

# IIHF COACH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

## LEVEL I



## COMMUNICATION



## 9. COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

## 9. Communication Principles

Everything you do as a coach, whether it be teaching skills, motivating players, listening to players, solving athletes' problems, having team parties, is done through communication with your players. To be a good coach, it is important to have effective communication skills.

*Upon completion of this chapter, you will be better prepared to:*

- *identify and understand the principles of effective communication with players on a group, sub-group, and individual basis, and in a parent (coach) – child relationship,*
- *realize that effective communication is both verbal and non-verbal,*
- *recognize the use of the voice and body in developing effective communication skills,*
- *identify and practice listening techniques as one component of effective communication.*

### 9.1 Principles of Effective Communication

As a hockey coach, it will be necessary to communicate with your players as one group, as a sub-group of players (e.g., the forward lines that play together) and as individuals. Regardless of the number of players you are communicating with any at one time, the same principles apply to communicate effectively.

#### ***Be an Enthusiastic Coach***

Establish your role as an enthusiastic leader of your team. Your enthusiasm will affect your athletes' enjoyment of hockey.

#### ***Be a Positive Coach***

Interact with your athletes in a positive manner. Set a good example of desired behaviour. Constant criticism and yelling at your players will decrease their motivation to participate, so give sincere praise and encouragement to your players frequently.

#### ***Be Demanding but Considerate***

Clearly establish what is expected of the players. Your expectations should be based on their abilities and experiences. Don't expect more than is reasonable and realistic.

#### ***Be Consistent in Communicating with your Athletes***

Communicate in a consistent manner from one situation to another (e.g., practice to practice, game to game, practice to game) and with all of your athletes. Communicating in an inconsistent manner will leave your athletes confused as to what it is you mean and what is expected of them and will also reduce their respect for you.

### ***Be a Good Listener***

Good listening is an important component of effective communication. Demonstrate a willingness to listen and your players will express their feelings, concerns, and suggestions to you.

### ***Provide Effective Feedback in Identifying and Correcting Skill Errors***

Give feedback in a positive, informative manner. Be clear and concise in the feedback you provide. When correcting an error, first tell the player what is being done well. The athlete then knows which parts of the skill are being performed correctly. Then tell the player what needs to be done to correct the error. Always end on a positive note by encouraging the player to spend more time on the skill. It is important to separate the athlete's worth as an individual from the athlete's ability to perform the skill. For example, a player's feelings of self-worth should not be negatively affected because the player demonstrates an improper passing technique.

### ***Explain the Contribution of Each Player to the Team***

All players are part of the team and the coach should demonstrate confidence in each player's ability to contribute to the team. You and your athletes should value the contribution of each player to the team. Players should be encouraged by the coach to be supportive of each other's contribution to the team.

### ***Treat All Players as Individuals***

It is important to be sensitive to individual needs and to show all players that you care about them as individuals. Make an effort to talk with them all individually at every practise and game. Greet players by their first names.

Maintain a file on each player and discuss what is in that file with the player. You may include suggested solutions on specific problems the player is having.

### ***Communicate in the Same Manner with your Child as with other Players***

Parents who coach their own children often put unrealistic expectations on them. If you coach your child, remember to treat them as you do the other players on the team and don't demand more of them than you do of the others.

As well, if you coach your children, avoid showing favoritism toward them. It is important for you to treat your children as individuals, the same as you would do for all the other players, but do not show any particular favoritism toward them.

## **9.2. Non-Verbal Communication**

Communication can be both verbal and non-verbal. "The coach is in a good mood today." "The coach is angry because we lost." How do your athletes know that? How did you communicate that? Coaches communicate many messages to players by their actions, facial expressions, use of arms and hands, body position, overall posture, touching behaviours and voice characteristics.



### 9.3 Effective Use of Voice and Body

Effective verbal and non-verbal communication with your players is affected by how well you use your voice and body.

