



CHECKING

CHECKING SKILLS

Checking is carried out to gain possession of the puck. The coach must recognize that, before checking skills can be taught or developed, it is important that the player must have mastered the basics of skating because skating is the base upon which checking skills are built. Elements of skating speed, agility, balance and strength are key skills required in the skill of checking.

Chapter Overview

- The importance of skating skills in the development of checking skills,
- The 4 checking skills of:
 - Positioning and Angling
 - Stick Checks
 - Body Contact
 - Body Checking
- Instruct or teach protection skills,
- Instruct your players in the rules pertaining to checking;
 - Checking from behind
 - Stick infractions

Skating Skills and their Relationship with Checking

The Skating Skills section of this Manual emphasized seven key skill areas:

- Basic stance, edges, starts, stops, striding, turning and pivots.

Each of these skating skills has a direct relationship with checking skills. The majority of mistakes made when checking an opponent come from incorrect body position on the skates, which is directly related to skating skill. Skating should be taught in a progressive fashion and once the basic skills are mastered then teaching the skills of checking can start.

For example, when a two-foot stop is completed, both legs must be in a position to initiate the drive into the new skating direction. If the legs are not in a proper flexed position, both time and power is lost. The drive should be initiated by the back leg, so that at no time are the legs crossed. If the legs are crossed over at the precise time of a check, the attacking player has only to move to the side to beat the checker. Fundamental body position errors and leg movement errors increase the problems in all other forms of checking skills.

Positioning and Angling

Positioning and angling can be considered as a player's first line of defence. Body and stick positions are important in checking without making contact. This section will explain how angling is a technique of checking without making contact.

The defender must position their body to take away movement and passing options of the puck carrier and angling is the skill of forcing the opponent to go in the direction you want. This is done by skating towards the opponent at an angle and positioning the body and stick correctly. During a game the opponent would normally be directed outside to towards the boards.

Key Points:

- *Remain between the puck carrier and the pass receiver, gradually reducing the puck carrier's space.*
- *Defender adjusts their skating speed to the opponent's speed.*
- *Skate parallel towards the opponent or in an arc but not in a straight line.*
- *Defenders body should be lined up to body position of the puck carrier thus not allowing the opponent to turn up ice to the inside of you.*
- *The stick is always on the ice in a stick to stick position taking away the puck carriers passing lane*

