

Hockey Saskatchewan Safe Environments Intervention Plans for Minor Associations & Leagues

Hockey environments are vast and unique across Saskatchewan. Some Minor Hockey Associations (MHAs) use various facilities hosted in urban municipalities, while others play a role in operating the local arena hub.

While all Minor Hockey Associations and Leagues seek to provide a safe and welcoming environment with a healthy hockey culture, some participants and guests of hockey events demonstrate threatening or violent actions and behaviours that are inconsistent with our collective goals. Sometimes MHAs feel ill-equipped to manage instances of maltreatment or even violence in the stands or lobby of the arena, and as such Hockey Saskatchewan is recommending that each member league and MHA establish, promote, and enforce an Intervention Action Plan to promote positivity and safety before, during, and after hockey events. The following resource offers important considerations and ways to develop Intervention Action Plans starting at the team level to reach our full potential of safe environments, and joyful hockey experiences.

Setting Expectations

It is important for hockey leaders to set expectations for decorum and culture at the beginning of each season. Speak to your participants about their responsibilities to ensure a psychologically safe climate for developing players. This means ensuring that fans are using encouragement in their cheering and resisting the urge to voice criticism.

Participants need to be responsible for the behavior of their guests and teams can abide by the expectations set by gently reminding those who are not being encouraging of the type of cheering the team, association, and league expects. While it can be intimidating at times, if the coach, team officials, and association is clear about acceptable fan behaviour from the outset of the season, reminders of this plan will be easier to carry out compared to getting fans onside in the middle of an intense game.

Tools to Support Expectations

Fans and Families Pledge (Full version attached)

Circulate a Fans and Families Pledge at the beginning of each season to support positive environments and remind folks of it periodically.

No Directions Cheering (Full resource attached)

Teams that adopt “No-Directions Cheering” offer supportive fan feedback without interfering with their player(s)’ development of decision making, or the coach’s instructions or feedback philosophy. In hockey, this can also extend to disallowing expressions of criticisms toward the officials.

Teams that adopt No-Directions Cheering demonstrate that they value the development of players, and honour the space that coaches need to unfold the game strategy and team goals. See the attached resource for more information and a handout you can use to promote and execute No-Directions Cheering.

Team Culture Captains

Have a volunteer designate on each team who will serve as the “Culture Keeper” or “Fan Club Captain” who can take the lead on monitoring and encouraging positive fan behavior. The Culture Captain should have a role in the expectation setting team conversation early in the season, get to know the team families and remind them of expectations, distribute helpful materials on promoting positive culture, and thanking fans publicly for great displays of support and good sporting conduct. The Culture Captain may also be prepared to periodically remind fans and families of the expected behaviours when spectating.

How to Encourage a Positive Culture in the Stands

It can sometimes feel intimidating to confront others about how they are cheering or behaving in the arena, even if we know them really well. Using a light and kind approach and tone helps those who are escalated, or could be triggered, meet you where you are. Here are some example statements we can use when others may need a reminder to align with the team culture:

- “We love enthusiasm here and it is even better if we can speak in a supportive way.”
- “By the way, our team has agreed to use No Directions Cheering, to ensure we are not interfering with what the coach is telling them.”
- “I know we used to yell at the players, and yet we now have learned that it is distracting more than it is motivating.”

- “In case you haven’t heard yet, our coach has asked that we keep our cheering positive. It is part of their strategy to set the tone the team needs most. We can even celebrate good plays by both teams.”
- “Now that the game is over, let's remember there is a 24hr cooling off period. Let's take the space we need to get to a calm mindset that will benefit all of us.”

Role play these phrases with a partner or friend to try them on a few times. Remember to use empathy when trying to course correct a fan who is experiencing anger or frustration, and walk away if the situation becomes uncomfortable or unsafe.

Periodic Coach Checkpoints

Rather than only addressing difficult situations as they arise, coaches can include checkpoints throughout the season where demonstrations of the team culture in action are acknowledged, and course corrections are applied where necessary.

Awarding & Prizes

Consider acknowledging the excellent displays of good sporting conduct and support that are carried out each season by your best fans.