#### *Effective Use of Voice*

The following are suggestions for using your voice effectively:

- Speak clearly and make eye contact with the players as you speak.
- Periodically, look carefully at the athletes who are farthest away from you. Can you see clear indications that they can hear? If there is any doubt, ask them.
- Use a voice that is only slightly louder than a normal speaking voice, except for the few times it is necessary to project your voice over a long distance (e.g., in an arena). Speaking unnecessarily loud encourages athletes to make noise themselves. Many coaches are able to settle players down by lowering their voices so that close attention is required to hear. Try it!
- Use inflections or change the tone of your voice to communicate varying moods (e.g., energetic, patient, serious, concerned).
- Take a maximum of three minutes to demonstrate and explain a skill. Demonstrate the skill first, then explain it.
- When explaining a skill, use language that is easily understood by the age and level of the players you are coaching. Watch for reactions from the athletes that they are or are not understanding your explanation.

#### **For the Coach**

While we often express our emotions in words, we more often convey feelings by how we say the words. Repeat a name or a short phrase in such a way that the tone of your voice alone expresses admiration, then alarm, then annoyance and any other emotions you can think of.

#### *Effective Use of Body*

The following are suggestions for using your body effectively:

- Move amongst your athletes so that they feel you are spending some time with each of them.
- Vary the distance and position you maintain between yourself and your athletes to communicate the extent of personal interaction you wish to have with them. For example, standing very close and facing your athletes rather than standing further away suggests a desire for more direct interaction.
- Make regular eye contact with all players. This not only reassures them, but can provide you with valuable feedback as to who is listening and understanding.
- A hand or pat on the back or shoulder, a firm grip on an arm, or an arm around the shoulder are powerful ways of conveying concern and support. Remember though, that a pat on the head reminds an individual of one of the ways one was touched as a very young child and, when used with players, can be interpreted as being demeaning or belittling.

- Face all of the players whenever possible. Turning your back may be perceived as a sign of disrespect. Also, by turning your back, you lose the impact of facial expression, which is a valuable non-verbal communication tool.
- Be aware of the message your body expressions is sending to your athletes (e.g., facial, use of arms and legs, eye movement).

### ***How To Gain Attention***

You can use your voice and body to gain the attention of your athletes with the following:

- Designate a specific area to gather at the beginning of each practice.
- Use a signal (e.g., whistle, raised stick) to indicate attention is desired. If a whistle is used, blow just loud enough and long enough to gain initial attention.
- Gather the players in a group and make an effort to make eye contact with all of them.
- If one or two athletes are not paying attention, look directly at them and ask for their attention by using their name(s). If a player is constantly disruptive, it may be best to remove the athlete from the rest of group, continue with the practice, and talk later with the specific athlete.

If you suddenly begin to lose the attention of your athletes, ask yourself the following:

- Am I communicating in a clear and direct manner?
- Can all players see and hear well? If not, rearrange them.
- Have I been taking too much time to provide a demonstration and/or explanation?

### **For the Coach**

Using the following chart, assess how effectively you communicate with your players. For each statement, circle the letter which best describes you (A = Always, O = Often, S = Sometimes, N = Never). You could also have your athletes complete the chart on you. In that way, you can find out if your athletes perceive how you communicate with them in the same manner as you do.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1. Show enthusiasm.	A	O	S	N
2. Act in a positive manner.	A	O	S	N
3. Am not too demanding.	A	O	S	N
4. Communicate in a consistent manner.	A	O	S	N
5. Listen well to my players.	A	O	S	N
6. Provide effective feedback.	A	O	S	N





### ***Attentive Listening***

Listening starts by the coach being attentive to the athlete, which can be demonstrated by your facial expressions and gestures, and by remaining quiet while the player is speaking. Eye-to-eye contact with the player at the same level is important. These actions all indicate to the athlete that you, as the coach, are ready to listen.

