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# LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM

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## Foreword

by René Fasel, IIHF President

The International Ice Hockey Federation is pleased to introduce the Learn To Play Program. It is the newest educational initiative within the IIHF Sport Development Program, which also includes the Coach Development Program, Officials' Development Program, Player Development Program, Administrators Development Program and the Medical Program.

The goal of this program is to teach boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 9 years old the basic hockey skills while at the same time creating a fun environment for both the children and their parents.

The Learn To Play Program is also aimed at the education of club administrators, program instructors and leaders (coaches) who will be instrumental in the successful implementation of the program around the world.

The IIHF is pleased to provide this program for the worldwide development of hockey. We trust that member national associations will use the program to introduce entry-level players into our sport and teach them these skills that can last a lifetime.

On behalf of the International Ice Hockey Federation, I would like to extend our appreciation to the many volunteers who offered their time and energy to prepare this educational resource for our youngest athletes.

Sincerely,

René Fasel  
President

## Introduction

The main objective of the IIHF Learn To Play Program is to give 6 to 9 year old boys and girls the ultimate hockey experience. Hockey at this level should be based on having fun, participation by all, and being taught basic hockey skills. This program is based on these ideals.

The program is comprised of four lesson manuals; A, B, C and D. These manuals are for Leaders who have completed the Learn To Play Program Leader's Training Session where they receive instruction in Leadership, Communication, Teaching Skills, Skill Analysis, Lesson Organization and Principles of Safety. The Leaders receive a Leaders Manual at this training session which they can then use as a reference to help implement the lesson manuals.

Each of the four lesson manuals contain 20 suggested lesson plans to teach beginning hockey players the basic skills in an organized and tested progression. The first 15 lessons in each manual are very detailed and the five remaining lessons are in outline form so that the Leader can further develop his or her practice planning technique and organizational skills. (See Lesson Format on page 4.)

The IIHF Learn To Play Program is based on a model of practicing and playing cross-ice. "Why cross-ice", you may ask, "I want my child playing on the big ice surface like the adults do". That is the point, children are not adults, they learn differently than adults, and they see the world differently than adults do. This cross-ice practicing and playing model has been used in many of the leading hockey nations in the world for a number of years and has stood the test of time. It has shown that children who begin their hockey training in this environment have an outstanding hockey experience. (See the Advantages of Cross-Ice Practicing and Playing on page 7.)

Playing Rules for Boys and Girls Under 10 Years Old, which have also been tested and developed over time in many countries around the world, are included on page 9. These rules enable the children to develop hockey skills in an environment that fosters fun, learning, participation by all, and mental and physical development.

Leaders, have fun and lead the children of the world into the future.

