

# The Hockey Edge Newsletter

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Special Column on  
ADHD and Hockey

## Mental Toughness Column Team Leaders, You Can Develop Team Chemistry! By Larry Lauer, Ph D

*"...a tough mental attitude is needed  
to be a top hockey player."  
Pavel Bure*

*Note to readers: This column will provide  
information and resources on hockey  
psychology and mental toughness.  
Strategies will be offered to help you  
develop into a mentally tough hockey  
player.*

The role of the team captain is a special one. You have the respect of your peers. Or so you thought! Often captains are frustrated with teammates that are not motivated, don't listen to the captains, are negative, or are not bought into the system.

But, you are only a player. It is the coaching staff's job to motivate your teammates. Well, it is, but you can play a major role in developing team chemistry. You are the captain. You are a team leader. You are often in the best position to make a positive change to the team's chemistry—how well you work together.

How can you get your team to work together? To trust each other? Be on the same page and communicate on and off the ice?

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The team captain can build team chemistry by doing some basic things such as planning team functions, monitoring and reinforcing positive communication, and making teammates accountable to the team's goals.

**Read this month's Special Column  
ADHD and Hockey: What You Need to Know  
By Dr. Gary Sater  
(page 2)**

# Special Column: ADHD and Hockey: What You Need to Know

## Gary Sater, Ph D



Dr. Gary Sater of Madison, Wisconsin reveals how ADHD affects how young people act and perform in hockey and recommends how to help a child with ADHD enjoy the game and to improve their skills.

To players, parents and coaches, ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) can be confusing. At first glance, it seems that ADHD (or as many refer to it, ADD) goes away when athletes who are diagnosed with such play fast-paced, multi-sensory (sound, sight, movement, touch, etc.) and highly engaging games like action-packed video games or hockey. At other times it is a clear detriment to learning and performance when the athlete is distracted during the coach's talk to the team, a teacher's lecture or he/she reacts impulsively and takes a poorly timed penalty during the game. Why is this sometimes true? How can such a brain/body condition as ADHD hold someone back in some activities and be an advantage to some in other activities (like hockey)?

ADHD is a unique neurobiochemical condition resulting from poor performance of transmitter systems of the brain. Researchers have discovered that the neurotransmitter, dopamine, is primarily involved, but there may be others affected, as well. When dopamine is not functioning properly to transmit signals within the brain, we experience problems with attention, distractibility, over-activity and impulsivity. It is also known that ADHD has a genetic link, thus it "runs" in families. Basically, it seems that if dopamine (and possibly other transmitters) is working well, we are able to stay alert and fo-

cused, even under relatively low stimulation conditions (like listening to a coach talk for a long time or patiently and alertly waiting for our turn to run a drill during practice). If not, we get bored quickly, maybe even feel tired, daydream and/or seek stimulation by doing something more active and engaging such as being "off task", annoying others or impulsively make a mistake. This can get us into trouble with coaches, teachers and teammates or classmates, without meaning to. Much of the time we do this to simply stay engaged and fight off boredom. If the activity, on the other hand, is highly engaging, stimulating and interactive (like hockey!), the athlete with ADHD might very well excel. This is often the case even without medication to enhance the alertness as the activity itself provides the stimulation to remain alert.

Some of us experience only the inattention and distractibility part (unable to stay alert during "boring" activities), others mostly the hyperactive and impulsive part (trouble controlling our energy and thinking before we act) while some of us experience both. These are all different types of ADHD. ADHD is also a condition that doesn't suddenly appear later in your childhood or teen years, as proper diagnosis must include signs and symptoms before age 7 and that have significantly interfered with our performance for at least 6 months. Also, proper assessment and diagnosis includes a careful developmental history, interviews, rating scales, observations and sometimes other psychological testing. Likewise, it is common for a person to be having trouble performing in school work and not at the rink, with hockey. As you might have already figured out above, if the activity is stimulating enough (e.g. playing hockey!), alertness and focus might not be a problem.

We also know that if someone is personally interested or driven enough, they can keep their heads/brains alert and "in the game". Some of us who experience ADHD know that when we "have to do" something with urgency, we can. It's as if we can "jump start" our brains when something absolutely has to be done. This, however, can be a haphazard and not very rewarding way to live our lives and perform at important tasks. Some ath-

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## Developing Team Chemistry (cont.)

Captains and team leaders should not sit back and allow teams to fall apart. You must take an active role in helping your team reach it's goals. First, it is important to understand how teams develop...