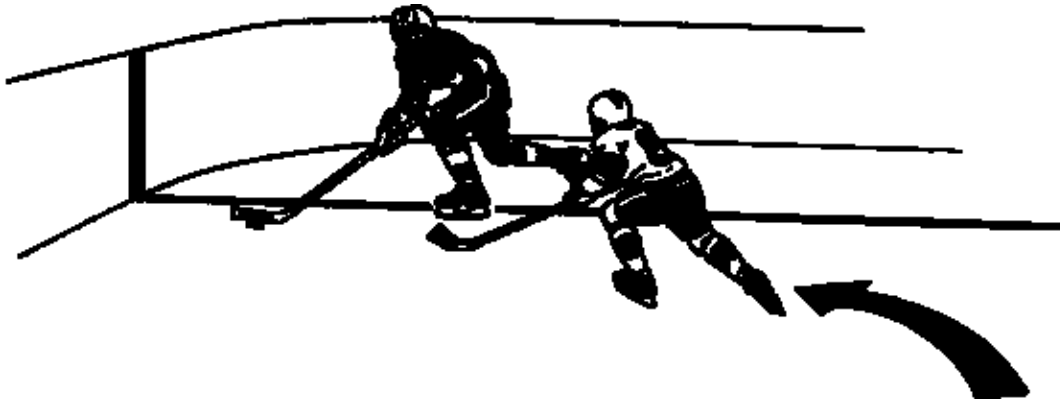


Figure 1: Position and Angling

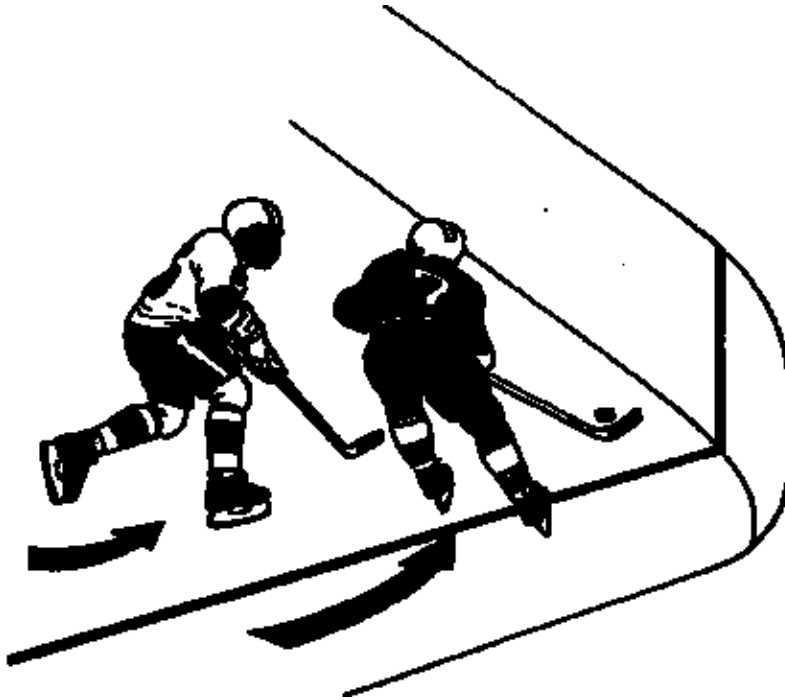


Figure 2: Position and Angling: Closing the Gap

Stick Checking

Stick checking is the second line of defence as angling forces the opposition to a position where contact can be made with the stick.

During the stick check, the player must maintain control of their stick as they attempt to control their opponent's stick.

Sticks checks can be effective to:

- delay the attack of the opposition,
- separating the puck carrier from the puck
- force a loss of puck control by the opposition, and turn-over

This section will examine six types of stick checks: stick lift, stick press, poke, sweep, hook, and stick tap

Stick Lift

The tick lift can be used anywhere on the ice. It is an excellent check often used when players are backchecking and attempting to regain possession of the puck.

Key Points:

- Approach the puck carrier from behind or at an angle from behind
- Lift the shaft of the opponent's stick near its heel enough to get the puck from under the stick
- Complete the move by putting the stick back onto the ice and taking the puck.



Figure 3: Stick Lift (From Behind)

Note:

If you are close enough to the puck carrier, you should position your body in front of the puck carrier. Surprise and strength are key requirements for this skill.

Stick Press

The stick press is used in the neutral and defensive zones. It requires strength and timing by the checker, who tries to immobilize the opponents stick momentarily. This can be used when trying to stop an opponent receiving a pass

Key Points:

- Player must be close to the opponent
- The stick is placed over the opponents stick shaft, below the opponents bottom stick hand.
- Downward pressure of the stick is timed to happen at the moment the opponent is about to receive the pass



Figure 4: Stick Press

Poke Check

The poke check is primarily used in a 1 on 1 situation. This check is effective in forcing the puck carrier to make a decision.

Key Points:

- *Player is in the Ready position (Figure 5)*
- *Primary vision is on the player: peripheral vision is on the puck.*
- *Stick is held with one hand with the elbow bent and close to the body.*
- *When the puck carrier has skated into the range of the check.*
- *Perform a quick extension outwards of the arm and stick to poke the puck. (Figure 6)*
- *Maintain balance throughout the check with legs always in a bent position*

Note:

This check is performed with just the arm. If the player lunges at the opponent, their legs will straighten, leaving them in a poor body position to recover if the poke check is missed.

