



# Hockey Key Skills

# Grip

**AIM:** It is essential to ensure that young players have the right grip. Players should know the correct grip for each of the basic skills. This grip is the same for receiving, ball carrying and pushing.

## COACHING POINTS:

- A close look at the grip shows that "V" formed between the finger and thumb on the left hand runs roughly between the front edge and the back of the stick. The "V" on the right hand is in a similar line.
- Hands should be approximately 30 centimetres apart
- The left hand curls around the top of the stick. It is essential to ensure that young players have the right grip. Players should know the correct grip for each of the basic skills. This grip is the same for receiving, ball carrying and pushing.



Photos courtesy of Photosport and CMG Sports.



# Ball Carrying

**AIM:** This is the hockey term for moving the ball with the stick.

## THERE ARE THREE TYPES:

**Closed:** This is where the ball hugs the stick or stays very close to the stick at all times. This type is used when there are lots of other players around.

**Open:** The ball is tapped ahead and the stick is used to guide it and bring it under control when necessary. This is used when a player has no opposition close and wants to move very quickly.

**Indian:** The ball is moved left to right and right to left by turning the stick over the ball. The stick guides and controls the ball. This is used to change the direction of the ball to elude an opposition stick.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT:

- Players should be able to perform the open, closed and Indian dribbles competently and comfortably beat an opponent
- Once the players can carry the ball comfortably, emphasis should be placed on looking up (scanning) as much as possible while moving
- Players should be able to keep the ball close to the stick while scanning
- Players should be able to perform a big drag. Emphasis should be placed on moving the ball from the back stick to open face as quickly as possible and then keeping it there in a protected position

## COACHING POINTS:

- Hands apart with the ball on the forehand
- "V" grip
- Upright position enables player to run freely
- Head up to scan – see where they are going and where their team mates are
- Right hand is not too tight so that the stick can be rotated easily across the ball for Indian dribble



# Receiving

**AIM:** This is the hockey term for controlling the ball whether it is stopped completely or still moving but under control.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT:

- Players should be able to perform a basic upright trap. Emphasis should be placed on movement of the feet to get into the correct stance
- Players should be able to perform a basic reverse stick trap
- Players should be able to trap the ball while on the run and once trapped, protect ball in readiness for the next movement

## COACHING POINTS:

- Firm grip with hands apart
- Right hand is relaxed and absorbs the ball
- Knees need to be bent
- If the ball is bouncing make sure the stick is vertical



RECEIVING  
Hands apart - knees bent



RECEIVING  
Eyes up - ready to absorb ball





# Tackling

**AIM:** This is a technique where the stick is used to intercept or take the ball off (dispossess) an opponent. All players need to develop tackling skills regardless of their on-field position.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT:

- Players should understand basic tackling techniques
  - mirroring, flat stick
- Players should understand the concept and be able to channel opponents
- Players should be able to perform lunge, jab and reverse stick tackles

## COACHING POINTS:

- Correct selection of tackling technique
- Feet correctly positioned for type of tackle
- Good balance
- Head up for good vision
- Be mobile where possible
- Good stick position

## BLOCK OR LUNGE TACKLE:

- Low body position
- Keep stick low to the ground with no swinging action
- Keep mobile with one foot forward of the other.

## JAB TACKLE:

- Stay at poke distance (stick length + one step)
- Good balance – body position usually side on
- Don't commit too early to tackle



# Hitting

**AIM:** This is one of the fundamental skills. It is used by all positions on the field – strikers, midfielders and defenders.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT:

- Players should be able to hit the ball with a controlled swing
- Players should be able to hit the ball along the ground in a given direction
- Players should understand when to use the hit in game situations

## COACHING POINTS:

- V Grip – Hold left hand near the top of the stick, slide right hand up from the receiving grip, so the hands are together
- Head is steady, eyes over ball
- Bend your knees so you have low centre of gravity
- Transfer weight from right to left foot
- Backswing, downswing and follow through should all be along direction of the hit
- Keep ball flat along the ground





The background is a dark, textured green with vertical stripes and a grid of small circles. A large, dark green triangle is positioned on the left side. Three white circular binder holes are located on the left edge.

