



*“There is no place in hockey at any level for intimidation and violence”*

## **COACHING LEADERSHIP – REMOVE INTIMIDATION AND VIOLENCE**

Coaches have the primary responsibility to manage the players they coach so that the players respect the referees and the opposition, and learn to discipline and control themselves under physical pressure and aggressive behaviour against them or their teammates.

Coaches should not teach intimidation. We should not, as a strategy or tactic encourage bigger and stronger players to orally or otherwise try to intimidate players on the opposition, especially smaller, physically weaker players.

We should teach our players not ever to initiate a fight. We should explain it is acceptable to fight in a self defence situation only if the other player has initiated the fight, and only if there is no way to escape injury without fighting back.

We should teach our youth that it is not cowardly to back away from a fight but rather cowardly to initiate a fight. Let’s teach our youth not to retaliate violently but rather to get “pay back” for opposition violence on the power play when they are in the penalty box for misconduct on the ice.

If certain players do not abide by these team rules and values, and are constantly breaking them after they are clearly explained, they should be expelled from the team. Coaches should not wait and rely only on the league for game suspension penalties for misconduct such as fighting, hitting from behind, hitting to the head, kicking, spearing, two hand slashing and other major penalties **where there is clear attempt to injure.**

We all know it is very difficult at times to be sure there was intent to injure, so this standard must be applied very carefully.

Coaches should also encourage their leagues to impose stiffer suspension penalties for fighting and attempt to injure infractions, including half and whole season suspensions from play. It should be mandatory that every coach hand each player a copy of the penalties and consequences, and to explain them.

There are situations where there are very few consequences for extremely violent and potentially very dangerous actions by players, such as in the last few minutes of the last game of the year when their team has been eliminated, or when a player is moving away or to another league, or in tournaments, or in a year end all star game. I have seen a very ugly situation arise in an all-star game involving 14/15 year olds.

Some coaches say fighting and intimidation are part of the game of hockey. They say make the players on the opposition afraid and they will be soft on the puck, miss passes, tip toe into



corners, and back off the puck everywhere. Surely we do not want to teach our youth these values.

**WE DO NOT WANT TO TEACH OUR YOUTH THAT CREATING FEAR AND INTIMIDATION AND TRYING TO INJURE ANOTHER HUMAN BEING IS OKAY IN ANY SETTING IN LIFE INCLUDING SPORTS**

Some people see nothing wrong with a good fight in hockey and say that without fighting the very skilled players will be left unprotected and subject to more violence, like “stick work” and “dirty hits” from less talented players. One of the answers to this is stiffer penalties for so called “stick work” and “dirty hits” and other intent to injure infractions. But there is another solution.

Some players have temperaments that are not suited to playing hockey because they lack discipline and cannot control themselves when they become angry. They may be violent for whatever the reason, either environmental or genetic. The reason for their violent nature is important for them and their parents to understand and overcome for the good of themselves and the community but their victims must be protected first and foremost.

We, as coaches may be able to help these players overcome their issues. However, violent players should not be allowed to play if they have proven over and over they can't restrain themselves. Coaches have the responsibility not to have them play on their team.

Because hockey is “just a game” that includes a lot of physical contact, what is clean and fair physical contact needs to be explained to the players precisely by coaches and reinforced throughout the season.

The players must understand that they must play within those boundaries or not play at all.

**FAIR PLAY, CLEAN PLAY OR NO PLAY**