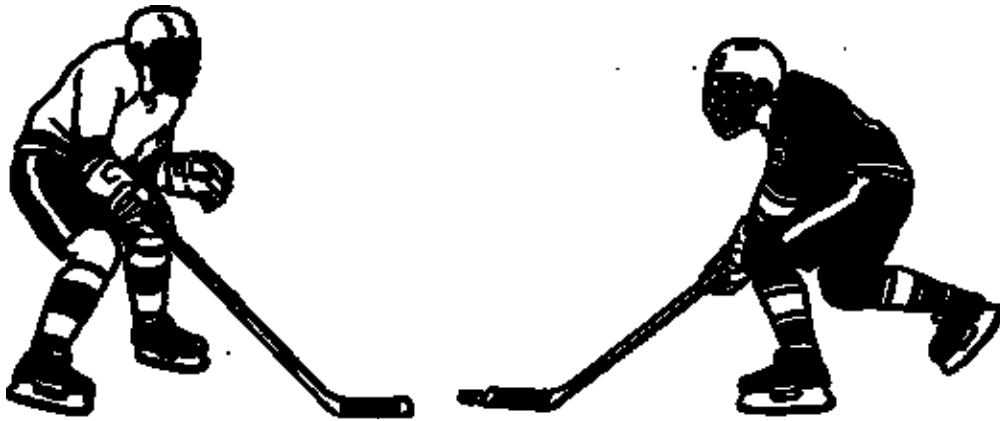


Figure 5: Poke Check



Figure 6: Sweep Check

Sweep Check

The sweep check is very similar to the poke check. It is executed from in front of the puck carrier. It can be executed from in the same position as the poke check. If the puck carrier is on the side away from the defender's stick, the defender sweeps the blade towards the puck, being careful not to over commit the body. If the sweep misses, the defender must remain in sound defensive body position.

Key Points:

- *Same position as the Poke check*
- *When the puck carrier has skated into the range of the check.*
- *Sweep the stick in a circular motion towards the puck*

Tap Check

The Tap check is used to hit the puck carriers stick to force them to lose control of the puck

Key Points:

- *Skate parallel to the puck carrier.*
- *Hit the stick shaft to make the puck carrier loose puck control. A hit to the forehand side of the puckcarriers stick will knock the stick blade away from the puck to the backhand side will cause them to hit the puck away*
- *To be effective, the tap must be quick and forcefully but ensure that this is not done in a slashing motion*



Figure 7: Tap Check

Body Contact

Defensive play begins the moment the opposing team has of the puck and checking is used to regain possession of the puck. In some levels of ice hockey Body Checking is not allowed, to let skills develop and for safety reasons, (for example Under 12 and women's hockey) but in all levels of hockey Body Contact happens and is permitted.

Body contact is the next stage used to separate the puck carrier from the puck, when a player positions their body between the puck and the puck carrier.

Body contact, must result only from the forward movement of the puck carrier into the defender.

Key teaching points for body contact:

Reinforce angling/positioning skills as well as further enhancing the required skating skills
Emphasize and further enhance the concept of controlling and the containing of your opponent
Stay in the Ready position

Body Block

This is an action where the defender is face-to face with the puck carrier and moves into their skating path. The goal is to delay or stop the puck carrier's forward progress.

Key Points:

- *Player watches the opponent's upper body, peripheral vision on the puck.*
- *Player moves in front of the puck carrier's direction of skating*
- *Defender has a solid base of support with the knees bent and the hands down (Figure 8 below).*
- *Puck carrier skates into the defender who extend the legs on contact*



Figure 8: Body Block

Rub Out

This type of body contact occurs when players are moving in the same direct (defender has angled the puck carrier) and the defenders movement is towards the puck.

Key Points:

- *Defender is parallel to the puck carrier with the knees bent and the hands down.*
- *As contact is made the defender pushes or rubs the puck carrier with enough force to the hip and shoulders to the boards (Figure 9).*
- *The rubbing will cause a turning or rolling around the point of impact forcing the opponent's chest to the boards.*
- *Defender can keep skating and take possession of the puck or pin the opponent on the boards*

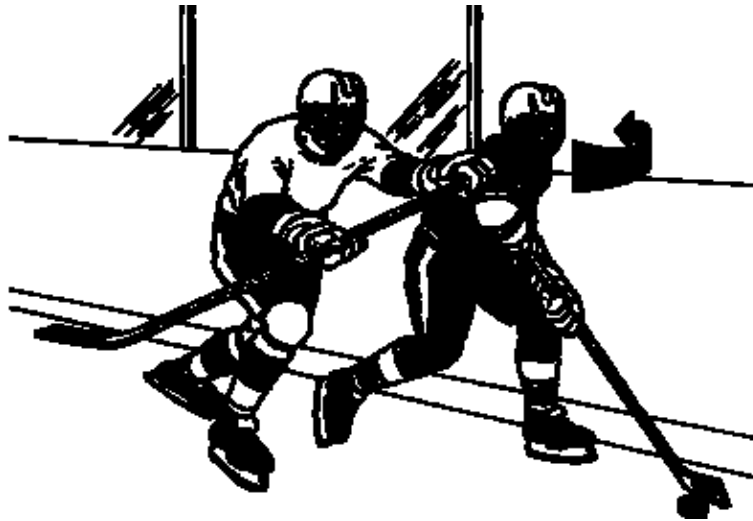


Figure 9: Rub Out

Body Checks

This section will examine five types of body checks: blocking or defending against the puck carrier, stick lift and shoulder check, block, hip, and roller.