# **Small Game Activities**

# Dribblers & Robbers

**AIM:** To develop ball control and vision skills in a confined space.

## ACTIVITY:

- All players to start with a stick and ball within the area
- One player is designated as the robber and their ball is removed
- On the coaches command players dribble their ball around
- Players must stay within the area
- The robber tries to get the ball off the dribblers using their hockey stick to gain control of the dribblers ball
- If the robber is successful, the dribbler who lost their ball becomes the new robber

## VARIATION:

- Add more robbers

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- How do you avoid the robber?
- Can you keep moving while looking for the robber?



## EQUIPMENT:

- Hockey sticks and balls for all players
- 4 cones to mark the play zone
- Bibs for robbers

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface
- Encourage players to look up to see where they are going



# King of the Square

**AIM:** To maintain possession of own ball while “stealing” or knocking away another player’s loose ball. The aim is to try and get through to be a “King” of the square.

## ACTIVITY:

- On the word “go” all players move around the “King” zone with their ball controlled on the stick
- As the players move around they may knock another player’s ball away from them but they must not hit away their stick
- A player can regain their ball before it goes over the boundary line and keep going but once it has gone over the line they must dribble their ball around the outside of King’s Square in a clockwise direction before re-entering the game
- Play for 2 minutes – stop then coach gives feedback and asks “Who has stayed in King’s Square the whole time? ...WELL DONE”
- Play again for a further 2 minutes – stop and give feedback
- Then play variation below

## VARIATIONS:

- When the player loses their ball outside the square, they must stand outside the area, foot resting on their ball and wait. Each player who is knocked out must do this until there is only one player left – KING OF THE SQUARE!
- Encourage players to cheer for the remaining players

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- How do you keep control of your ball while knocking someone else’s ball away?
- What type of tackle is the best to use in this game?



## EQUIPMENT:

- Hockey sticks and balls for all players
- Cones to mark the play zone.

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface
- Increase size of area to make it safe and to avoid collisions.

# Dog & Bone

**AIM:** To provide players with an opportunity to run to gain control of the ball and score a goal. This game also starts developing awareness of attack and defense when working with a teammate.

## ACTIVITY:

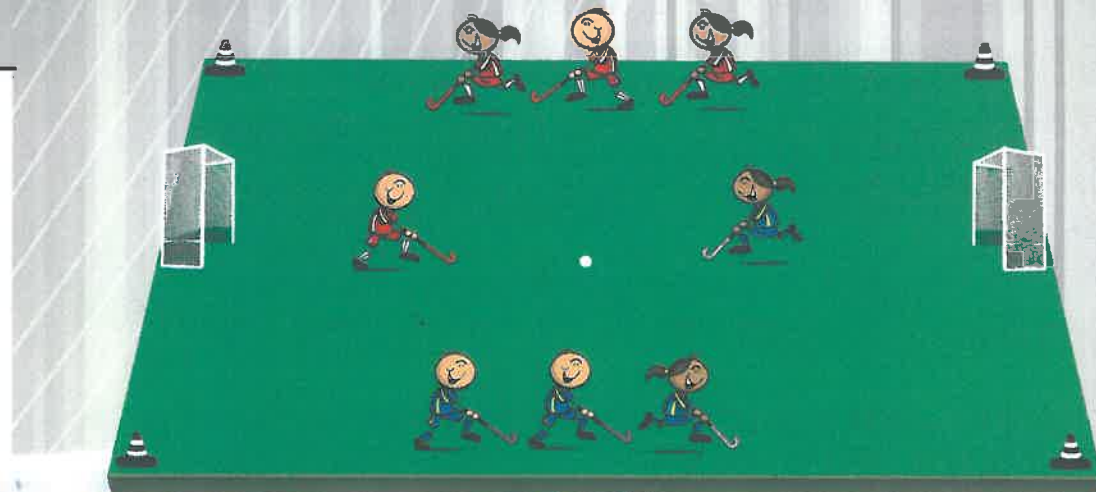
- Divide players into even teams
- One team can have bibs to identify them
- Assign players numbers
- Coach calls 1 number and the 2 players with those numbers run behind their team and around cone to enter field of play
- Players try to get control of the ball and dribble or push it into the goal or over the end line
- The player without the ball tries to win or steal back the ball or deny the other player the chance to score
- Play it out until the ball is over the sideline, backline or in the goal

## VARIATIONS:

- Coach can call more than 1 number i.e. 1 and 5 or 1, 3 and 5
- Players on the side can push pass the ball to one of their team members to keep the game going

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- "How can we keep control of the ball?"
- "If there is more than 1 person should they all attack?"