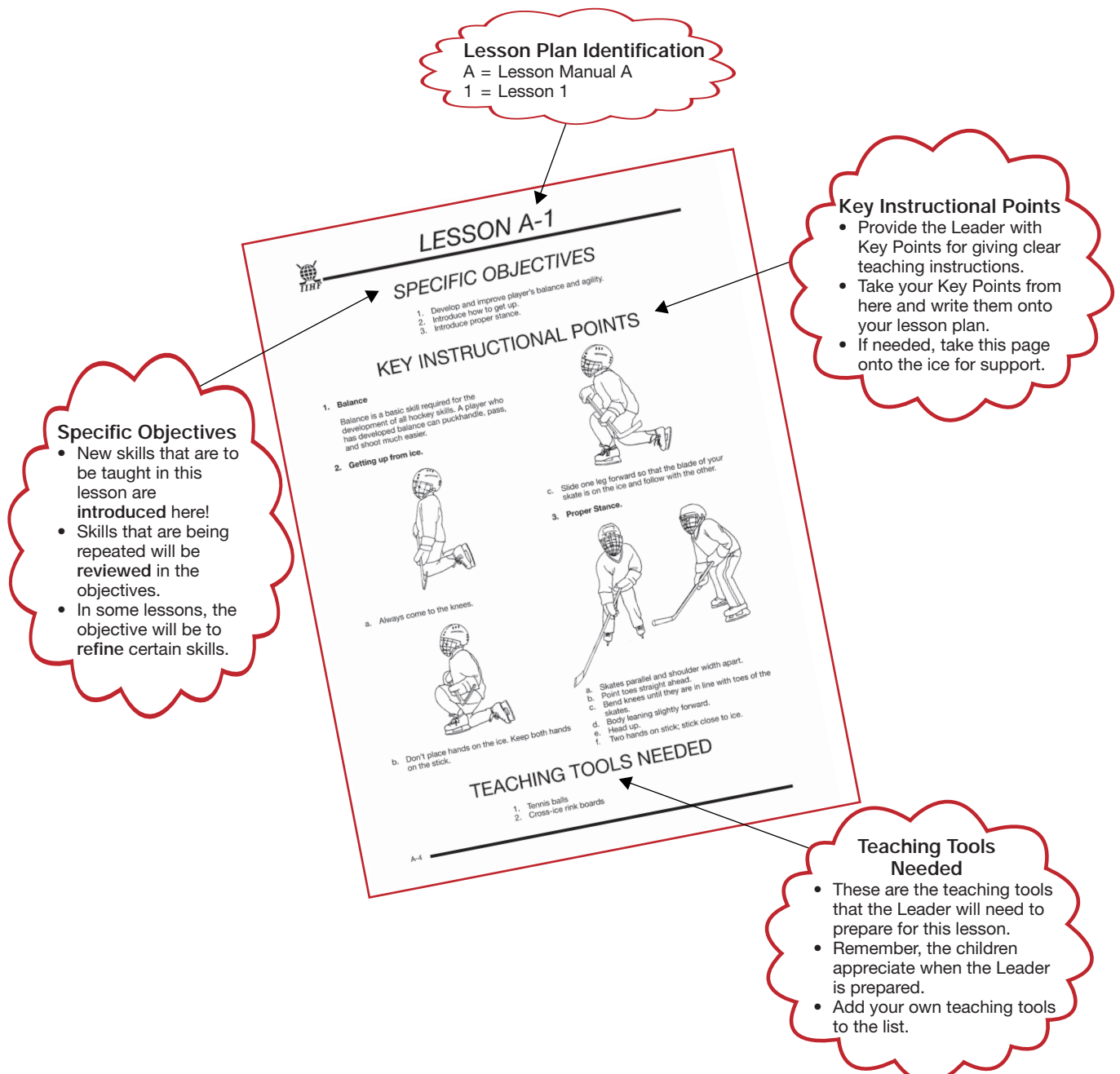
## Lesson Format

The four lesson manuals, A, B, C, and D, are formatted in a similar style. The components are laid out in a progressive order to help the Leader prepare for and operate an efficient practice. The four components of a lesson are:

1. Specific Objectives
2. Key Instructional Points
3. Teaching Tools Needed
4. Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plans are intended as worksheets for the Leader to write on while preparing the practice. Once the practice is prepared the Leader should put the Lesson Plan in a plastic cover, take it onto the ice and hang it on the boards for quick reference during the practice.

Descriptions of the components of a typical lesson plan are illustrated below.



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## Key Points

- Add your own Key Instructional Points or notes here:
  - bend knees
  - head up
  - keep it fun
  - good communication

## Teaching Tools

- Use the teaching tools which are listed and enhance with your own ideas.

## Organisational Information

- Add your specific information here.

## Skill

- The skill or activity that will be used will be illustrated here.

## Filled-In Illustration

- This illustration, which is filled-in, indicates that this skill or technique has been used earlier in the manual.

## Description

- A detailed description of the skill or activity that will be used is given here to help the Leader in giving instructions to the children.