A body check should be used when:

- you wish to separate the player from the puck,
- the opponent, in possession of the puck, tries to pass between you and the boards,
- An opponent is not fully prepared yet not in danger of injury.

General Principles of Body Checking:

- Once you have committed yourself to deliver a body check, complete it. Do not change your decision part way through the check.
- Keep your primary vision on the opponent at all times.
- Never attempt a body check if you are off-balance.
- Attempt to place the opponent off-balance while maintaining your balance.
- For better balance, assume a wide stance, bending the knees in order to ensure leg extension.
- Along the boards, you must neutralize the arms and stick of the opponent to avoid the possibility of a pass.
- During the body check, be sure to momentarily control the opponent by completing your body check
- To avoid penalties and injury, always keep your stick low.

Checks from the Front

These types of checks are where the defender is in a 1 on 1 situation with the puck carrier and moves into their skating path. The goal is to stop the puck carrier's forward progress.

Body Check

This check has the same principles as the Body Block the main difference is that the Defender moves into the puck carrier to hit and stop them.

Key Points:

- *Players vision is on the opponent with a solid base of support*
- *Defender moves in front of and steps forward into the puck carrier*
- *Attempt to hit the opponent's chest with the shoulder (Figure 10).*
- *Extend the legs when finishing the check.*
- *Precede the shoulder by placing the hands to the lower chest of the opponent to guard against a stick raise and to control the player.*



Figure 10: Body Check

Hip Check

The hip check is the most difficult of the body checks to execute, particularly in the mid-ice area and, therefore, should be handled with care in this zone (Figure 11: Hip Check).. An extension of the hip check can occur along the boards by the defending player pivoting at the last moment and making contact with the hips or buttocks rather than executing a shoulder check.

Key Points:

- *It is important to be close to the opponent as momentary eye contact is lost during the check.*
- *Bend the upper body parallel to the ice.*
- *Bend the knees and hit the opponent at the hips and thighs.*
- *On impact, the checker rights oneself by pushing with and extending the outside leg.*

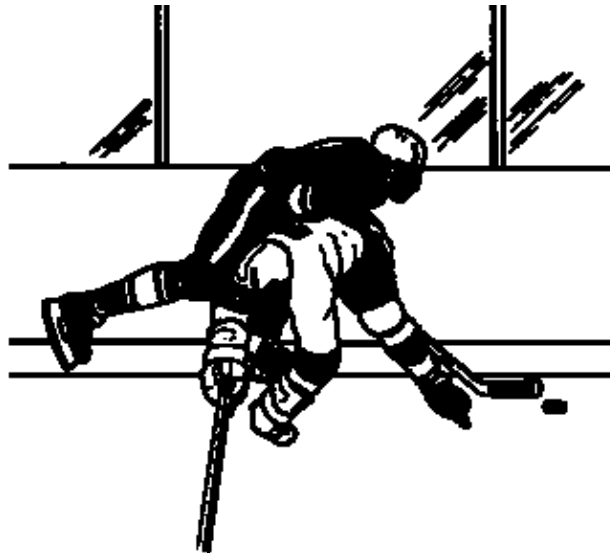


Figure 11: Hip Check

Checks from the Side

These types of checks happen when good angling and positioning has been established.

Shoulder Check

Key Points:

- *Place the inside knee, bent, in front of the opponent.*
- *Place your stick under the opponent's stick.*
- *Lift the stick.*
- *Hit the opponent into the boards, with the hip or shoulder (Figure 12).*
- *Momentarily pin the opponent's stick and arms on the boards.*
- *Recover the puck with your stick or skate.*