- Team or Association Volunteers can hand out prizes during games to fans showing great sporting conduct. (Canteen vouchers, mittens, noisemakers, etc.)
- Social media posts and promotions highlighting the good sporting conduct of fans and spectators.
- Associations & Leagues can include Fan and Team Spirit awards in their annual awards programs. (‘Team with the best fans’, ‘Most encouraging hockey fan’, ‘Hockey Mom/Dad/Parent/Grandparent/Aunty/Sibling of the year’)

Promoting Welcoming Environments in Hockey

There are many ways your association and league can promote positive spectator and participant behavior to uphold your organizational values and good sporting conduct.

In the Appendices, please find the following template resources:

Public Address Scripts to use before and during the game.

In Arena Messaging

Fan Code of Conduct

Intervention Planning Exercise

As an association, it is important to have action plans in place for situations that require the upholding of organizational values, as well as the continued safety of participants and spectators. While each potential situation is different, reducing risk where possible is an important standard for all Minor Hockey Associations and Leagues.

As a Board/Executive Committee, consider and document what options you have available, to mitigate situations of conflict and violence by discussing the following questions:

Supporting on-ice officials

- Do Officials have the support they need to suspend the game as a result of crowd control needs or coach conduct?
- Who would be responsible to support an Official who has ejected a coach or fan who is not complying?
- Do Officials have personal safety when moving between the dressing room and ice surface? Who is responsible for ensuring their safety?
- Are timekeepers (who are typically adults) trained and briefed to support on-ice Officials before, during, and after games if they may require the safety of an adult presence?

Inter-spectator conflict

- Who is responsible for mitigating conflict between fans? What tools might they need?
- What games/tournaments/events may require additional support to reduce or mitigate inter-spectator conflict?
- Does the arena operator/owner have policies regarding conflict or violence, and if so, are they promoted among members?

Domestic conflict

- Who is responsible for intervening in public displays of domestic abuse/violence? (ex: A parent intensely admonishing their child in the arena lobby after a game; two parents arguing about custody conditions during a game)
- What training do our coaches have/need to maintain the psychological and emotional safety of participants?

Alcohol consumption

- How does alcohol consumption affect our risk of conflict and violence?
- What control do we have over alcohol related risks? Is our arena(s) licensed or unlicensed, and how does this impact our control and protocols?
- If our space is licensed, what balance can we find to produce revenue, while also protecting our participants?
- Who is responsible for monitoring alcohol consumption and intervening where necessary?

Identifying agents and helpers

- Who is available to take the lead in conflict mitigation during hockey events?
- What role and training do parents/guardians of players have, or need?
- What role and training do timekeeping officials have or need? Could we give our timekeepers the additional responsibility of being the peacekeepers, and what might that entail?
- What role and training do coaches have or need?
- Does our arena have other helpers (administrators, security, facilities crew) that can play a role in supporting safety?

Arena Environment

- How many arenas do we program out of? (If more than one, consider the following for each of them).
- Does our partnership with arena owner/operators give us the opportunity to partner on good risk management practices? If not, how might we achieve this?
- What are the vulnerabilities of the arena? (ex. Fan proximity to bench, public exposure to officials, public address system, home/away fan seating, etc.)
- What proactive measures can be taken to make the environment safe and welcoming?
- Are participants aware of the security protocols of the arenas? If not, how can they be promoted?
- Are seating plans appropriate for certain events? (ex: reserved seating for Elders, limited alcohol consumption areas)
- Are ushers, fan ambassadors, or security personnel appropriate for certain events?

Putting it all Together

Who should be consulted before plans are implemented? (Stakeholders, Arena Operators, Elders, Leaders, Members, etc.)?

From this discussion, what are some intervention plans that can be implemented straight away in the upcoming season?

Who will be responsible for the plans?

To whom and how will plans be communicated?

What are the longer-term strategies that should be documented and developed?

What are the proactive activities that the association or league can take on to promote a positive and welcoming environment? For example:

- ✓ Season welcome bbq
 - ✓ Awards night
 - ✓ 'Buddies' program matching older and younger teams
 - ✓ Open house events (include other arena users such as the local ringette, broomball, skating clubs)
 - ✓ Try-Hockey events
 - ✓ Equipment exchange events
 - ✓ Team partnerships for fundraising
 - ✓ Team partnerships for tournament hosting (U9 host for U18 and vice-versa)
 - ✓ Cultural events
 - ✓ Banner making events
 - ✓ Parent 'try-hockey' events
 - ✓ See *Where Fun Wins* at hockeysask.ca for more ideas!
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Fans and Families Pledge

Fans and Families play a major role when it comes to influencing youth hockey players to display good sporting conduct. Children often see their fans and families as role models and look to replicate their actions.