**LESSON PLAN A-1**

LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 TEAM: \_\_\_\_\_  
 DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

KEY POINTS

TEACHING TOOLS

SKILL	DESCRIPTION	TIME
Free Skate and Warm-up	1. Clockwise and counterclockwise directions. 2. Varied speeds. Warm-up. Perform agility drills (p. A-2) a. Knees high b. Touch toes	10 minutes 
Basic Stance (introduce)  p. A-4	1. Leader to demonstrate and go over key points. 2. Have players go into basic stance. 3. Check for balance: a. Have players stand on left skate only. b. Have players stand on right foot only. c. Have players jump up 5-10 cm off ice. Keep knees bent when landing. d. Rock forward onto the toes and backwards onto the heels and try to feel where the best balance point is. NOTE: Repeat each several times.	10 minutes 
Agility (introduce)  p. A-4	1. Leader to demonstrate the proper technique of getting up. 2. Have players fall to knees and get up into basic stance. 3. Have players lie on stomachs. Two hands on the stick, elbows on ice, holding stick level. Pull to kneeling position by using elbows, and then stand up in basic stance.	5 minutes 
Balance (introduce)  p. A-2	1. Walk across ice. Lift knees to touch stick held waist-high. Repeat several times.	5 minutes 
Fun Time  p. A-5	1. Give every player a tennis ball. 2. Individual players bounce the ball and catch it. 3. Partners (2-4 metres apart) roll ball to your partner. Player bends over, picks it up and returns to basic stance. 4. Partners kick ball with side of skate (inside of blade) to partner.	10 minutes 


**Illustration**

- This illustration, with no fill-in, indicates that this is the first time that this skill or technique is used in the manual.

**Time**

- Recommended times for each activity are given here.
- Adjust the time according to your situational needs.


**LESSON PLAN A-1**

SKILL	DESCRIPTION	TIME
Balance and Agility (introduce)	1. The players must follow the leader who moves slowly around the area. Leader must move slowly and change directions frequently.	5 minutes
Balance and Agility (introduce) 	1. Starting from sideboards, the players cross rink trying to walk on the toes of their skates. Players must stand straight.	5 minutes
Game Time	1. British Bulldog Players stand in line along boards. One player stands in the middle of the rink. At leader's signal, players must cross to the other side. The player in the middle must try to tag them. Players who are touched remain in the center to help. Winner is the last player touched.	10 minutes

**LESSON SUMMARY**

Successes: \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of Improvement: \_\_\_\_\_

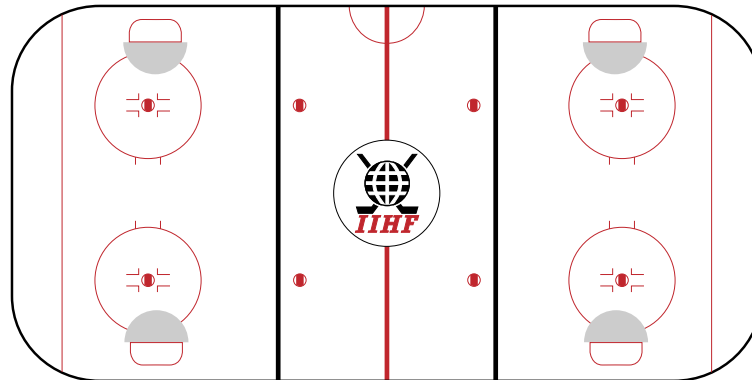


A-6

**Lesson Summary**

- After practice, this section is to be completed by the Leader.
- What successes did we have today?
- In which areas do we need more improvement?
- What needs to be reviewed or refined?

## The Advantages of Cross-Ice Practicing and Playing



The IIHF Learn To Play Program, which is for children, is based on a model of practicing and playing hockey across the 30 meter width of the ice surface as compared to practicing and playing lengthways along the full 60 meter length of the ice surface. This cross-ice practicing and playing model has been used in many of the leading hockey nations in the world for a number of years and has stood the test of time. It has been shown that children who begin their hockey training in this environment have an outstanding hockey experience.

Parents may ask the question why should my child play cross-ice, what will this bring? I want my child playing like the professionals do, full-ice, because I want my child to experience “real hockey”.

