

Hockey Canada

High Performance 1  
Team Building:  
Reference Material

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# Stages of Group Development

Groups develop through a series of predictable stages.

The table below identifies the stages of group development using the standard terms; it also provides suggestions for leadership action in each stage.

| Stage | Description | Guidelines for Intervention |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Forming | * In the beginning…a new team, a new season, new athletes join the team… * Athletes/teams need direction, structure, and guidelines * Athletes want to feel part of the team * The focus is more on task than on process * You want the team to develop ***trust*** in you and other members of the group | **In general**   * Make direct interventions to the whole group * Choose actions that provide information and clear direction * Establish structure, e.g., practice schedule, expectations of athletes, ways to contact you * Share your coaching philosophy |
| Storming | * The tug of war begins… sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle * The group struggles for control with the leader about what is done (task) and how it’s done (process) * It is normal for group members to challenge the leader; it’s important to pay attention, because the challenges can be very quiet * You want the group to develop the **openness** required to share **responsibility** for team success | **Ingeneral**   * Give the group opportunities to share in decision-making about team norms, values, goals, and other areas where you want shared leadership * Provide clear information about which decisions you will make and explain why — reinforce with the whole team * Provide safe (low-intensity) opportunities for team members to provide feedback or ask questions |
| Norming | * The group is getting comfortable with team norms as it trains and competes, and it is developing additional norms that will give the group its character * A group starts to accept responsibility for its own well-being and success * Too much structure will inhibit the development of a sense of **independence** and athletes stay coach-dependent and abdicate responsibility for their success | **In general**   * Take action promptly when norms are being ignored or followed * Provide feedback to individuals, small groups, or the whole team when they act consistently with team norms/values, as well as when their behaviour is inconsistent with those norms/values * Intervene with athletes, small groups, or the whole group whenever they abdicate their responsibility for performance (medium-level emotional impact) |
| Performing | * You and the athletes are working in tandem toward the team’s goals * When problems arise, the athletes know how to solve them * Athletes accept responsibility for what they need to do to perform successfully and do not depend on you to tell them everything they need to do * There is a strong sense of team spirit | **In general**   * There is a low need for interventions focused on group development * Ask athletes (all together, individually, small group) for feedback on what they need to support achieving their goals * Choose actions that reinforce athletes working successfully together * Act immediately and directly if the cohesion of the team is at risk |
| Adjourning | * In the end… after the season, when players graduate, the end of the games… when an athlete is cut — it is essential to create a process for closure that is respectful of the athletes involved * Team members will choose how to stay in touch | **In general**   * Choose actions that draw attention to success and individual contributions (medium emotional impact) * Provide feedback or opportunities for feedback to individuals that recognize how they have changed (medium to high intensity) |

When you support a group’s development, you need to pay attention to both the group’s goals (task) and the group’s cohesion (process). These require different amounts of attention at different stages.

The ease with which your athletes develop into a cohesive team or group depends on your skill in intervening. If you make timely and appropriate interventions, the passage will be much smoother. Sometimes teams move quickly to the performing stage; at other times, they stay stuck in forming or norming; and sometimes they move backward. The following factors will affect the rate at which a group develops:

* The number of athletes on the team — in general, the greater the number, the longer it takes
* The purpose of the team, e.g., games performance or skill acquisition
* The length of time the group will be together, e.g. assembled for specific competition versus ongoing club
* The stability of the team’s membership
* Team members’ interpersonal skills
* Athletes’ age

Your intervention skills

# Interventions with Groups and Individuals

* *Intervention* comes from two Latin words: inter (between) and venire (to come), which suggests that *to* intervene means *to come between*. Intervention is about coming between in an overt manner, acting in a transparent way to facilitate the group’s development.
* Interventions are any actions you openly take as a leader to facilitate a group or team to work well together (process).
* Interventions are any actions you take to help an individual athlete or a group of athletes learn skills, tactics, or strategies.
* Interventions are deliberate actions on your part to help a group achieve its goals. In essence, interventions are choices you make that enable others.
* Interventions foster collaboration and teamwork by building trust and facilitating relationships; they also strengthen others by increasing their self-determination and motivation.
* Intervening should be done with the intention of acting in athletes’ best interests.
* Interventions are **NOT** actions you take to try to manipulate the group or team to do what you want.

Interventions are **NOT** tricks to get the team or athletes to do what you want, i.e., to act in your best interests. That’s manipulation. The Latin roots of *manipulate* are *mano* (hand) and *pulare* (to go behind). This explains why manipulation is about acting while hiding your intentions.

## To Intervene Effectively…

* You need to be able to stand slightly back from the situation.
* You need to recognize when it’s necessary to act.
* You need to choose an action thoughtfully and keep it consistent with your values.

The intervention needs to be appropriate to the situation and your coaching context.

