

Hockey Player Placement Workbook

A Family Discussion Guide for Ages 14–17

*This workbook is designed to be completed by the player AND parents together but **answered independently first**. Where your answers differ, that gap is a conversation. There is no right or wrong. The goal is alignment as a family before you ever contact a single coach.*

How to use this workbook:

- Player fills out every section first, without input from parents.
- Parents fill out the same sections independently. (Print two copies to allow blind responses)
- Compare answers together. Discuss the gaps and drivers behind each opinion. These are the most valuable conversations you will have. No right or wrong, only better understanding, clarity and priorities as a **family unit**.
- **Do not skip the "Why" prompts.** The reason behind an answer matter as much as the answer itself.
- Complete Phase 1 fully before moving to Phase 2.

Enter your information (will need this for later):

Player Birth Date: _____

Player Birth Year: _____

Player/Family City + Province/State _____

Player Position: _____

Building Your Target List

Before you look at a single team, you need to know what you are looking for. Most families skip this step and jump straight to trying to figure out which teams their player can "realistically make." That is the wrong starting point. Start with where you WANT to go. The rest follows.

SECTION 1 — Geography: Where Do You Want to Play?

Geography is first because if you don't like where you live, you won't like where you play, and that will show up in your performance over time. Answer each question below independently. Player fills out the blue column. Parent fills out the grey column. Compare and discuss after.

1.1 Living Situation

Where does the player want to live while playing? Where do parents want the player to live?

Options include living at home and commuting to a local team, billeting with a host family in a new city, living in a team dorm or residence, or living with extended family. There is no right answer. Each has real trade-offs in independence, support, cost, and development. Parents: It's okay to talk about finances with your player, it helps them understand how you make decisions. If you're hiding answers from them because it's an uncomfortable topic, it is unreasonable that you expect them to be fully open.

PLAYER: Where do you want to live?

PARENT: Where do you want the player to live?

Why? What matters most to you about that living situation?

PLAYER: Why?

PARENT: Why?

1.2 Distance from Home

How far from home is acceptable?

Consider: same city, same province or state, anywhere within driving distance, anywhere in Canada/USA, anywhere in North America. Think about visit frequency, emergency travel, potential homesickness, and your family's capacity to support from a distance. Also consider the opportunity to grow in an independent environment, truly become your own person, accept more responsibility, and separate from potential distractions.

PLAYER: How far is acceptable?

PARENT: How far is acceptable?

Why is that your limit or preference?

PLAYER: Why?

PARENT: Why?

1.3 Environment and Community

Does the type of city or environment matter to you?

Think about: big city versus small town, prairies versus mountains, coastal versus inland, areas with extended family nearby, climate preferences, and the culture or pace of the community.

PLAYER: What environment fits you?	PARENT: What environment fits your family?

Why does this matter to you?

PLAYER: Why?	PARENT: Why?

1.4 Fan Base and Community Hockey Culture (more for Junior/College)

Does it matter whether the team has a strong local fan base or is part of a community where hockey is a big deal?

Some players thrive in front of big crowds and want to be part of a team that people in the city genuinely care about. Others prefer a lower-profile environment with less external pressure. Neither is better, but knowing your preference matters.

PLAYER: Does fan culture matter to you?	PARENT: Does fan culture matter to you?

Why or why not?

PLAYER: Why?	PARENT: Why?

NEXT STEP (AI Exercise): Once you have completed this section together, upload your combined answers into your AI platform of choice (ChatGPT, Claude, etc.) and ask it to generate a list of 100 cities across North America that best match your description. Be sure to set the AI model to 'Research', 'Deep Think', or 'Web' mode, to ensure the model runs your task thoroughly and completely. Further, remember to give your current location so it knows where home base is if there are any geographic boundaries. Ask it to rank the cities from best fit to least fit based on your answers. Save that list. You will use it in the next step.

1.5 Cross-Referencing Teams to Your City List

Using your 100-city list, ask your AI to identify which junior hockey teams (Major Junior, Junior A, and Junior B) are based in or near those cities that you would be eligible to play for next season.

