



Junior Playing Up Policy

'Playing up' refers to situations where a junior player joins a team with players who are older than his/her chronological age. Conversely 'playing down' would refer to any situation where an older player was to be placed in a team with chronologically younger players.

MK Storm recognises that 'playing up' can be beneficial for the skills development of junior players, but 'playing down' is not approved or condoned by the EIH. This is to maintain fairness to the younger players by not introducing a player who may have considerably more advanced ability or be significantly more physically developed which could result in accidental injury. However, a player may be deemed able to train with a lower age group as part of their 'reasonable adjustments' SEN support plan but will not be eligible for matches.

Ice Hockey has traditionally taken an approach of 'if they're good enough/they're old enough' in deciding which children should 'play up' and when. The EIH and the Club has a clear policy in place to guide these decisions to both safeguard young people in our sport and create a development structure which creates the best opportunities to nurture talent.

Selection Criteria for Training Up an Age Group in Junior Ice Hockey

When selecting players to train up an age group (i.e., moving players to a higher age group or level), it is essential to consider a holistic approach that balances skill development, physical readiness, mental maturity, and overall contribution to the team. The following criteria is designed to guide coaches and teams in making informed decisions about promoting players to a higher age group, ensuring that both the individual and the team will benefit from the move. Not all criteria are required to be met if the coaches feel that the player has hit most aspects and can develop in the remaining areas. A coaches assessment must be undertaken against all criteria which will then be discussed with the respective team manager, the player and their parent/guardian. The Club DSL and Inclusion Lead will also be consulted to ensure all aspects are covered for player safety and support plan arrangements (if relevant).

Particular attention will be given to those moving from junior teams to playing or training with adults.

1. Skill Development

A. Technical Skills

- **Skating Ability:** The player should demonstrate superior skating ability, including speed, acceleration, agility, and edge work. A player moving up should be able to maintain high performance with minimal risk of getting overwhelmed by faster and more skilled opponents.
- **Puck Handling:** Players should exhibit strong puck control, passing, and receiving skills. They must be able to make plays under pressure and display creativity in tight spaces. A higher age group often demands quicker decision-making and puck handling under more intense pressure.
- **Shooting:** A strong shot selection and the ability to shoot accurately in various situations (e.g., wrist shot, snapshot, backhand, one-timer) are critical. The player must show the ability to shoot from different angles and under pressure.

B. Game Understanding

- **Tactical Awareness:** The player should have a strong understanding of offensive and defensive concepts, including positioning, spacing, and reading the game. Moving up an age group means adjusting to more complex game strategies.
- **Adaptability to Game Situations:** A player should show the ability to quickly adapt to different in-game situations and make smart decisions under pressure (e.g., power play, penalty kill, defensive zone coverage).

2. Physical Fitness and Conditioning

A. Physical Maturity

- **Strength and Endurance:** A player must demonstrate the physical strength and stamina required to compete at the higher age level. They should have good cardiovascular endurance, especially when transitioning to longer, faster shifts.
- **Size and Physicality:** While this is not always a determining factor, physical maturity (height, weight, strength) can help a player succeed in a more physically demanding age group. Players who are smaller than those in the upper age group but have excellent agility, endurance, and technique can still thrive if they have the necessary determination.

B. Injury Prevention and Durability

- **Recovery and Resilience:** Players moving up an age group should be able to handle the physical demands of the new level. This includes being able to recover quickly between shifts and after practices, minimizing the risk of injury.
- **Physical Readiness:** Players should not only be physically capable but also prepared to deal with more challenging matchups and more frequent game schedules.

3. Mental and Emotional Readiness

A. Coping Under Pressure

- **Resilience:** Players must demonstrate the ability to remain calm and focused in high-pressure situations. The mental ability to bounce back after mistakes or setbacks is crucial when playing at a higher level where the pace is quicker, and competition is fiercer.
- **Confidence:** A player should have confidence in their abilities without becoming overconfident. They should display the maturity to handle the increased responsibility and demands of the higher age group.

B. Emotional Maturity

- **Self-Regulation:** Emotional maturity is essential for a player to deal with the stresses of moving up to an older group. This includes the ability to remain disciplined in the face of frustration or failure.
- **Teamwork and Leadership:** Players should exhibit strong communication and leadership skills, whether through positive reinforcement with teammates or by setting an example in practice and during games. Players should also be capable of adapting to different team dynamics in a higher age group.

4. Game Performance and Impact

A. Consistency

- **Consistent Performance:** Players must demonstrate a high level of performance across various games and practices, not just in isolated instances. Consistency is

key to succeeding at a higher age group, where expectations and competition are greater.