### ***Paraphrasing***

Repeat in your own words what it is you think a player said to see if that is what the athlete meant. Paraphrasing allows you to see if you have a complete understanding of what was said and provides the athlete with feedback on whether the coach interpreted the information correctly. Any areas of misunderstanding can then be explained by the athlete.

### ***Bridging***

You verbally indicate that you are following and understanding what the player is saying by the use of bridging words such as, “I see” and “yes”.

### ***Restating***

Repeats the last phrase or few words of what the athlete said without changing anything.

### ***Inviting Clarification***

Request that the athlete clarifies or expands on something that the athlete has said. In seeking clarification, question a specific comment made by the player that you did not understand. Inviting clarification shows interest in the athlete by the coach.

## **For the Coach:**

Spend a few minutes listening to your athletes after a practice or game. Get some feedback on areas that went well and areas that the players and/or coach work on.

Questions that could be asked are:

- What did you do that you really enjoyed?
- What is one thing you learned today?
- What did you do well?
- Did you encourage each other?
- What is one thing that you want to do at the next practice/game?
- What was one good thing that happened today?

### Example of Ineffective Listening



Athlete: "Coach, I'm a bit worried about competing today."  
Coach: "Okay guys, let's get ready for warm-up."



Athlete: "Coach, I'd like to talk..."  
Coach: "Okay guys, let's go."



Athlete: "Coach, could I..."  
Coach: "What is it?"



Athlete: "I'm worried about competing with..."  
 Coach: "Don't worry Johnny..."



Athlete: Silence  
 Coach: "Okay guys, let's get out there."

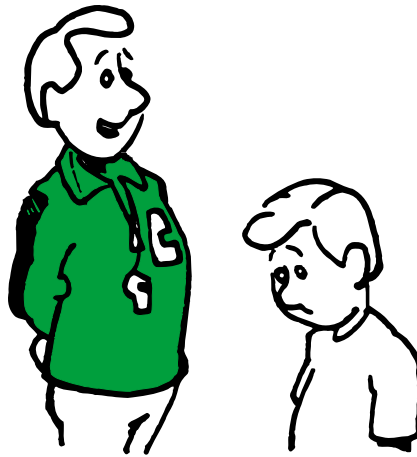
**Example of Effective Listening**



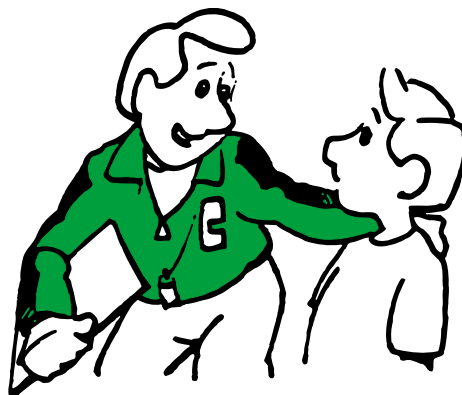
Athlete: "Coach,, I'm a bit worried about competing today."  
 Coach: "I see" (bridging).



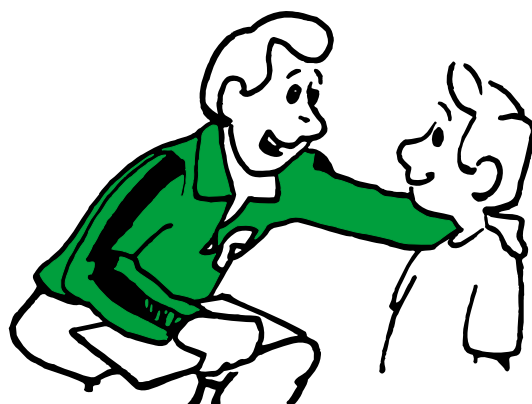
Athlete: “Yes, I got this scary feeling since I talked to the guys.”  
Coach: “The guys?” (restating).



Athlete: “Yes, the guys told me the other team is pretty good.”  
Coach: “So you’re worried because the other team is good. Is that right?” (paraphrasing).