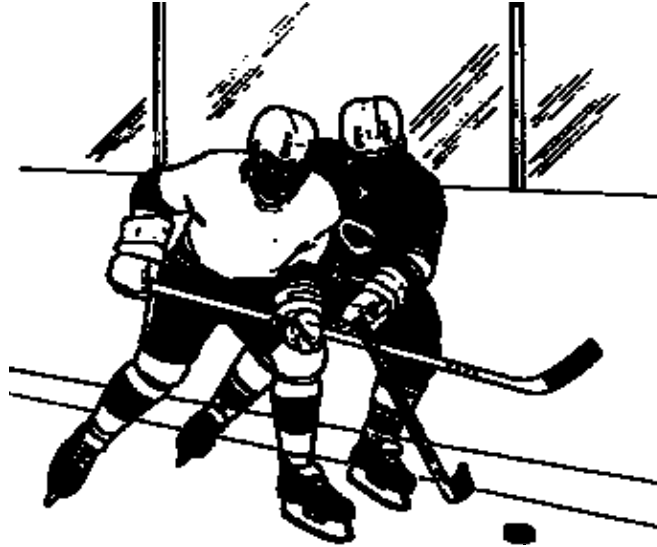


Figure 12: Shoulder Check

Block Check

Key Points:

- *Widen the grip on the stick.*
- *Bend the inside knee and place it in front of the attacker.*
- *Skate in front of the puck carrier and move across into them*
- *Use a shoulder check to block the puck carriers forward progress*
- *Momentarily pin the opponent's arms on the boards.*
- *Recover the puck with the skate.*

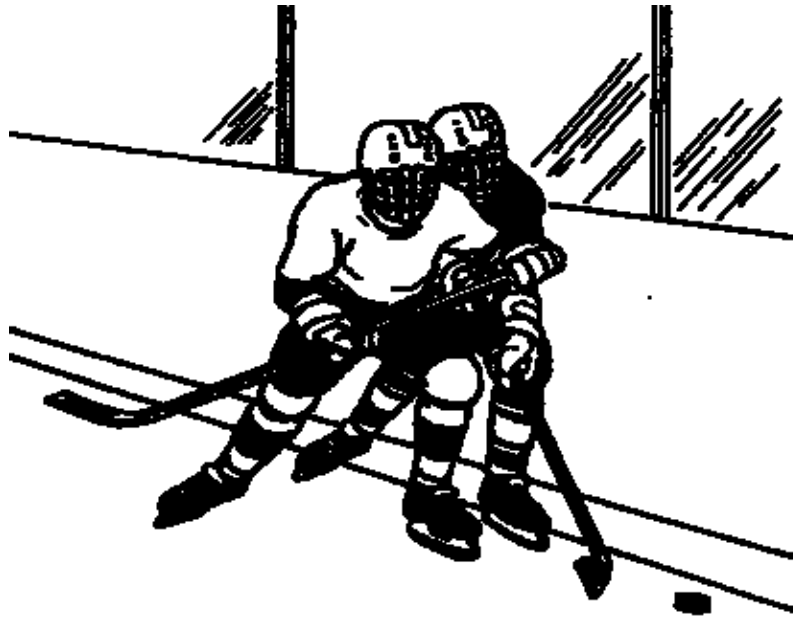


Figure 13: Block Check

Rule Enforcement and Emphasis

In 2006 the IIHF has increased its emphasis in the rules relating to restraint infractions (hooking, holding, interferenceetc) and dangerous play (check from behind and to the head)

Recommend Guidelines

Interference

- Any action where a player interferes or impedes the progress of an opponent who is not in possession of the puck. This rule applies to any interference action, such as:
 - knocking a stick out of an opponent's hands,
 - preventing a player who lost his stick to regain possession

Allowed

- A player is entitled to the ice he occupies, as long as he is able to maintain his own foot speed and body position between the opponent and puck or his teammate in possession of the puck. In front of the net players can compete for their position using their strength

Not allowed

- Stick in between the opponent's legs, preventing the movement of the opponent, especially in front of the net.
- Late hit on an opponent after releasing the puck

Holding

- Player having his arms around his opponent
- Both hands around the opponent
- Holding his opponent at the boards by his body or arm(s) and preventing him to move, and making no attempt to play the puck
- Grabbing the opponents body or sweater with one or both hands
- Using free hand to restrain an opponent

Hooking

- A player cannot use his stick against his opponent's body (puck carrier or non puck carrier) for the purpose:
 - To gain positional or distance advantage or to slow him down by:
 - Placing the blade or shaft of his stick in front of or on the side of the puck carrier's body and making no attempt to play the puck
 - Extending his stick on the opponent's body in front or aside to force the opponent to go around him skating backwards or skating forwards
 - Using the stick on the opponent's body from either beside or from behind to get an advantage while on a one-on-one dash for a loose puck by either player
- To restrain or impede the progress of the opposing player
- To reduce the opponent's ability to pass or shoot the puck by placing the stick ("Poking", "Tagging" or "Jabbing") on the hands or arms of the puck carrier
- To reduce his playing skills by hooking the hands of the opposing player
- Such actions shall be penalized as hooking

High Sticking

- Any contact with a high stick, accidental or not, shall be penalized.
- Any player, in the process of checking an opponent, who raises one's stick above the normal height of the shoulders and does not make contact with the stick, shall still be penalized.
- Any defending player raising one's stick above the normal height of the shoulders in a manner intimidating to an oncoming opposing player shall be penalized.
- Opposing players jostling for position anywhere on the ice surface who raise their sticks above the normal height of the shoulders shall be penalized.