To help address these questions, let’s think about a child trying to skate with a puck while performing a drill the entire 60 meters from one end of the rink to the other, how long will this take? How much energy will this require? Will the player’s decision-making skills be enhanced more in the close action of the smaller cross-ice surface or in the wide-open area of the full-ice surface? In which situation will the child be more involved in the action?

A study of hockey games played on the full-ice surface by George Kingston in 1976 found the following:

- In a sixty minute running time hockey game between 6-8 year old children, the average player had possession of the puck for 20.7 seconds.
- Top National Hockey League and international professional players were also timed and no player exceeded 85 seconds of puck possession time.
- In a sixty-minute children’s game the actual playing time of the game was 20 minutes and 38 seconds. Taking this into consideration, the individual player is only on the ice every third or fourth shift depending on how many players are on the team, resulting in even less ice time.
- An average of less than 0.5 shots per game for youth players and only 1.5 shots per game for junior and professional players.

The study concluded that:

- For young players in the “full-ice game model” of development, the youngest players would require 180 games and the older youth players would require 80 games to enjoy 60 minutes of actual puck possession time to execute their stickhandling, passing, pass receiving and shooting skills.
- Professional and international players would require 60 games to ensure 60 minutes of puck control skill development.

**Many players never touched the puck in the game, especially in youth hockey.**

The IIHF firmly believes that by giving children the opportunity to participate in the Learn To Play Program, which supports cross-ice practicing and playing, that their enjoyment of hockey as well as their hockey skills will be greatly enhanced.



# LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM

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To help you further understand the benefits of the cross-ice practicing and playing model, some of the advantages are listed below.

## Practicing

- The children have more energy with which they can improve their skills when they are skating 30 meters across the ice surface as opposed to the 60 meter length of the ice surface.
- Group sizes become smaller which means learning and teaching will become more effective.
- The close feeling of belonging to a team will motivate a child to participate with even greater enthusiasm.
- Drills designed according to the varying skill levels of players within the group are easier to organise.
- More puck contact resulting in improved puck control skills.
- More repetition/frequency in drills in one ice session.
- Decision-making skills are enhanced as more decisions must be made more frequently at a higher tempo.

## Actual Game

- Playing on a smaller rink results in increased puck possession time for each player.
- Individual technical skills develop more quickly.
- More frequent line changes in the game means more ice time for each player.
- Children remain active between their shifts with various activities in the neutral zone.
- Line changes are made quickly since the players are directly beside the playing surface.
- Each player's activity increases greatly.
- Scoring skills are enhanced since the players have more shooting opportunities and the child sized goal nets force the players to shoot more accurate.
- The goalkeeper's reading of the game and reaction to changing game situations becomes more effective.
- More repetition for goalkeepers.
- The game is full of continuously changing situations.
- The speed in playing situations increases, which will require quicker mental and physical reactions by the players.
- Due to increased tempo, all of the team members take part in solving the playing situations which leads to a sharing of responsibilities between the players.
- The feeling of being an important part of the action increases because of the small size of the rink.
- Hockey sense, or understanding the principles of the game, is being developed at a young age.
- There are no unnecessary breaks in the game.

## General Organisation

- More efficient use of ice time and space.
- The size of the rink is in proportion with the size of the players.
- The child sized goal nets are in proportion with the size of players.
- The middle zone is available for other purposes (player's bench, warm-up area, skill competition) while games are played in the end zones.
- The IIHF recommends that teams play with two or three units of four or five players and one goalkeeper which results in each player having more ice time.
- More ice time for practicing and playing is made available to more teams within a single club.
- Many teams can practice together by sharing the ice surface.