Athlete: “Yes, that’s it.”  
Coach: “Why do you think that’s worrying you?” (inviting clarification).



Athlete: "I don't know ... I guess because I might not be good enough."

Coach: "John, do you remember when we talked about your goals? We agreed that what was most important was for you to try to reach your own goals. Well, your goal tonight is to play as well as you can. It doesn't really matter to me what anyone else does. All you can do is give it your best shot ... no one can do more than that."



Athlete: "Okay, coach. I feel a bit better now."

Coach: "Good, I know you'll be okay John ... Okay guys, let's get ready for warm-up."

**For the Coach**

What happens to an athlete when the coach demonstrates ineffective listening skills as compared to demonstrating effective listening skills?

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## SUMMARY

- Developing effective communication skills are necessary to becoming a good coach.
- Communication is both verbal and non-verbal.
- Listening is one component of effective communication. Listening techniques include: attentiveness, paraphrasing, bridging, restating, and inviting clarification.



## 10. COMMUNICATION IN THE HOCKEY ENVIRONMENT

## 10. Communication in the Hockey Environment

Developing effective communication with a team of individuals is necessary to run a successful hockey program. Parents, referees, assistant coaches, managers, trainers, and administrators all form part of the team in hockey. Establishing positive and cooperative relationships with these individuals will significantly affect the overall, smooth operation of your hockey program.

*Upon completion of this chapter you will be better prepared to:*

- *understand when and why parent and coach meetings should be held,*
- *plan and conduct a coaches parents meeting,*
- *identify means of seeking parent cooperation,*
- *understand the role of the referee and how to develop a mutually respectful relationship,*
- *identify the roles of the support staff (assistant coach, manager, and trainer),*
- *recognize means of ensuring a harmonious relationship with the assistant coach(es), and manager(s), and trainer(s)*
- *understand the roles of the administrators (e.g., league and association presidents).*

### 10.1 Communicate with Parents

Establishing good communication with the parents of the athletes you coach will have a significant impact on the overall success of your hockey program. Holding parent/coach meetings is one of the best ways to develop this necessary communication and to secure the support and cooperation of parents.

#### **When Should Parent/Coach Meetings be Held?**

There are four occasions when it would be beneficial to hold such a meeting:

- Prior to player selection
- Beginning of the season after player selection has been completed
- Mid-season
- Post-season

#### **Why Should Occasional Parent/Coach Meetings be Held?**

##### ***Prior to Player Selection***

A meeting with parents prior to player selection may assist in accomplishing the following objectives:

- enable parents to understand that the selection process is used to place athletes on teams where the athletes will benefit the most,
- explain what factors will be used in selecting players (e.g., skills to be tested, scrimmages, and discussions with athletes),
- explain how the selection will be done (e.g., scoring on skill tests and scrimmages, interpretation of scores, and use of other coaches or trained observers in evaluating players).



### ***Beginning Of The Season After Player Selection Have Been Completed***

The first meeting held after having determined the players you will be coaching for the season becomes very important to establishing an enjoyable and positive relationship with the parents of your athletes. There are a number of reasons to hold this meeting:

- provide the opportunity for parents and coach to meet one another,
- enable parents to understand the goals and objectives of your program,
- inform parents about the details of your program,
- inform parents what is expected of them and what is expected of the players,
- help you understand the concerns of the parents,
- gain the support and assistance of parents for the season's activities,
- establish an open line of communication between you and the parents.

### ***Mid-Season***

It is desirable to have a mid-season meeting with parents to:

- reinforce key points in your program,
- discuss the progress of the athletes and the team,
- seek solutions to any problems that may have arisen,
- gain parental assistance for any specific projects.

### ***Post-Season***

It would be very beneficial to hold a meeting with parents at the end of the season to:

- receive feedback from the parents on your coaching and your program,
- provide parents with your feedback on the program,
- finish the season on a positive note.