An old theory about how team's grow comes from Bruce Tuckman (1965). He said that teams go through four stages:

### Four Stages of Team Development

1. Forming
2. Storming
3. Norming
4. Performing

In the first stage of **forming** teams are just coming together in the preseason. Players are comparing themselves with teammates specifically looking at strengths and weaknesses of those players in their position. They are also becoming familiar with one another as people and go from the point of being uncomfortable around teammates to becoming acquainted. This stage is often characterized by excitement and a willingness of teammates to work together.

As a team leader you can help your team form in several ways. First, talk with your teammates about your role and what can be expected from you. Support your coaches' team expectations for conduct and effort in the weight room or on the ice. Second, get to know all of your teammates, not just the guys you know from last season! Create open lines of communication so players can get to know each other and hopefully develop an appreciation for what each person brings to the team.

An excellent way to help the team form is to do a team function. Going to movies and having team dinners are good for bringing teams together. This is often planned by the coaching staff or by team managers or parents, but you can take an active role by emphasizing why this is important to do and suggest the types of activities that could occur. For instance, a fun exercise at a team gathering to help teammates remember names is important for initial team formation.

### Pass the Puck

Purpose: Learn each other's names.  
Begin by having the team place chairs in a circle. Make the circle wide enough so you can pass the puck to one another. You will need one puck and sticks. The team leader is the first to go. He takes the puck, picks someone to pass it to with his stick and says "Joe (the name of the person) here you go!" and passes the puck to Joe. Joe receives the puck and says "Thanks Larry. Ben, here you go!" Ben then continues the exercise by passing to someone new.

No player should touch the puck twice before everyone has had the puck.

Note: Players should look each other in the eye while talking and talk respectfully.

Once the leader receives the puck from the last player to touch the puck he announces that this time you will do it again in the same order and you will time how fast you can do it.

It is also important to begin to build trust amongst teammates in the forming stage. This can be achieved by doing fun activities such as team obstacle courses.

### Obstacle Course

Purpose: To build trust through listening to teammates. (Make sure you have a coach supervising this activity!)

Set up an obstacle course on or off ice using gloves or cones. Find an open space with no dangerous obstacles.

Put teammates in pairs by assigning someone that they don't know well.

The Roles: One player is blindfolded and must go through the obstacle course without falling or running into an obstacle. The other player communicates to the blindfolded player where to go.

The first team to get through the obstacle course wins. At the end: Talk about how the blindfolded player had to trust his teammates' directions and really listen to him. Trust is critical on the ice as well. You must do your job and trust that your teammate will do his. At the same time the communicator must take their role seriously and not let their blindfolded teammate down. The same can be said during a game. You have to be accountable to each other.

Once the team has formed you move into the **storming** stage where roles have been defined and players are not always accepting those roles. In addition, team members may not buy into the leadership, are forming cliques with buddies, and not getting along with each other. This of course kills team chemistry and performance. To minimize the amount of storming your team experiences it is good to have a team motto that is connected to the team's goals. Mottos such as "all for one, and one for all" capture the importance of working together towards a team goal.

In this storming stage it is vital that leaders openly communicate with teammates and help them remember what is most important—the team. Concerns with team members should be handled respectfully and openly versus talking behind

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## Hockey and ADHD (cont.)

letes with ADHD may appear inconsistent, even unmotivated at times, when they are struggling to gain and maintain attention and focus. We also might struggle in school and not be able to practice or play.

Treatment for ADHD, once properly diagnosed, usually includes medication with psycho-stimulants (e.g. Adderall and Ritalin), psychological skills training in attention and self-control, parent training and collaboration with teachers and hopefully, coaches, when appropriate. If ADHD goes untreated, low self-esteem, confidence, social and academic success and possibly athletic and other extracurricular activities can be affected. An example of this would be a hockey player with untreated ADHD getting in trouble with the coach for not paying attention during a talk or making impulsive and bad decisions during challenging moments on the ice.

It is important to note that ADHD is not an “on-off” switch, but rather a “dimmer” switch. That is, some of us have just a little bit of it and can manage it well without much, if any, treatment, while others of us clearly need medication for parts of or most of the activities of the day, as well as psychological skills training and parent/family support. Although most of us gain in self-knowledge and self-control skills as we get older and have more experiences to learn from, ADHD doesn’t “go away” and we don’t “outgrow” it. It is thought to be a life-long condition, although many of gain skills in self-understanding and self-control as we grow older.

