

Welcome Back Week Phone Call Retention Program Manual

**A Step-by-Step Guide
for Retaining Players**



Program Services

Kevin Erlenbach
(719) 538-1119
KevinE@usahockey.org

Shannon Webster
(719) 538-1118
ShannonW@usahockey.org

Andy Gibson
(719) 538-1115
Andy.Gibson@usahockey.org

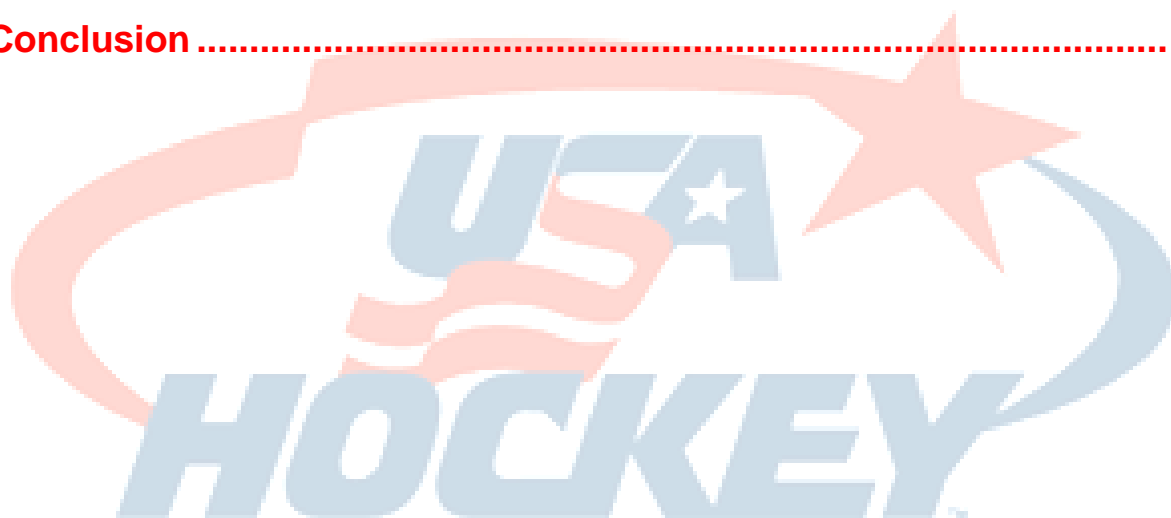


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Table of Contents

Overview.....	2
Retention Phone Call Program	3
1. Build the Foundation.....	3
2. Follow-up Phone Call.....	3
3. Script.....	3
4. Follow-up Email.....	4
5. Turn Problems into Solutions	5
6. Don't Give Up	5
Conclusion	6



Overview

For many associations, retaining players is a major challenge. Each season raises the question of how to bring back last year's participants. If your association struggles with player retention, don't worry. The answer is simple: just ask.

Underestimating the power of asking is common because it is assumed that most players will return without prodding. In reality, a significant amount of 8 & under hockey players do not return to their local association for a second season. Personal interaction between an association and parents is crucial as it increases comfort levels and demonstrates a commitment to their child. Further, it allows the organization to answer questions and address any misconceptions about youth hockey.



One effective way to extend return invitations is through a personal phone call. A call retention program is useful because it allows associations to notify parents of registration deadlines, as well as what to expect for the upcoming season. Additionally, phone calls can inform associations of any potential barriers to entry.

To run a properly executed phone call retention program, these guidelines are suggested:

- Build a foundation using timely emails
- Schedule follow up-phone calls
- Use a script with talking points and important dates
- Send a follow-up email
- Turn problems into solutions
- Don't give up!

Each of these guidelines will be explained in further detail later in this manual.

Retention call programs are effective for a variety of reasons. First, the program is free, eliminating the need for advertising or other costly forms of communication that often plague retention programs. A second reason that call programs are effective is that they have a high success rate and can immediately increase the number of participants. More players make hockey a more attractive sport, which further bolsters participation. In the rest of this manual, we will give you the necessary guidance and tools to develop your own phone call retention program.

Retention Phone Call Program

A Step-By-Step Model for Retaining Players

INTRODUCTION

Every hockey association experiences turnover between seasons. In fact, each season, almost 20,000 8 & under youth quit playing the sport. The reason for this turnover is not always because of a bad experience or lack of interest. Often, families simply forget to sign up prior to the season's start and do not return because they assume that it is too late. A focused follow-up program can prevent much of this lost participation.

1. Build the Foundation

Email

- Focus retention emails on registering uncommitted players.
- Feature benefits of youth hockey (teamwork, friendship, hard work, and fun).
- Detail **all** options for participation, highlighting the differences between first and second year participation.

Timing

- Send emails at the beginning of August, as this is when parents begin thinking about fall activities.

2. Follow-up Phone Call

Timing

- Make follow-up phone calls during Welcome Back Week, September 17th—23rd.
- For best response, call Sunday through Thursday between 5:30 pm - 8:00 pm.