## EQUIPMENT:

- 1 hockey stick each
- 2 hockey balls
- 2 goals – can be cones
- 4 cones to mark the play zone
- Bibs

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface



# Mine Field

**AIM:** An activity promoting an awareness of space as well as an introduction to moving the ball with the stick.

## ACTIVITY: MINEFIELD (5mins)

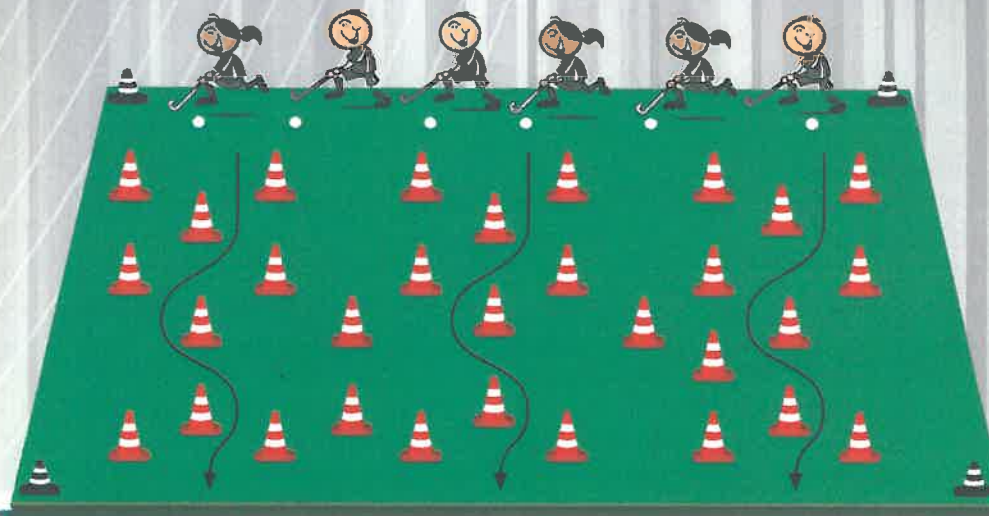
- Mark an area 25m by 25m or appropriate size for group
- All players have a ball and are lined up at one edge of the area
- The area has cones placed randomly throughout
- When the coach says GO the players need to dribble their ball through to the other side of the area without disturbing any of the cones (mines)
- Players should change position so they are taking a different route through the minefield each time

## ACTIVITY 2: MINEFIELD WITH CHASER (5mins)

- One player is nominated as the chaser and stands 5m behind the other players without a ball
- All other players have a ball and are lined up at one edge of the area
- When the coach says GO, the chaser chases the dribblers and the dribblers dribble their ball through to the other side of the area without disturbing any of the cones (mines) and without being tackled by the chaser
- Any player tackled by the chaser, or blown up by a cone, joins in as a chaser for the next round

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- What position do the hands need to be in to make it easier to control the ball?
- How can you see where the mines are?
- Which type of dribble is best to use?



## EQUIPMENT:

- Hockey sticks and balls for all players
- 30 cones to act as "mines"

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface
- Increase size of area to make it safe
- Restrict the numbers of dribblers for each turn

# Robbing the Nest

**AIM:** An activity that uses ball carrying skills and also encourages vision to see where other players are and what cones are free.