In my experience with athletes of all ages, most seem to not benefit much from medication while participating in sports. This seems to be the case because sports, especially like hockey, are very stimulating and engaging activities. However, because ADHD also affects the part of the brain responsible for “executive functioning”, activities like self-monitoring, organizing and managing multiple stimuli at one time, some hockey players report that they are better able to “see the whole sheet of ice”, prevent themselves from reacting poorly in a tough spot (like retaliating and taking a foolish penalty) and can “make better decisions in the moment” when there is a lot going on during the game (like deciding on a pass up-ice in traffic). Some hockey players have reported problems with focus during non-ice time, such as concentration during coaches’ talks and other instructional activities. Some

players, who are particularly impulsive or hyperactive, can also become annoying to teammates during meetings, locker room time or travel time. Unfortunately, coaches and teammates sometimes think these athletes just have bad attitudes, aren’t motivated enough or are trouble makers. Not getting properly diagnosed or treated can have many negative consequences and can hold back or otherwise interfere with an athlete’s success and participation in their sport. As well, school performance is the single most frequent concern. Thus, as you know, if you don’t take care of “off the ice” life, there may not be life on the ice, at least as you might like it to be! If you need your meds to be successful in school and other less stimulating activities, take them consistently and appropriately.

Often I will hear, “he/she can’t have ADHD because they can play video games or hockey for hours and never appear to have any trouble with focus and distractibility”. Recall what was explained earlier. If an activity is sufficiently exciting, active and engaging, an ADHD individual may perform extremely well at it and, in fact, prefer to stay engaged in that activity because they love that feeling of being fully engaged and even “in the zone”. Compared to that distracted, bored and tired feeling they get when trying to read their text books, write that paper or do other homework, this is a feeling they don’t want to give up! So, if hockey is going well, but school may be a struggle, even with spending sufficient effort and time, due to distractibility, inattention and /or impulsive and overactive behaviors, you might talk to your parents, coach, medical doctor or psychologist about it.

Lastly, as you may already know, psycho-stimulant medications are controlled substances and are otherwise banned substances by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). This is so because they are considered performance enhancing and an unfair advantage for athletes, not properly diagnosed for ADHD and medically treated for such. I have written several letters to the NCAA, along with the sports medicine physicians I collaborate with, to explain and document when an athlete may test positive for stimulants but is legitimately being treated for ADHD. In these cases it would be unfair to not allow them to medically treated for a condition that puts them at risk of not being able to perform at a level they are capable of, especially,

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## Hockey and ADHD (cont.)

and most often, in the classroom and not in their athletic lives. Unfortunately, stimulants are often abused substances and under no conditions should you share or sell your prescription meds at any time. Nor should you experiment with these substances, even if you are prescribed them by a medical doctor. Serious legal consequences could result, possibly at a felony level, as well as unwanted medical effects. These can be very safe and beneficial meds, but only when properly prescribed and used.

I hope this has provided the reader with more information about this much talked about medical condition and the intersection of ADHD with hockey (and all sports for that matter). I have found this to be a very interesting and challenging area in my clinical and sport performance work as a psychologist and consultant to hockey players and coaches. For more information about ADHD, in general, I suggest you access the CHADD (Children and Adults with ADHD) website. It is a storehouse of up-to-date and excellent information.

### Smart Tips for Athletes:

If you are concerned about having problems with self-control, attention or distractibility, discuss it with your parents.

If you are being treated for ADHD with medication, discuss with your parents and doctors when and where your meds might be helpful to your performance and success in all settings.

If you are using meds for ADHD, discuss any and all concerns you might have about them with your doctor and under no circumstances share or sell them to others.

Make sure your coach knows if you are struggling with focus, attention or self-control and you have ADHD. Remember, however, ADHD is not an excuse.

ADHD is a treatable medical disorder. Medications are often helpful, but your effort and attitude are even more important. Making the mental effort to stay focused, to stay on task and organize your thoughts before acting will contribute to your performance and success.

### Smart Tips for Parents:

If your child has displayed difficulty with attention, distractibility, focus control, organization, short-term memory and/or frequent over-activity and impulsivity since childhood, you might consider discussing such with your medical doctor or a psychologist.

If your child has been diagnosed with and treated for ADHD, consider discussing it with their coaches so misunderstandings or mistaken judgments do not interfere with their performance and relationships with coaches and teammates.