It is expected that all fans and families participating in Hockey in Saskatchewan observe the following principles:

Children are involved in organized sports for their own enjoyment. I will encourage and support the players' chosen sport and will not pressure them into participating.

I will remember that the game is fun! I will not taunt or disturb other fans, or embarrass my player by yelling at players, coaches, officials, or other fans.

I will support and promote Fair Play by encouraging my player to play by the rules. I will display good sporting conduct by applauding a good effort by both teams in victory and defeat, and respecting players, coaches, and officials.

I will recognize the importance of volunteer coaches and will take the time to attend team meetings and messages to get to know our team coach's philosophy, expectations, and guidelines. I will communicate with my player's coaches and support them.

I recognize that I am responsible for guests and fans that come to support my player, and I will share with them the goals of good sporting conduct, no-directions cheering, and coach philosophy the team and association expects.

I understand that when my player is on the ice, the coaches do the coaching. I will not yell instructions to my player from the sidelines or give my player instructions counter to those of the coach.

I understand that it is my role to teach my child good sporting conduct, how to deal with success and failure, and to support my child's development in the game.

I will strive to become knowledgeable about the rules of the game and support the officials' decisions.

I understand the importance of skill development. Especially for the younger age groups, I will remember that practices benefit my child more than games and competition.

I will respect dressing rooms as privileged areas for players, coaches, and officials.

I will not place unreasonable expectations on these young players.

I agree to abide by these principles with the understanding that if I do not follow them I may be asked to leave any practice, game, or event.



No Directions Cheering (From Positive Coaching Alliance)

PositiveCoach.org @PositiveCoachUS

No-Directions Cheering

It's disconcerting for athletes to have parents/caregivers yell out instructions. Athletes may struggle to decipher what to do when they get instructions from the stands and from their coaches - especially if they are conflicting. Being mindful of what you are yelling to your athlete can help them better focus on the game and the strategy that the coach employs. Commit to no-directions cheering to help your athlete succeed. Eliminate verbs in your cheering because you can't give advice without verbs. For example, "Pass the puck to Sarah" is a no-no because it uses the word "pass" as a verb to give directions. On the other hand, "Great pass, Sarah!" gives no directions. You're just commenting (appreciatively) on what you see Sarah doing.

Here are some examples of No-Directions Cheering:

- "Great effort!"
- "Good hustle!"
- "Way to play defense!"
- "Nice shot!"
- "Terrific play!"
- "Way to go!"

No-Directions Cheering is important because **your athlete will do better if it's their game**. So provide encouragement without direction – or even enjoy the game in silence. The more space you leave them to be the actor – a proactive player rather than a puppet on a string, the better.



Public Address Scripts

Print and laminate/post these scripts to keep at the timekeepers/announcers booth and encourage their use throughout the season.

Hockey Canada Fair Play Initiative Pre-Game Announcement

Good (evening/afternoon/morning) hockey fans. Welcome to (tonight's/today's/this morning's) game between _____ and _____.

These are young hockey players who are performing here (tonight/today). They are friendly rivals as members of opposing teams. They are not enemies. The coaches for (tonight's/today's/this morning's) game are _____ and _____. They have accepted the challenge of teaching the skills of this great game. The officials are _____ and _____. These individuals have been assigned to administer the rules of the game. Their training, experience and integrity qualify them for their role in this contest. On behalf of the (team/association) _____, enjoy our great game of skill.

General Spectator Reminders Throughout the Game

Our Hockey Association thanks you, hockey fans, for your partnership in ensuring that our games are safe, and welcoming. Everyone involved in the field of play deserves our encouragement and respect. This is how we honor the game together.

While our teams may be rivals on the field of play, we all have a common goal of enjoying the great game of hockey. Treating each other with dignity is what makes a rivalry special and we appreciate the support of our fans participating with positive encouragement (today/this evening).

Did you know? Green armbands indicate that officials are under the age of 18. This does not indicate a level of qualification or experience for an official; it simply indicates the age of the official and helps advocate to the hockey community to recognize that the officials working that game are young officials; a young person in your community deserving of respect and appreciation.

Hockey Saskatchewan In-Game Announcements

Game announcers can access the Hockey Saskatchewan in-game Announcement sound files to play periodically throughout the game.