# Factors to Consider in Choosing an Intervention

## What’s at Stake

You need to intervene when the goals, values, or guiding principles of the team are at risk. The intervention chosen depends on the degree of risk present. You need to pay attention to the surface issue — what’s immediately evident — as well as to issues that may be hiding under the surface.

As a general rule, as the risk to what’s important to the team increases, you should choose interventions that are directed at the specific individuals involved, use interventions that are medium to high level in their emotional impact, and focus on group process.

## Size of the Group

A large group presents unique challenges. In a large team that is together on an ongoing basis, subgroups or cliques often emerge and start to develop separate or additional norms that create a group within a group. You need to decide whether or not to intervene. If the clique compromises the team’s ability to succeed or develops norms that are inconsistent with the larger team, you need to intervene. If the subgroup emerges as leaders who reinforce the values of the team and support other team members, you may intervene, but to reinforce their contribution.

Small teams also create unique challenges. Think of the four members of a curling team or the four in rowing or canoeing. It is easy to overlook the importance of applying group development principles to small teams, because the strength of personalities makes it seem more like a task of managing four individuals. With smaller teams, the importance of having a strong structure and clear norms to provide a framework within which strong personalities can function in unison increases.

## Who’s Involved

Consider the following when deciding what intervention would be appropriate:

* How old are the athletes? Younger athletes require more structure and direction and need more time to learn the skills needed to function as members of a team. Younger team members may not be ready to accept the same level of responsibility for the team’s success.
* The fewer the interpersonal skills of the athletes involved, the more structured your intervention needs to be and the less intense it should be.
* Are the athletes rookies or veterans?
* What is the athlete’s role in the team — leader or follower?

Your relationship with the person(s) involved: Is there a strong foundation of trust that’s evolved over time, or is it a tentative relationship? Do you have an easy or a difficult history with this person/these persons?

## Your Experience

In general, the less experience you have, the more you should:

* Rely on interventions that provide information or change the structure of the group
* Deal with the group as a whole
* Choose intervention options with low emotional impact
* Ask questions of the group only when you are prepared for the challenge that may be contained in the answers

Take time to plan what you need to do rather than intervene spontaneously

# Choose the Way You Intervene

There are three types of interventions you can use:

Provide Information

* Examples include reminding your athletes of the goals of the competition, putting a diagram of the drill on a whiteboard, explaining the reasons for changing team members between finals and qualifying, giving feedback while an athlete is executing a new skill, etc.

2 Adapt the Current Activity

* Examples include taking a small group and working with it on a specific skill or aspect of strategy, having players work individually on skills, ending practice early, having players lead the warm-up, etc.

3 Facilitate the Group’s Development

Examples include giving feedback about how you see the team treating a new team member, delivering a clear message, holding a team meeting, asking for feedback at mid-season, etc.

### Choose Who to Intervene With

You can intervene with an individual, with a smaller part of the team, or with the whole team.

### Consider the Emotional Impact of Your Intervention

The last characteristic of an intervention you need to consider is how strongly an action will be felt by those with whom you intervene. Think about whether the emotional impact on the person will be low level, medium level, or high level. As an example, think about how it would feel if you told a rookie in front of the whole team that she was in the wrong position on the three play patterns the team just ran and asked her why that was happening. Compare this with taking her aside, giving her the same feedback, and asking the same question. As another example, consider the difference in emotional response between challenging the whole team to tell you what they said in their feedback forms, which were used in your evaluation, and asking athletes to identify on a written checklist one thing they would like you to change in the way you are coaching them.

## A Note on Intervening in Skill Instruction and Strategy

The skill of intervention is not limited to facilitating group or team cohesion. Interventions are also used when you teach or correct skills or strategy. These interventions are part of helping a group perform its ‘task’.

However, interventions that focus on facilitating the acquisition and performance of skills and strategies are more likely to involve providing information or adapting the current activity. When choosing your intervention, you still need to consider who you direct your intervention to and what the intended emotional impact is.

| Type of Intervention | Options for Intervention |
| --- | --- |
| **Provide Information** | * Repeat instructions * Demonstrate or repeat a previous demonstration |
| **Adapt the Current Activity** | * Explain how to do it right (verbal or reference point) * Have the athlete start again * Use different equipment or practice areas * Reduce the difficulty level or give more time |
| **Facilitate Group Development** | * Reassure, encourage * Question the athlete |

## Some Final Words on Interventions

* You can plan an intervention, or you can intervene spontaneously; the latter is more difficult.
* Choosing **not** to intervene is still an intervention. Sometimes this is the most appropriate choice.
* Silence is an intervention.
* You’ll know if your intervention didn’t work — it typically creates uncomfortable silence in the moment and persistent murmuring after the fact. In either case, you will need to choose another intervention.

While a simple situation may require a single intervention, more complicated situations require a series of interventions, sometimes several with the same person(s) or one intervention in the same time period with different persons. While you can sometimes plan these interventions in advance, you often need to observe the results of your first intervention and then choose your next, based on what happens.

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