Slashing

- Any deliberate slashing action (regardless of frequency or degree) to the body of an opponent shall be penalized.
- Any stick swung at an opponent who is out of reach shall result in a penalty.
- Any swinging action with the stick where it is obvious that the player is not playing the puck shall result in a penalty.
- Any chopping action on the shaft of an opponent's stick above the bottom hand shall result in a penalty.

Cross-Checking

- Any chopping action (sharp pushing action, sudden jarring, or jolting forward action) with the shaft of the stick held between the hands shall result in a penalty.

Checking from Behind

- Any movement by a player who runs, jumps, charges or hits in any manner an opponent from behind

Checking to the Head or Neck

- A check or blow, with any part of his body, to the head and neck area of an opposing player or an action which "drives" or "forces" the head of an opposing player into the protective glass or boards

Through this stricter application of the above rules, it is hoped that the safety and enjoyment aspects of the game will be promoted and that players may be allowed to develop and better exhibit individual and team play skills.

Recommendations:

Stricter enforcement of the obstruction penalties interference, holding and hooking

- Stricter enforcement of the dangerous penalties like high sticking, cross-checking, slashing, checking from behind and any checks to the head..
- National Associations strongly support the officials who officiate games according to the recommended application guidelines.
- All National Association officials and coaching clinics specifically address the enforcement of these rules.
- All National Associations make a conscious effort to implement and/or strengthen their present referee supervision programs, with emphasis on stick infractions.

Protection when being body checked

It is very important to have the ability to avoid or prepare oneself for a check. To avoid being checked:

- keep the head and eyes up, scanning the play,
- maintain movement or motion,
- don't reach back for a pass unless you are sure there is no opposition player in front of you.

To prepare to receive a check:

- maintain a wide stance by bending the knees and leaning in the direction from which the check is coming,
- initiate movement towards the checker just prior to impact and ensure low contact,
- when falling down or colliding with the boards, absorb the shock with the largest available portion of the body,
- avoid falling on extended body parts,

The Do's and Don'ts of being Checked

The following guidelines are to help players be safe when they are being checked.

No not get caught in the danger zone – Do stay close to the boards

A player standing still 2 to 4 feet from the boards is extremely vulnerable. If checked, from either the side or behind, the player could go head first into the boards. There would be not time to recover from the check before hitting the boards. IF the player is moving he/she will be better able to react to a check than if standing still. Encourage players to stay in tight to the boards for better support. A player can use the long bones of the body – legs, arms, hips and shoulders – to absorb the impact of the body check.

Know where opponents are

Skating into the corner to retrieve a loose puck the player should use a quick shoulder check to see where the other players are. "Head on a swivel" is often used to describe the players action. Knowing where the pressure is coming from helps to prepare for a potential body check. This quick check will also help sort out where teammates are, making it easier to make a quick outlet pass.

Use hands and arms as a cushion

When a player is checked, raised arms and hands so can help cushion the collision with the boards. It can also assist in protecting the head and allow the player to push off the boards after the check, springing out and back into action.

Keep the head up

This rule applies throughout the games but especially when being checked. Going to the boards with the head down, will increase the odds of a serious neck injury. Players should be instructed not to duck, scrunch their head down into your shoulders or stick out your chin before impact. These are dangerous positions **KEEP THE HEAD UP.**

Turn the body so the shoulders hit first

Players should be instructed that if they are hurtling head first into the boards, their first move should be to get their arms up and try to turn their body so that the shoulders will hit the boards instead of the head.

ALWAYS REMEMBER:

Everyone should try to play safely – including players who are giving checks as well as taking them.

Checking is carried out to gain possession of the puck - NOT to take out the opposition from the game.

The keywords are: **FAIR PLAY AND RESPECT!**