## ACTIVITY 1: ROBBING THE NEST:

- Players stand by a cone with stick
- The balls are all in the middle
- On the "go" signal the players run into the centre and with their stick, pull a ball out and dribble it back to their cone
- Players keep doing this until there are no balls left. Stop.
- The coach checks to see how many balls each player has
- Repeat this to see if players can get more balls than the first time
- The third time through – once all the balls have gone from the middle, players can then go "steal" or "rob" others from any cone
- The fourth time through – players when they "rob" can only "rob" from the same colour cone as their own

## VARIATIONS:

- Players can walk in the first round and run to make it easier to control
- Can set up smaller circles and players with most balls shift to a different circle to challenge them and also to make it more positive for those with fewer balls

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- "How do you control the ball on the stick?"
- "What hand positions make it easier to run with the ball?"
- "How do you protect the balls you have collected?"



## EQUIPMENT:

- 3 different coloured cones – at least 5 sets or 3 coloured sets of hoops
- 25-40 hockey balls, put hockey balls in a tight circle in the centre. They could go inside a hoop to keep them stationary.
- 1 hockey stick for each
- A flat surface with cones placed in a circle in order as in diagram

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface
- Increase size of area to make it safe



# Push it

**AIM:** To develop passing and receiving skills

## ACTIVITY:

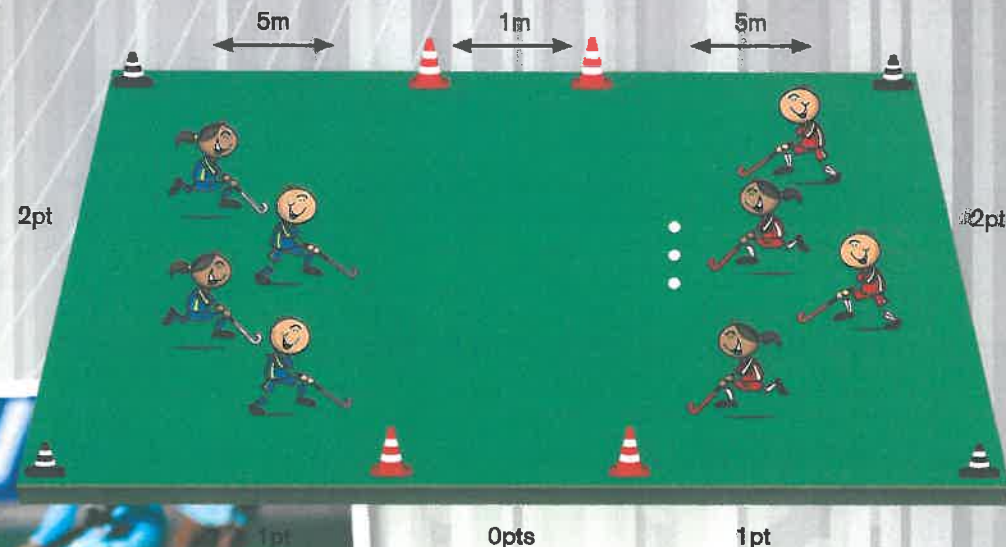
- Divide the group into two teams
- One team starts with 3 balls and they push the balls across the gap to the other team trying to get the ball past the receivers and over the end line
- The other team tries to receive the balls
- The team pushing the ball gets 2 points if it goes right through past the end line
- The receiving team now has their turn, there is no dribbling allowed
- A player may pass in his area to another player close to the middle line so that it is easier to find a gap in the opposition

## VARIATION:

- Reduce the number of balls to start off to make it easier
- Can use bigger balls to make it easier to stop
- Make the players push the ball from where they have stopped

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- What can you call when the ball is coming to you?
- Where do you hold your hands on a stick to stop a ball?



## EQUIPMENT:

- 1 hockey stick each
- 8 cones to set up play zone
- 3 hockey balls

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface

# Four Goal Hockey

**AIM:** To use hockey skills to control a ball, beat defenders and score a goal. This game encourages other team members to help communicate any dangers to their goal.