### Smart Tips for Coaches:

Obtain medical information about players from their parents prior to the start of the season, including such disorders as ADHD, so you can be fully informed about their needs.

Discuss concerns you might have about behavior problems with the athletes and their parents as needed.

Keep practices moving, kids working and avoid long lines and long lectures.

Don't assume a player is a "goof off" or isn't "serious" about the game if they are struggling with self-control. Also, don't assume they need meds if they display some challenging behaviors.

### About the Author

Gary Sater, Ph.D. is a Psychologist for Mental Health Solutions/Solutions for Performance in Madison, Wisconsin. He grew up in Minneapolis./St. Paul area and received his undergraduate degree in Psychology from Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota (1972). He also played baseball at Gustavus Adolphus before going to on to receive a Masters (1975) and Ph.D. (1987) in Ed. Psych. at UW-Madison. Dr. Sater was initially a school psychologist (K-12) in the Madison area for several years before going back for the doctorate. Now he is a Licensed Psychologist in private practice (19 years) and a partner at Mental Health Solutions. Dr. Sater is the sole proprietor of Solutions for Performance, LLC and has worked with athletes for 18 years (youth through adult ages).

## Developing Team Chemistry (cont.)

each other's backs. One way to get issues out in the open and to move on is Can It!

### Can It!

Purpose: Determine issues within the team and then move on with a solution.

Find a "ceremonial" garbage can and bring sheets of paper and pencils.

Sit in a circle. Ask team members to write down any issues that they might have.

Next, the team leader emphasizes several rules:

1. No name-calling or disrespecting teammates.
2. No interrupting a teammate.
3. The goal is to find a solution not to place blame.

Then, have team members talk about their concerns.

The team should discuss how they will solve this issue in a respectful way. These solutions should be written on a board.

At the end: Once all issues have been discussed and solutions developed, team members ceremonially dump their list of issues into the garbage can. This is a sign to let them go and move on. Now it is time to focus on the solutions. Post the solutions list in the locker room as a reminder.

Often in the storming stage teammates are not feeling appreciated for their role, especially if they are on a fourth-line and don't get much ice time. It is important to show how every team member is critical and contributes to the team's goals. The following exercise can help.

### Strength Circle

Purpose: To recognize what all team members contribute to the team's success.

Again, place your team in a circle.

Next, follow the same directions as "Pass the Puck" but instead of just saying the name of the person you pass the puck to you say something that person does that contributes to the team's success. Examples are that they work hard, are funny and keep it light in a stressful situation, or are a good listener. The leader should start the exercise.

Once you have completed one round, go through a second round but do not follow the same passing order.

At the end: Talk about how each person is important to the team and contributes. These are the things we need to remember not the negative stuff!

The third stage of *norming* is a time where teammates accept their roles and are getting along with each other. Issues that were happening in the storming phase are solved and team members are more interested in the team goal than their own personal goals. The team is working together.

While things are going well in the norming stage it is important to continue to keep the team close by showing the importance of teamwork.

### Human Knot

Purpose: Show the importance of teamwork.

Team members stand in a circle and put their right hand into the middle. They then clasp hands with one other person across the circle.

Then, everyone puts their left hand into the middle of the circle and clasps the hands of a DIFFERENT teammate. This forms a knot.

The goal is for the team to untangle the knot without releasing anyone's hand.

At the End: Talk about how the team can do what seems very difficult if you work together. You can also talk about how the team and its performance is interconnected.

The fourth stage of team development is *performing*. In this stage teammates are completely focused on the team's goals and work together to solve issues. Relationships between team members are very solid and roles are clearly defined and accepted. This is the ultimate goal of any team!

Hopefully, you have found a few ideas in this column to help you to enhance the team chemistry on your team. For more information on team exercises see the box below. Best of luck in bringing your team out of the storm and into great performances!

Pecos River Resources [http://www.pecosriver.com/resources\\_3.html](http://www.pecosriver.com/resources_3.html)

Dale, G., & Conant, S. (2004). 101 Teambuilding Activities: Ideas Every Coach Can Use to Enhance Teamwork, Communication and Trust.

### HOCKEY QUOTE

"We can't play stupid hockey, dumb hockey, greedy hockey, selfish hockey. We have to put the team ahead of our personal feelings."

- Terry Crisp, the ex-coach of the Tampa Bay Lightning.