

BASIC TACTICS

When teaching new players tactics it is important to remember that they are still learning technical skills and that this takes a lot of concentration. As technical ability increases, players will be able to devote more concentration to focusing on tactical play.

The 'Beehive' Effect

When children first start playing hockey you will often see them running in a swarm, chasing the ball. This is known as 'Beehiving' and results in much stop start confusion with little chance for scoring or fluid play. The following tactics are aimed at reducing this effect as well as teaching young players some underpinning concepts such as space, movement, vision and decision making.

Vision – Is an important skill to develop in young players as it (along with experience) will allow them to evaluate play and in turn make accurate decisions when playing. To develop vision players need to be taught to observe play, looking for areas of space and the movement of players around them.

Space – Exists in areas that are free of other players and where there is no immediate threat from the opposition. Space can be utilized in three main ways; moving with the ball (dribbling) into space, moving the ball (passing) to a team mate who is in an area of space or moving without the ball into space (becoming open) e.g. for a pass.

Movement – As shown in the 'beehive' children will automatically want to move towards the ball. This can have a negative effect as it tends to congest play, crowding team mates and reducing opportunities for effective passing. Players should be encouraged to move into areas of 'space' that they have identified to be free of congestion (both opposition and team mates) and preferably into a position where the ball can be passed to them.

When to Dribble – Ball carrying or dribbling, should be reserved for times when no pass is available or a safe pass cannot be made. Players should be encouraged to move on an angle into space, keeping the ball on their strong (forehand) side and their head up to help with vision.

Using the Pass – Players should be encouraged to use the pass when it is available. Players should look to make passes that are low risk (not likely to be intercepted by the opposition) and to team mates who are in areas of space. Vision is needed to locate space and to make decisions about whether or not a passing option is available (e.g. how close is the opposition? Are they able to intercept the pass?). It is important to encourage players always to look and select a target before passing, this avoids players "hitting and hoping" that the ball will make it to a team mate.

Width – Encourage players to move the ball wide when transitioning from defence to attack. This opens up more space in the field, reducing the 'beehive' effect while moving the ball away from the 'danger zone' in front of the goal.

Cover – This term refers to players dropping back when on defence. To cover effectively, players should learn to drop back behind the next layer of defence once play has passed them. Cover also applies to both sides (left and right) of the field - if one side moves up to defend, the opposite side needs to drop back and provide cover (like a seesaw or a pendulum).