## ACTIVITY:

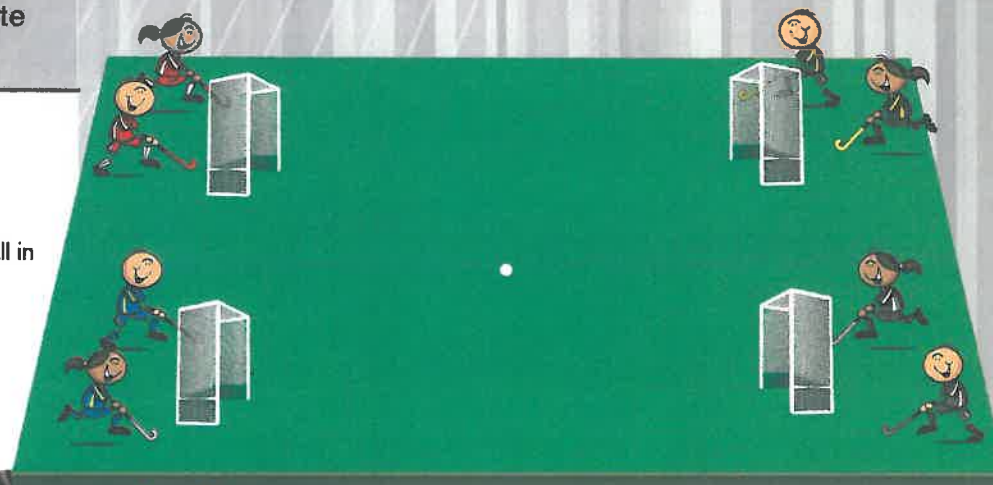
- Players are divided into teams of 2-4 and are allocated numbers and given coloured bibs
- Teams are allocated a goal and stand behind it
- The coach rolls a ball into the middle
- The coach calls a number and the players with that number try to get possession of the ball in the middle
- Players try to score in any goal but their own with a push shot
- The other players must stay behind their goal but can advise their player of free goals and danger in their own
- Once a goal is scored players return behind their goal and another number is called
- Competition starts again.

## VARIATION:

- Size of area can be adjusted depending on age of players
- Can call in 2 numbers.

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- How can you win possession of the ball?
- How do you get power into a push shot?



## EQUIPMENT:

- 1 hockey stick each
- 4 goals
- 4 sets of bibs
- 1 hockey ball

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface
- Keep all players not in game behind their goals
- Shot on goal must be a push, no hitting



# Hockey Bullrush

**AIM:** To use hockey skills to control a ball and beat defenders. To learn to tackle in a controlled environment

## SET UP:

- Set up zone with cones (use court markings if available)
- Two players are nominated as a defenders (no ball required)
- All other players become attackers and line up along the line with a stick and ball each

## ACTIVITY:

- On command, attackers dribble through the zone, attempting to reach the opposite end
- Defenders attempt to tackle attackers and knock their ball out of the channel
- Attackers who lose possession of their ball move outside the channel and practice dribbling
- When attackers still in possession of their ball reach the end of the channel they realign and the game continues in the opposite direction
- The game continues until one player is left as the winner. New defenders are nominated for each new game

## VARIATION:

- Size of area can be adjusted depending on age of players
- Add more defenders

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- How can you win possession of the ball?
- How do you avoid running at the defender?



## EQUIPMENT:

- Hockey sticks and balls for all players
- 4 cones to mark the play zone

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface
- Keep all players not in game outside the area

# Tunnel Ball

**AIM:** To develop power and control of push passes in a safe and fun environment.

## SET UP:

- Choose half the players to line up next to each other in a line with a ball each
- The other players line up opposite them 8-10 meters apart without a ball
- The coach and 1 player position themselves at either end in the middle of the tunnel with 1 ball

## ACTIVITY 1:

- The coach and partner have a ball between them, and they must pass to each other through the "tunnel"
- The players then pass their ball back and forwards to each other, trying to hit the coach/teachers ball as it passes them
- When a players ball hits the coach/teachers ball the game stops, the successful pair of players swap positions with the coach/teacher and the game restarts

## VARIATIONS:

- For beginners a large ball (soccer or basketball) can replace the hockey ball being passed down the middle of the target. This provides a bigger target. The large ball can be rolled or kicked
- The space between partners can be widened as the players become better at pushing

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- How do you ensure the ball goes in the direction of your partner?
- Where does the stick need to be to trap the ball?



## EQUIPMENT:

- Hockey sticks and balls for all players
- 1 big ball (optional)

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface
- Ensure players are well spaced and do not chase their ball into the tunnel.