### **Parents Evaluation of the Program and the Coach**

Design an evaluation form that the parents can complete in a short period of time. Structure the questions so that feedback on how well you achieved the objectives of your program is provided. Also, ask the parents for suggestions for improving your hockey program and yourself as a coach.

The charts below contain examples of the types of questions you could ask parents.

To what extent do you believe that your child:

	<i>Very Much</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Very Little</i>
1. Learned the basic skills.	_____	_____	_____
2. Had fun.	_____	_____	_____
3. Developed self-confidence.	_____	_____	_____
4. Learned self-respect.	_____	_____	_____
5. Developed respect for teammates.	_____	_____	_____
6. Learned sportsmanlike behavior.	_____	_____	_____
7. Shared in the decision-making.	_____	_____	_____

To what extent do you believe that the coach:

	<i>Very Much</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Very Little</i>
1. Was an effective teacher.	_____	_____	_____
2. Ran well-organized practices.	_____	_____	_____
3. Kept winning in perspective.	_____	_____	_____
4. Communicated effectively with players.	_____	_____	_____
5. Communicated effectively with parents.	_____	_____	_____
6. Established a positive and respectful relationship with the referees.	_____	_____	_____
7. Treated all players fairly.	_____	_____	_____

**Setting Up and Running the First Parent/Coach Meeting after Player Selection has been Completed**

***Planning for the Meeting***

Schedule the first meeting as soon as possible after player selection has been completed. Select a facility easily accessible to the parents and with a suitable meeting room. Invite parents by personal letter and follow-up telephone calls.

First impressions are very important. Be well-prepared and organized for the first meeting you will hold with the parents of the players you will be coaching. Some coaches like to have the players attend the meetings with their parents as they believe it enhances communication between parents, coach, and players. However, other coaches believe attendance by athletes restricts communication between parents and coach. It is up to you to decide if you feel it would be advantageous to have players at these meetings.

### ***Conducting the Meeting***

It is important to establish an atmosphere in which the parents will feel welcome. You want them to feel that their participation and contribution throughout the meeting is desired and appreciated.

A proposed meeting agenda could include the following topics:

- Getting Started (5-10 minutes)
- Your Coaching Philosophy (10-15 minutes)
- Details of Your Program (15-20 minutes)
- Your Expectations of the Parents (15-20 minutes)
- Wrap-Up (20-25 minutes)

### ***Getting Started***

Introduce yourself and your assistant coach(es), manager, and trainer. Parents want to know about the individual(s) who will be coaching and interacting with their children. Gain the trust of the parents by establishing your credibility with them as a coach of their child. Give the parents information about yourself – your experience and training as a coach, why you are coaching, and general background information about yourself. Provide a brief explanation of the importance and purpose of the meeting. Be sure to express appreciation to the parents who attend for their interest and concern in the program.

### ***Your Coaching Philosophy***

To prepare for this section of the meeting, you may wish to review Module 2, Role of the Coach. Parents will want to know about your coaching approach – the emphasis you place on the physical, psychological, and social development of the athletes; having fun; and winning. The parents will also want to know what techniques and methods you use to teach technical skills (e.g., skating, passing, shooting), and to develop cooperation and friendships among the players. You are a very significant role model to the athletes you coach and it is important that your coaching philosophy reflects what is desirable for the athletes.

This is the time to clearly present the goals and objectives of your program. Your expectations of the athletes should be presented at this time. This is a good opportunity to receive feedback from the parents on the goals and objectives they feel are most important and would like to see you emphasize, as well as how realistic they feel your expectations are of the athletes.

### ***Details of Your Program***

Present specific information on the operation of your hockey program. Parents will want to know about:

- schedule and location of practices and games
- length of season
- length of practices and games
- equipment needed and where it can be purchased
- playing time for athletes
- team travel and costs of associated expenses
- medical examinations
- injury insurance
- team rules and discipline
- tournaments and methods of funding
- fund-raising projects

Provide parents with a team roster listing the names, addresses, and phone numbers of players.