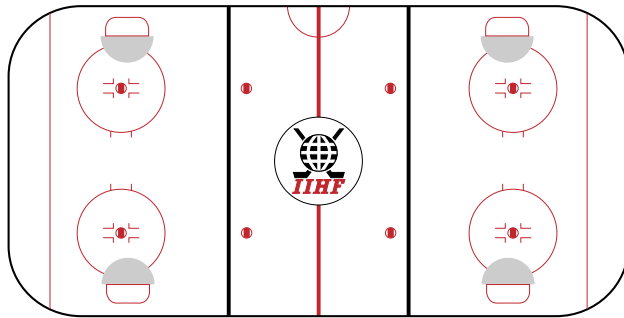
## General Spirit of Participation and Fun

- More children get a chance to play ice hockey.
- More children will experience a feeling of success when playing hockey.
- The same exciting and fun environment as in a "real" game is created.
- Both more and less gifted children will benefit from close/tight action on the ice.
- Children are excited and motivated to continue playing hockey.
- Hockey will be more appealing and rewarding to a wider range of children and their parents.

## The Playing Rules for Boys and Girls Under 10 Years Old

### 1. Cross-Ice Playing Surface, Cross-Ice Rink Boards, and Child Sized Goal Nets

#### 1.1 Cross-Ice Playing Surface



All games will be played on one-third of the normal size rink, across the ice in the end zones.

#### 1.2 Cross-Ice Rink Boards

The IIHF recommends that every arena construct a light board barrier which:

- is easy and quick to move on and off of the ice surface,
- is approximately 10 cm high and 5 cm wide,
- has no support legs to hinder the puck from sliding along the boards,
- forms a continuous barrier from one side of the rink boards to the boards on the opposite side,
- uses some form of mechanism to easily hook the boards together,
- is constructed of, for example, wood, aluminium, fibreglass, or an old fire hose.

To keep the puck in play it is recommended that a “corner board” be constructed. The “corner board” constructions should be the same height and width as the boards which runs along the blue line. An example of the light board barrier construction is shown in diagrams 1 and 2.

Diagram 1

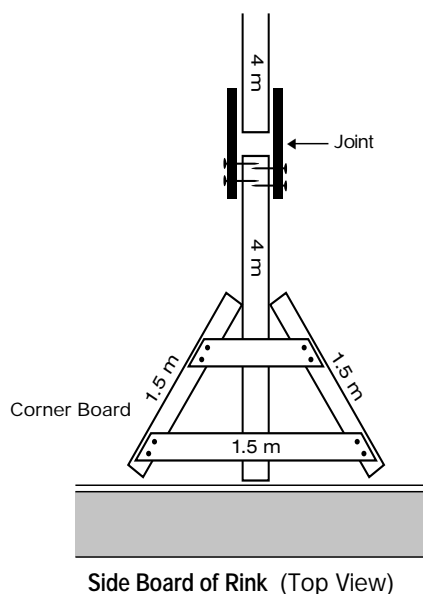
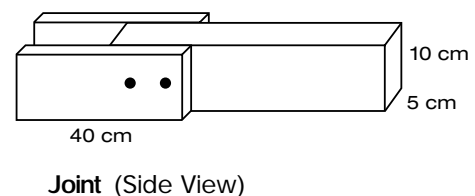


Diagram 2



## 1.3 Child Sized Goal Nets

It is recommended that Child Sized Goal Nets be used to give the goalkeeper a greater chance of success, which will in turn build confidence. Further, every shot on net will not result in a goal and therefore there will be fewer stoppages in play which will result in more playing time.

The goals should be located one meter from the sideboards of the rink and half way between the end boards of the rink and the cross-ice rink boards set up on the blue line.

Two Child Sized Goal Net construction examples are provided below.

### 1.3.1 Lightweight Goal Nets

Lightweight goals, measuring 90 cm high, 130 cm wide and 70 cm deep can be used, constructed of 1.5 to 2.0 cm tubing. The lower end of the goal posts should have small pegs to keep the goal in position. (see diagram 3 and 4)