# Follow the Leader

**AIM:** To develop power and control of push passes in a safe and fun environment.

## ACTIVITY 1:

- Organise players into groups of four with all players having a hockey stick and ball
- Line the groups up and number players in each group 1-4
- Player 1 of each group is the leader
- On the coaches command the leader dribbles around the area with the ball under control
- Players 2-4 follow the movements of player 1 trying not to lose the player directly in front of them
- On the coaches' command, players stop and reconnect.
- Player 2 then becomes the leader and player 1 rotates to the back of the line
- The game continues for a set time, for a set number of repetitions or until everyone has become the leader

## VARIATIONS:

- Add obstacles to the area
- The coach roams in the area walking between players to create confusion

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- Who should the players be following the leader or the player directly in front of them?
- How do you avoid running into other teams?



## EQUIPMENT:

- Hockey sticks and balls for all players
- 4 cones to mark the play zone

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface
- Start the game at walking pace and gradually build up the speed to avoid collisions

# Fox & Rabbits

**AIM:** To dribble the ball at pace while avoiding a defender. Ball control, vision and speed are developed during the game.

## ACTIVITY 1:

- Make a circle with 2 entrances using cones
- One player is designated as the fox
- Spread other players (rabbits) around the circle
- All players must move in an anti clockwise direction around the circle dribbling their ball on the coaches command
- The centre channel is the safe zone for the rabbits; the fox cannot enter the centre channel. The rabbits cannot stop in the channel.
- The fox can only go around the outside of the circle
- The fox must tackle the rabbits and once tackled, the rabbits go and stand in the cage
- Give the fox one minute to catch as many rabbits as they can
- The winner is the fox who catches the most rabbits in a minute

## VARIATIONS:

- Have two foxes
- Allow the fox into the channel

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- How do you see where the fox is while dribbling?
- How do you evade the fox?



## EQUIPMENT:

- 10 – 20 cones to mark the play zone
- Hockey sticks and balls for all players

## SAFETY:

- Limit the number of rabbits
- Ensure all players dribble anti clockwise
- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface



# Cats & Mice

**AIM:** To dribble the ball at pace while avoiding being tackled. To tackle without interfering with the player or players stick.

## ACTIVITY:

- Players line up in 2 rows, one row called Cats and the other called Mice
- The two rows are about 3m apart
- Using cones mark a line 10 meters away from each row
- When the coach calls "MICE" the mice all dribble across the nearest line
- The Cats then have to leave their ball behind and try to catch the mice, tackling them before they reach the line
- If the coach calls "CATS" the rolls are reversed, with the cats dribbling across the line, and the mice chasing
- After each chase, reposition the players and call either cats or mice again
- The winners are the players who do not get caught

## VARIATIONS:

- Either lengthen or shorten the space between rows to make it harder or easier for the dribbler

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- What is the fastest way to dribble the ball?
- Where does the tacklers stick need to be to play the ball?



## EQUIPMENT:

- Hockey sticks and balls for all players
- Cones to mark the play zone

## SAFETY:

- Ensure the tacklers do not swing their sticks
- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface

# Nuisance

**AIM:** To develop passing in pairs while on the move.  
To develop techniques to intercept passes.

## ACTIVITY:

- Get everyone into pairs and then pick 1 pair to be nuisances
- The nuisances wear bibs
- On the coaches' command, pairs pass a ball back and forth between themselves while moving around within the area
- The nuisances try to intercept a pass or pick up a loose ball
- When the nuisance intercepts a pass or controls a loose ball, the player that lost the ball takes the nuisances bib and becomes the nuisance
- The old nuisance now has a partner and they begin passing the ball to each other

## VARIATIONS:

- Divide everyone into two teams, and play against each other, the aim being to keep the ball in your possession, no tackling allowed

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- What type of pass should you use in this game?
- Should the pass be hard or soft?