- **Impact on the Game:** The player should have a noticeable positive impact during games, whether through scoring, playmaking, defending, or creating scoring opportunities. They should be able to make a difference even against stronger, more skilled opponents.

B. Positive Influence on Team Dynamics

- **Work Ethic:** The player must show dedication, discipline, and a strong work ethic. A high-level team requires players who push themselves and their teammates to continually improve.
- **Team Contribution:** The player should consistently contribute to the team in multiple facets of the game, whether it be through offensive production, defensive reliability, or providing energy and morale on the bench.

5. Coachability and Willingness to Learn

- **Openness to Feedback:** Players must be receptive to constructive criticism and show a desire to learn and improve. A player's ability to accept feedback from coaches and make necessary adjustments is a critical component of success at a higher age group.
- **Work Ethic in Development:** Players should demonstrate a commitment to off-ice training and individual skill development. This includes a willingness to practice skills on their own and continually refine their techniques.

6. Social and Behavioural Readiness

- **Respect for the Game and Rules:** Players should show respect for the rules of the game, referees, coaches, and teammates. Respect for the game is vital in ensuring a positive transition to a higher age group where expectations around sportsmanship are heightened.
- **Team Dynamics:** The player must be able to integrate well with older teammates, respecting their experience while contributing positively to the locker room and team culture.

7. Player's Attitude and Desire

- **Motivation and Ambition:** The player must demonstrate a strong intrinsic desire to compete at the next level, be driven to succeed, and show enthusiasm for the opportunity to train up. This includes demonstrating a genuine love for the game and the willingness to put in the extra effort needed for success at the higher level.
- **Commitment to the Process:** The player must be committed to the process of development, understanding that moving up to an older age group is a challenge that requires hard work, perseverance, and the ability to adjust to new demands.

8. Parent/Guardian Support and Expectations

- **Parental Support:** Parents must be supportive of the player's progression to a higher level, ensuring they provide encouragement and understanding as the player faces more demanding schedules, potential travel commitments, and increased performance expectations.
- **Realistic Expectations:** Parents should have realistic expectations of their child's development and be prepared for the natural progression of the player's development, recognizing that moving up an age group is just one part of the long-term development journey.

9. If players are unable to attend training with their own age group during the week

- We encourage all players to prioritise attendance at their own age group training sessions, as this forms an important part of their development and team connection. While opportunities to train with older age groups may be available, these are dependent on consistent commitment to their current age group.
- If a player is unable to attend due to illness or injury, we recommend that they wait until a return-to-play assessment has been completed before joining any additional sessions.
- We understand that circumstances can vary, and each situation will be considered individually with understanding and care.

Conclusion

Selecting players for training up an age group should be a comprehensive process, ensuring that a player is not only physically and skilfully ready but also mentally and emotionally prepared for the challenges of playing at a higher level. The criteria outlined above offers a holistic approach to assessing whether a player should be promoted, focusing on a balance of skill development, physical readiness, mental maturity, and overall impact on the team. The goal is to help the player succeed at the next level while ensuring they continue to enjoy the game and progress in a healthy and positive environment.

The following table shows the age groups a player can play in:

Age on 31 st August of the playing season	
6	Under 10
7	Under 10
8	Under 10 Under 12
9	Under 10 Under 12
10	Under 12 Under 14
11	Under 12 Under 14
12	Under 14 Under 16
13	Under 14 Under 16
14	Under 16 Under 18
15	Under 16 Under 18
16	Under 18 Seniors
17	Under 18 Seniors

Training up does NOT guarantee that the player will be selected for the above age group matches

Players own age group will take priority over the older age group in any league or tournament clashes.

What are not good reasons for children to be selected for 'playing up'?

- Their sibling or friend is on the older team, and it would be more convenient for the parent(s).
- They prefer the coach of the other team (it's good to learn from a variety of coaches).
- They play up in other sports.
- Their older siblings played up at the same age.
- Their parent is a sponsor / volunteer / friend of a club official.
- The older team is short of players.

Procedure

If a coach considers one of their players would benefit from 'playing up' with the next age group they should discuss this proposal with the coach of that team (if different) the player, the parent/guardian, and the Club DSL. In the event that the Club DSL is also the parent, the Regional DSL should be involved. These discussions should cover the following topics:

- What benefit the child will gain from playing up.
- Safeguarding concerns, such as: exposure to older children / adults; increased risk of injuries; potential pressures and how to recognise signs of pressure.
- Reassurance that there will be no judgement or sanction if the child does not want to play up, changes their mind later, or finds it too much. All parties should sign the consent form alongside any additional relevant forms, such as consent to share changing rooms.