Specify what you expect of the players and parents with respect to the details of the program.

### ***Your Expectations of the Parents***

A very important component of the meeting is informing the parents of your expectations of them. To ensure overall program success, it is important to maintain a positive relationship with the parents. You may find it extremely useful to organize a parents committee to coordinate their roles and responsibilities within your program. Responsibilities of the parents committee may include the following:

- arrange transportation to and from practices and games
- phone calls to parents/players to inform them of specific activities
- arrange fun nights
- organize a post-season social
- establish communication channels after the initial meeting

Just as coaches are significant role models for athletes, so too are parents. Parents need to be reminded that hockey is for the players, not the parents. The parents that have a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of your program will enhance the quality of participation by the athletes. Parents must provide positive support and encouragement to the players as they strive to achieve their goals.

Let the parents, in discussion with you, decide on rules for parental behavior at games. The following should be considered: during a game, the coach has the responsibility for their children and the parents must respect that responsibility. Thus, parents should not coach from the spectator area and should not shout instructions, nor should they make derogatory comments to players or parents of the opposing team, to officials, or to league administrators. Parents should be model spectators during a game. Just as athletes are more committed to achieving goals that they had a hand in setting, so too are parents more responsible for their behavior if they contributed to the setting the rules.

### ***Wrapping Up***

Allow time at the end of the meeting for further questions/comments from parents. Show a willingness to listen to suggestions from parents.

This is also a good time for parents to get to know one another and to get started on the tasks of the parents committee. Have parents use name tags so that they can easily meet one another. If possible, provide refreshments. Parents should leave the meeting with a clear understanding of the objectives, goals, and details of your program and your expectations for yourself, the players, and them. The parents should feel they are an important part of your program and that their suggestions and input are most welcome. Aim to have them leave the meeting with the feeling that it's going to be a good year for their children in hockey.

## **10.2 Communicate with the On-Ice Officials**

The relationship established between the coach and the officials affects the atmosphere in which the game is played. It is necessary for each to appreciate the importance of the other's role in hockey. Officials who have a positive attitude toward the game and are consistent in interpreting the rules, and a coach who reinforces to the players the importance of playing by the rules, will each contribute to the development of a mutually respectful relationship.

The coach's behavior toward officials has a very significant effect on the players' attitudes toward officials. You can develop a good relationship between yourself, your players and the officials by ensuring the following:

- Have an official meet with the players at the beginning of the season to discuss the reasons for enforcing rules and to tell the players about their expectations of them.
- Be sure you and your players know the rules of the game. Experience with the game is not sufficient to ensure knowing the rules. Have the officials come to a team practice and discuss with you and your players, on the ice or in the dressing room, the rules and any recent rule changes.
- Explain to your players that the officials are an important part of the game and are necessary to make hockey more fair and more enjoyable for the players.
- Both coaches and players need to understand and accept that officials do make mistakes. Officials are human and cannot be perfect all of the time.
- During scrimmages, have your players practice officiating so they will learn to appreciate the official's role. You may also consider having officials officiate practice games and pre-season scrimmages.

- Officials call the game. Do not challenge the decisions and authority of the officials. Accept the official's call even if you feel it was incorrect.
- Avoid shouting at an official when you feel he has made a mistake. Your behavior behind the bench affects your players' attitudes toward the official.
- Do not take the official's calls personally. A call against your team is not against you.
- Do not challenge consistently poor officiating during a game. Take the steps necessary to improve officiating in a professional manner after the game.
- Compliment the officials for the good calls they make.
- Consider inviting the officials to your end-of-season social. They are as interested as you are in the development of the players.

### 10.3 Communicate with Support Staff

To ensure the smooth operation of your hockey program, it is necessary to establish effective communication with your support staff. The support staff includes the assistant coach(es), manager, and trainer.

