



Body Checking Objectives

First and foremost, it is our duty to educate players on the personal responsibility each individual has towards their own safety as well as the safety of other players on the ice. Teaching players how to both give and receive a body check in a manner in which both players are safe is the primary objective.

The purpose of body checking is to separate your opponent from the puck, thus allowing your team to gain control of the puck; the process of transitioning from defense to offense or maintaining offensive possession of the puck.

The most important thing to keep in mind when delivering or receiving a body check is to make sure you bend your knees and lower your center of gravity. The muscles in the legs are strong and complex and bent knees maximize this power by generating more force. Another important reminder is to keep your shoulders back and your head up. You always want to have your head up on the ice to avoid collisions and make smart plays.

Receiving a Check

Being comfortable and confident while playing hockey allows a player to function at the top of their game. It is important that we educate individuals how to properly receive a check so they are safe and comfortable on the ice. This allows them to focus primarily on playing the game and less on being fearful of a body check. Being fearful can lead to players turning or backing out of checks; putting them in vulnerable positions that can lead to injury and a less than favorable opinion of body checking and hockey in general.

Ideally, we would like to protect the player's head from any contact at all. This being said, it is not the reality of the sport. Modern advances in helmets and mouth guards have made it so that light to moderate contact to the head is no longer a threat to the health of a hockey player. When receiving or absorbing a body check it is still our primary objective to make sure that the head and neck area receives as little impact as possible.

When absorbing contact, the player would like to do so through their center of gravity: their hips. If the player can make their hips the initial point of contact, it will divert impact from the upper body. Ideally the secondary point of impact would be the chest/shoulder area leaving the neck and head with minimal points of impact.

If the player is near the boards, they should get as close to the boards as possible allowing the impact to move from the outside hip to the hip against the boards and back into the opposing player. The shoulder may also absorb impact as a secondary source, once again leaving the head and neck to absorb minimal impact.

When receiving an **open-ice** body check, the player should try to turn their body into the opposing player, using their hip and shoulder to absorb contact in the center of the opposing player's body. If the player receiving the check is unable to turn their body, they should stay low and shoulder-on-shoulder contact should be the primary contact point. When receiving an open ice body check you should always try to move through the other player's body, giving you the best chance of staying on your feet and not ending up beneath an opponent while falling in a backwards fashion. It is much better to fall forwards on your hands and elbows than it is to fall on your back as well as the back of your head.

Executing a Body Check (Four Steps)

The First Step – Angling

Angle the offensive player slowly and take away their ice until they have nowhere to go. This is done by skating slightly in front of the offensive player, ensuring that the player does not cut back to the middle of the ice. The player uses both their stick and body to guide their opponent into an area which they can execute a body check. Keeping balance, a strong center of gravity, and remembering to keep your body between the player and the net are essential keys to effective angling. Angling is probably the most effective method of body contact and, if done properly, it eliminates the person and the puck.

Angle your opponent: During a one-on-one situation near the boards, your angle of attack is critical. As you angle toward your opponent (decrease the space between you and the player), they should feel as if space is decreasing at a rapid pace and they have no possibility of escape. Imagine placing pylons on the ice that directs your opponent into your trap. Create a path that forces your opponent to the space in which you intend to execute the body check.

Avoid approaching and making contact head-on. You will take yourself out of the play and possibly out of the game due to an injury. "Locking onto your opponent" and telegraphing your exact course of travel will give your opponent several options to skate past you.

The Second Step – Stick Checking

Stick checking is the next step in the body checking progression. It is a very useful skill if you can use your stick effectively to force turnovers in a game. Some other things that make a stick check very useful are the ability to control another player's stick and delay their progression. There are numerous different types of stick checking including: poke check, sweep check, and lift check. All would be used in different situations all over the ice.

The Third Step – Body Contact and Contact Confidence

It is now time to hit. Start slowly and get low by bending at the knees. The goal is to separate your opponent from the puck and gain possession of the puck while leaving the check with body position on your opponent so they are unable to regain possession of the puck. While checking against the boards it is ideal to lead with your hip ahead of the opponent, so you make contact with the front of their hip. This will prevent your opponent from moving forwards and stop them in place. The follow through of your shoulder should eliminate your opponent's arms rendering

their stick useless. Your opponent is now stuck between yourself and the boards unable to use their arms. This gives you possession of the puck with an opponent who is unable to retake possession of the puck.

Never hit a player when they have their back turned or if you can see their number. The danger zone -- the area about 4-5 feet away from the boards -- is something that should be understood and recognized. Avoid contact in the danger zone as there is a much higher chance of (serious) injury.

Gauge and adjust your speed: At the time of contact, your speed should be equal to or slightly greater than that of your opponent. As “contact” speed increases, the likelihood of injury and the difficulty of quickly returning to the play also increase.

Contain your opponent: Once you have made contact, tie up your opponent, then play the puck if possible. A few helpful hints:

- Drive through using your legs with deep knee bend.
- Keep your hands down—at chest level to avoid penalties.
- Pin them to the boards—place your arm(s) and stick in front, one leg between their legs, and the other leg behind them.
- Do not waste energy trying to crush your opponent.
- Use your feet to kick the puck to a teammate.

Step Four - Return to play: A check is not complete until you return to the play. We lose track of time and sight of the play during body contact. As you battle with an opponent, the game continues to be played behind you, so remember two things: One, if you get knocked down, get up immediately and return to the play. Two, if you give a great body check, “Don’t break your arm patting yourself on the back!” Never take yourself out of the play when playing the body.