## EQUIPMENT:

- 4 x cones to mark the play zone
- 5 bibs to identify nuisances
- 1 hockey ball per pair
- 1 hockey stick each

## SAFETY:

- Control the pace of the players movement at the beginning of the game to avoid collisions
- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface



# Sideline Hockey

**AIM:** Passing and receiving under pressure, vision and teamwork

## ACTIVITY:

- Set up play zone with goals at both ends
- Divide the group into two teams
- Select 3 players from each team to start on the field
- The spare players from each team are placed along the sideline, one team on either side of the zone
- At the coaches command, it is 3v3 for a set time or until a goal is scored.  
At end of time limit or a goal is scored players rotate
- Players leaving the field go to the end of their own team line and three new players run on from the other end
- The ball is kept in play along sideline by players off the field who can 'wall pass' or 'bounce' the ball back onto the field to their own players
- Players on the field can also pass to the sideline players
- Sideline players cannot tackle or enter field

## VARIATIONS:

- Players can only hold ball for 5 seconds max
- Players can only have 3 touches then they must pass

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- How can sideline players help their team mates that are in the 3v3 game?
- How do players use the entire space rather than bunching?



## EQUIPMENT:

- 1 hockey stick per player
- 1 hockey ball
- 2 cones to mark the play zone
- 2 goals

## SAFETY:

- Encourage players to keep their sticks on the ground
- Keep sideline players outside the play zone
- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface

# Horses and Jockeys

**AIM:** To develop dribbling skills and to encourage group support.  
To develop movement skills while working with a partner.

## ACTIVITY:

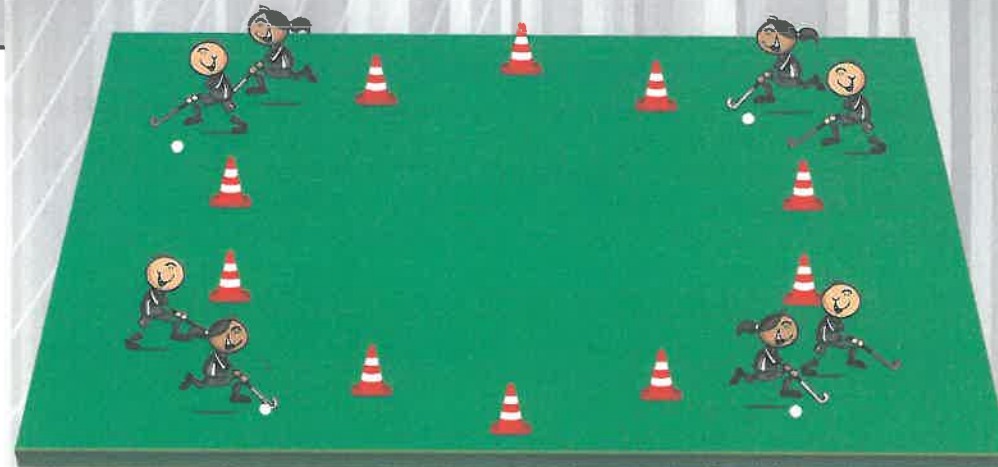
- Arrange players in pairs and set up in a large circle
- Name one player in the pair the horse, the other the jockey
- The horses get on their hands and knees with their heads towards the centre of the circle
- The jockey stands over the horses again facing the centre, this is the 'saddle-up' position (jockeys do not sit on the horse just stand over them)
- The balls are placed to the side of each pair
- The coach calls out either 'Horse' or 'Jockey'
- If 'horse' is called, all horses stand up, then dribble their ball around the outside circle
- They should all race anticlockwise around the circle and finish in the saddle-up position with their partner
- If 'jockey' is called the jockeys race around in the same way
- Award points for the 1st three pairs back in the saddle-up position (3, 2 and 1 points for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd pairs, respectively)
- After each player has raced 5 times, the team with the most points wins the game

## VARIATIONS:

- Dribble around the circle in a clockwise direction
- Players must run around their partner before dribbling
- Start with the balls in the centre, players must then collect a ball and dribble it through the space to their partners right and then dribble around the circle
- Players should encourage their partners by acting like horses or jockeys

## COACHING QUESTIONS:

- How can you make it easier for your partner to get into the saddle up position after they have dribbled?
- How do you hold your hockey stick while waiting for the coaches' call?



## EQUIPMENT:

- 1 hockey stick each
- 1 hockey ball per pair
- 8 cones

## SAFETY:

- Practice getting into the saddle up position prior to starting the game.
- Ensure the play zone is a flat surface.