The coach will have constant communication with the assistant coach(es) and the manager. You can do the following to ensure the development of a harmonious relationship with your assistants:

- provide leadership to your assistants
- clearly define the roles and responsibilities of yourself and your assistants
- respect and appreciate each other's role
- offer one another mutual support and work together in an honest and open relationship
- be fair and consistent in your interactions with your assistants
- meet regularly and before each practice go over your plans for the practice
- periodically evaluate your assistants and provide them with feedback
- encourage your support staff to provide you with feedback and suggestions
- give credit and recognition to your assistants when it is appropriate
- make your assistants feel like they are an important part of your hockey program

Responsibilities of the assistant coach(es) could include tasks such as:

#### *During Practices*

- conduct the warm-up
- modify selected drills
- coach actively in drills
- conduct the physical conditioning program
- work in specialized areas (e.g., design specialty plays/power play, work with the goalkeepers, provide skating lessons for players who need to work on their skating)
- conduct practices periodically

### *During Games*

- analyse the play of both teams
- make suggestions on team strategy
- talk to individual players giving specific corrections on their play
- provide summaries of statistics for the team and individual players
- provide written comments on each player
- assist with coaching at the bench
- act as a liaison between the head coach and the player
- read the feelings of the team
- assist the manager when travelling
- check on the nutritional habits of the players
- check on any injuries and the therapy being administered

Responsibilities of the manager could include tasks such as:

- registration
- negotiate ice time for practices and games
- handle equipment (e.g., sweaters, pucks, pylons)
- game reports
- travel arrangements
- tournament applications
- team finances and insurance
- arrange for dressing rooms and security

The trainer could be responsible for tasks such as:

- provide first aid as required
- check equipment for proper fit
- inspect equipment to see that it is properly maintained and legal
- teach athletes how to care for their equipment
- perform medical follow-up on injuries
- educate players and parents on injury prevention

### For the Coach

Other responsibilities you could consider delegating to your:

Assistant Coach: \_\_\_\_\_

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Manager: \_\_\_\_\_

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Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10.4 Communicate with Administrators

The establishment of effective communication with the administrators in hockey is necessary to ensure the success of your hockey program. These administrators could include the National Association president, general secretary, league administrators, referee-in-chief, coaching coordinator, and many others. For the coach to interact effectively with the administrators, it is necessary to understand the roles of these individuals.

It is important to note that the names and descriptions of each position and its responsibilities may vary from association to association. Such information should be included in the association or league constitution. Despite possible discrepancies, here are some common positions and general responsibility descriptions:

- The president directs the activities of the league or association and ensures that its philosophy is successfully implemented by all of its participants.
- The general secretary and executive committee are responsible for the administration and welfare of hockey within their organization. Appointing a referee-in-chief, a coaching coordinator, generating and handling funds, training officials and coaches, as well as establishing discipline throughout the association, are just some of the tasks which fall under the auspices of this group.
- The coaching coordinator is responsible for establishing a solid coaching framework within each Association. This includes identifying, recruiting, developing, and evaluating coaches. These individuals can be valuable reference sources for all coaches.



- The league administrator is responsible for the smooth running of the season's schedule. This individual ensures that the policies and rules of the league are adhered to and successfully implemented. The coach or a team manager can approach the league administrator for clarification should they have any questions throughout the season.
- The league administrator also establishes the ice times for practices and games within the association and ensures that the policies and rules of the association are implemented.

As a coach, examine the hierarchy and policies of your National Association and the league in which you participate. Understanding this aspect of your role will assist you along the road to experiencing an enjoyable and successful season.

## SUMMARY

- To establish effective communication with the parents of your players, hold parent/coach meetings.
- Establish a positive and mutually respectful relationship with the on-ice officials.
- To run an efficient and effective hockey program, develop a harmonious relationship with your assistant coach(es), manager(s), trainer(s), and administrators.