



## Basic Structure for 6U Mite Practices

The 6U Mite group consists of players ranging in age from 4 to 6 years old. This assumes that the players have first followed USA Hockey recommendations and taken a basic learn to skate and learn to play program. These two foundational programs will provide the rudimentary skills needed for the 6U program. In the case of some smaller youth associations it may be necessary to group the 6U and the 8U players into practice sessions. This can still be done efficiently with proper planning and be very beneficial to all involved.

Skating is a primary skill for ice hockey and although players must continue to master skating technique throughout their career, there must be a special emphasis placed on the ABC elements of skating in the early years of development. Players at the Mite age have a harder time processing technical skills instruction and their bodies lack some of the fine motor control required. At this age large muscle groups and multiple joint movements should be incorporated into the practice sessions. Agility, balance and coordination (ABC's) on the ice surface are at the foundation of LTAD for 6U Mites.

Activity volume plays a significant role in development at the 6U age group. Little kids are doers so keep instruction short and activity high.

Practices have a preparatory phase followed by the main body of the practice. The main body of the practice session includes station work so that kids are developing their skills in an efficient manner. The recommended breakdown is with six stations so that there is enough variety to hold the interest of players at this age. Training should be structured so that a large part of the skill repetition is done in a games format. Players at all levels must be mentally engaged in order to best acquire new skills. When skills repetition lacks an emotional element, children at this age quickly become bored. If the skills repetition is hidden in the form of a game, children are capable of extended periods of focused effort. Play is the key to emotional engagement in the skills repetition.

Young kids are comfortable with repetition and like familiarity in the drills that they are asked to perform. Similar drills are rotated down the progression from practice to practice. This give each practice a slightly different look and feel without changing too much. For example each practice's warm-up is then used within the station setup in the following practice. Thus the players are familiar with the game, but the spatial requirements have changed.

The basic 6U Mite practice structure is for a 50 minute hour block of ice as this is common across the country (50 minutes of ice with the cost of a 10 minute ice cut included). If your local associating gets the full 60 minutes out of their hour block of ice the practice sessions are easily modified by adding one additional minute to each station and four minutes to the game activity at the conclusion of practice.