Diagram 3

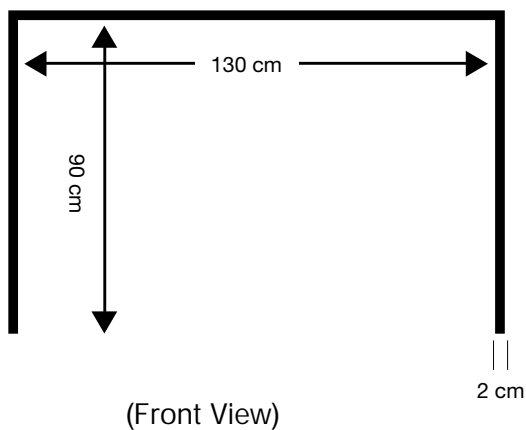
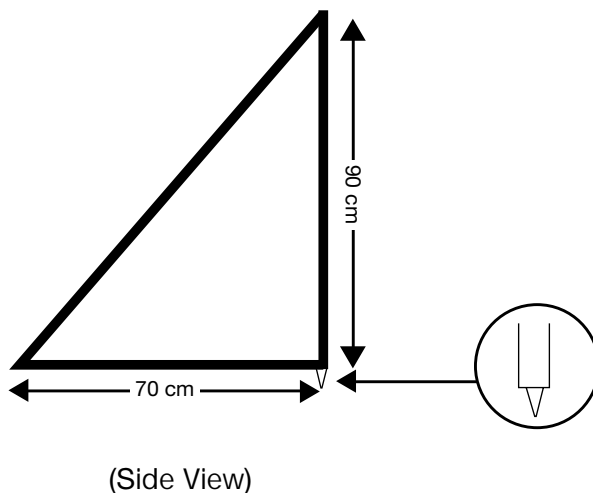


Diagram 4



## 1.3.2 Goal Insert

These lightweight goal inserts could be constructed using wood or plastic. The inserts should be made to fit inside the posts of a normal goal net. The insert should have an opening 90 cm high and 130 cm wide. The insert can be fastened to the goal posts and cross bar using straps or hooks. (see diagram 5 and 6)

Diagram 5

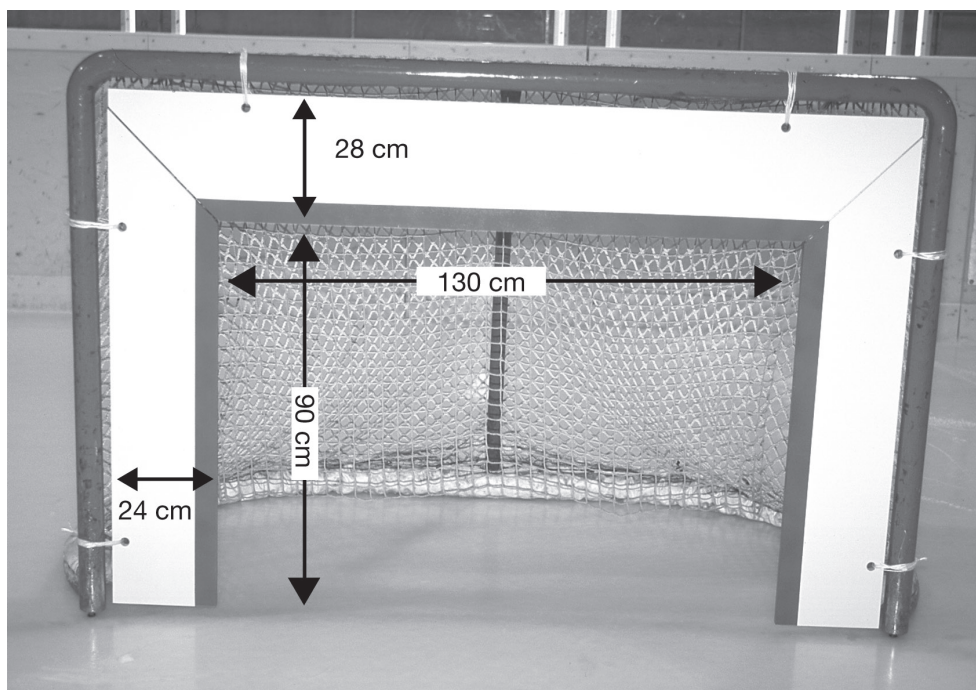


Diagram 6



## 2. Equipment

Remember that the children being taught are small and in order for them to achieve maximum enjoyment and optimise their understanding of the skills, junior sized equipment should be used.