Call Center

- Gather volunteers at one location and turn follow-up calls into a social opportunity (e.g. pizza party, etc.).
- Spilt up calls to maximize efficiency.
- Use impartial parents as volunteers.
 - Coaches give impression of having been recruited to make calls to potential players.
- Sell the organization, not individual teams.

3. Script

Talking Points

- Develop a script by detailing the upcoming season's positive aspects. Avoid internal politics, team placement, etc.



Sample Script: Hi. This is **(YOUR NAME)** with the **(YOUR ASSOCIATION NAME)**. We are getting ready for another great season of youth hockey and noticed that we didn't have **(THEIR CHILD)** signed up yet for the coming session.

We hope that you had a great experience last season and that youth hockey helped your child both on and off the ice. We really enjoyed seeing **(THEIR CHILD)** at the rink and would love to see **(HIM or HER)** again this fall. Lately, we have been busy planning for another great season that will focus on fun and skill development.

If you would like, I can get **(THEIR CHILD)** signed up right now.

If the answer is yes:

- Direct parent to association website for registration.
- Let them know of important upcoming dates (parent's meetings, opening day, Try Hockey For Free Day to involve their friends, etc.).
- Ask if they have any other questions.
- Finally, let them know that you will be sending a follow-up email with all of the information that you have discussed.



If the answer is no:

- Briefly try to sell the program.
 - Emphasize the benefits of participating in a youth hockey program.
- Ask why there is no interest in joining the program.
 - Take detailed notes and utilize this to improve your program.
- If the reason is financial, let parent know that the association is willing to be flexible to make things work.
- If the reason is due to scheduling issues, inform parent of any other possible options (later season, multiple times and dates, etc.).
- Finally, let them know that you will be sending a follow-up email with all of the information that you have discussed in case they change their mind.

4. Follow-up Email

Contents

- Remember to send a follow-up email. However, if the parent was overly upset during the phone call, you may want to rethink sending this email.
- For interested parents include all pertinent scheduling information as well as any special events during the season.
- For disinterested parents, thank them for their time, stress the positive impact of youth sports, and include information necessary for future participation.

Timing

- Send follow-up email within 24 hours of the phone call. Promptness will show your association is organized and wants their child to participate.

Sample Email to Parent Who Does Not Plan to Return This Season:

Dear **(PARENT'S NAME)**,

On behalf of your friends at **(ASSOCIATION NAME)**, I wanted to say that we are sorry to hear that **(CHILD'S NAME)** will not be returning this season. We are constantly striving to offer the best youth sports experience in our community. We are proud of the many ways that youth hockey can impact a child both on and off the ice.

If you change your mind and decide that you would like to participate in youth hockey, it's not too late for this season. Additionally, we offer a variety of programs throughout the year that may match your needs. If your child does take the entire season off, it is not too late for **(HIM or HER)** to come back next year. Talented hockey players begin playing at many different ages, often taking off a season or two before returning to the sport with even more passion.

Thank you for being a part of our program. Please let us know how we can improve to better meet your needs. We hope to see you back at the rink soon!

Sincerely,

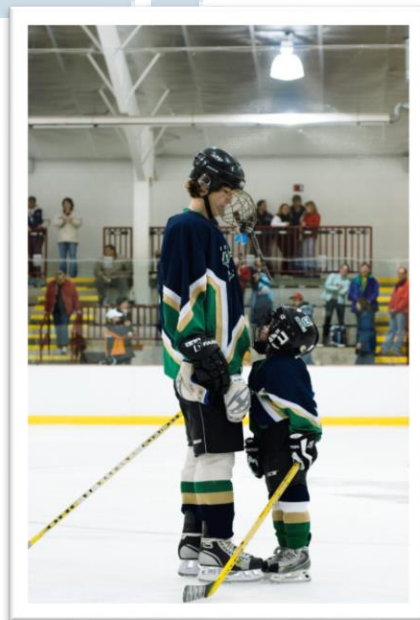
(YOUR NAME)

5. Turn Problems into Solutions

- If possible, have a board member available to answer any organizational questions that go beyond parents forgetting to sign up.
- Before making calls, develop a list of common questions and answers.
- Do not shy away from improving your organization through participant feedback.
 - Keep a detailed log of all issues and use it to examine current structures and programs.

6. Don't Give Up

- If a player does not return to the program, do not stop communicating with them.
- Send regular newsletters to participants and possible participants.
- After the season has begun, continue to try to get more youth involved.



Conclusion

Even with the implementation of retention programs, turnover in youth hockey is inevitable. There will always be reasons that prevent parents from bringing their children back to the rink. Our job is to reduce this number as much as possible. By working together, we can continue to foster growth and increase the popularity of youth hockey. Simply asking is a good place to start. If followed correctly, this phone retention program will increase your membership, decrease turnover, and improve your youth hockey program. But it doesn't have to stop here. We hope that you will also explore other opportunities to grow your own membership and the membership of youth hockey as a whole. Hopefully, this manual has provided you with valuable tips and guidance that will contribute to a successful season.

Thank you for doing your part to make the world's greatest sport even better and have a fantastic season!

For questions or for more information, please contact Program Services at (719) 538-1124 or comeplayyouthhockey@usahockey.org