### 2.1 Junior Size Sticks

All players are encouraged to use junior sized sticks. Some benefits of using junior size sticks are:

- they are less expensive than senior sticks ,
- they enable better puck control,
- they are lighter, and therefore improve balance.

### 2.2 Lightweight Pucks

The overall diameter, thickness and material of the puck should be the same as a normal game puck. (minimum weight is 80 grams and maximum is 130 grams) Options for lightweight pucks are outlined below.

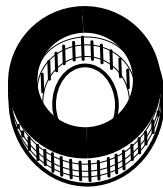
#### 2.2.1 Blue Puck

- This is a normal size puck, blue in colour, which is made of a lightweight material.

#### 2.2.2 Puck with a hole

- This is a normal puck that has a 50 mm diameter hole in the centre.

Diagram 7



Tip: If there is a lot of snow on the ice, wrap a few rounds of plastic tape around the puck to keep the snow out of the centre of the puck to ensure that the puck slides easily on the ice surface.

## 3. Game Organisation

### 3.1 Statistics

No statistics or league standings are to be recorded, however, a game sheet must be filled out so that the federation has a record that the game took place. No scores are to be shown on the game time clock.

### 3.2 Game Officials

At least one person will act as “leader” or “referee” to manage the game.

### 3.3 Off-Ice Officials

The home team should arrange for a timekeeper.

### 3.4 Face-offs

Face-offs will take place in the centre of the playing surface at the beginning of the game and the period, as well as after a goal, after a break in the play (when the goalkeeper freezes the puck), or when changing the players.

Tip: To ensure quick face-off alignment, a red line with a face-off dot could be painted on the ice with spray paint.

## 3.5 Playing Time

### 3.5.1 Player Participation

All the players whose names are on the team roster must be played evenly in every game.

### 3.5.2 Shift Changes

At the signal from the timekeeper, at a maximum of 90 seconds running time, the units will change. The units will always play at even strength (5 - 5, 4 - 4).

### 3.5.3 Length of the game

The length of the game is to be determined by the club.

### 3.5.4 Length of the playing shifts

The maximum length of the shift is 90 seconds running time.

## 3.6 Off-Sides, etc.

There are no blue line off-sides, icing etc.

## 3.7 Violating the Rules, Penalties

When a player violates the rules, the game “leader” or “referee” can stop the game by blowing the whistle and clarifying the reason for the break with the player in question. No penalties are given. A new face-off will take place in the centre of the playing surface. If necessary the game “leader” can remove a player from the game.

If a player continuously violates the rules, the leader from the player’s team may remove him or her for the remainder of the game and substitute a new player in his or her place.

## 3.8 Players Waiting for Their Turn to Play

The centre zone should function as the players bench. Players waiting for their turn to play can rest there by standing, kneeling or sitting. For maximum ice use and player development, the players should be allowed to skate, pass the puck, etc., in the middle zone while they are awaiting their turn to play.



## 3.9 Bodychecking

No bodychecking is allowed.

## TEACHING TOOLS

Below is a Tool Box, which has a list of the teaching tools that are necessary to run a successful Learn To Play Program. As the Leaders gain experience they are encouraged to add their own teaching tools to the Tool Box to enhance the learning environment during practices.



## Ice Diagram Legend

The following symbols are used in the Learn To Play Program Lesson Manuals.

Chair <b>h</b>	puck ●	passing <b>---</b> →
pylon ▲	stop <b>—  </b>	shooting <b>==&gt;</b>
hockey stick <b>└─┘</b>	forward skate <b>→</b>	agility board <b>▬</b>
player <b>X</b>	backward skate <b>~</b>	jump over <b>└─┘</b>
leader <b>Ⓛ</b>	puck carrying <b>⋈→</b>	step over <b>└─┘</b>
paint dot <b>*</b>	lateral movement <b>    </b>	group of players <b>Ⓐ, ①</b>