*Important: **You are not filtering by what teams you think you can make or what is realistic.** At this stage you are only finding the teams you WANT to make and that would be a good geographic and lifestyle fit. This distinction matters. Limiting yourself by perceived ability at this stage will narrow your target list in the wrong direction.*

List your top 15 to 20 teams from this exercise:

SECTION 2 — Team Fit: What Are You Looking for in an Organization?

Now that you have a working list of 15 to 20 teams, it is time to define what you actually want in an organization. Again, answer the following questions independently, then discuss.

2.1 Established Program vs. Rebuilding Program

Do you want to join an established team, a new team, or a team in the middle of a rebuild?

Established program: Typically means a stronger record, a more stable roster and culture, developed systems and facilities, experienced staff, and a clear identity. The trade-off is that rosters tend to be more locked in, trust in high-pressure moments must be earned, and you are joining a culture that already exists rather than helping to create one.

Rebuilding program: Typically means higher roster turnover, more opportunity for a young or developing player to earn meaningful minutes, and a real chance to be part of building something. The trade-off is typically a weaker record, potentially less established systems and facilities, and more uncertainty. You would be helping to set the culture and drive it rather than stepping into one pre-established.

New program: Similar to a re-building program minus any previous reputation.

No option is particularly better. This is purely preference. But have a reason.

PLAYER: Which do you prefer and why?

PARENT: Which do you prefer and why?

Regardless of your preference: Where do players typically go AFTER they finish with this team? Is that path aligned with where you want to go?

For example: Does this team regularly send players to NCAA Div I programs? ACHA? CHL? NCDC? Prep schools? Do their graduates regularly end up in junior, university, or pro? Is there a trend to which teams these players go to that signal a connection or relationship? Fortunately, AI should be able to help you source these answers as well. This should factor into your thinking.

Notes on player pathways from teams on your list:

2.2 Coaching Staff and Management

Research the head coach and general manager for each team on your list and answer the following:

How long has the coach been with this organization?

Maybe stability matters. Maybe a new environment matters. A coach who has been there for several years has built something. A coach who is new may be more motivated to drive change. Both can be good depending on what you want.

Notes per team:

Has the team been winning more, less, or the same since this coach arrived?

This tells you something about the direction of the program. A team trending upward under a new coach can be an exciting opportunity. A team that has been declining over several seasons is worth examining more carefully.

Notes per team:

What is the coach's playing and coaching background?

Did they play at the college, junior, or pro level? Where? Did they coach elsewhere before this role? This matters because coaches tend to develop relationships with programs they came from or played in. If you eventually want to play college hockey in the US, a coach with NCAA connections may be very valuable to you.

Notes per team:

What is the coach's style?

Old-school coaches tend to prioritize structure, physicality, defensive responsibility, and veteran experience. New-school coaches often emphasize skill development, data, player communication, and building trust with younger players. There is no right answer, but knowing what environment brings out your best is important.

PLAYER: What coaching style fits you best?

PARENT: What coaching style fits your player?

Of all the coaching questions above, which ones matter most to you and why?

Not every factor will carry equal weight. A player who is already verbally committed to a university program may care more about development style than connections. A player who needs exposure may care more about a coach's network. Know your priorities.

PLAYER: My top priorities

PARENT: My top priorities

SECTION 3 — Roster Research: The Background Check

This section requires research. Use AI, team websites, Elite Prospects, or social media to find as much of this as you can. You will not find everything with certainty, but the exercise of looking builds a clearer picture than you would have otherwise.

Complete a version of this section for every team on your shortlist. You can use AI to help compile answers by giving it the team's name and asking it to find current roster data, age-out information, and any publicly announced player movements or commitments for the upcoming season.

3.1 Goalie Depth and Roster Openings

How many players are currently on the roster at your position?

This applies to any position. Knowing how many players are already there tells you about the starting point before turnover.

Notes per team:

How many players at your position are aging out, graduating, or moving on this offseason?

In every level of hockey except pro, players age out at the top of the eligible age range. A team losing two or three experienced players at your position in the same offseason has a real opening. A team where no one is moving on likely does not.

Notes per team:

Are any players at your position moving up to a higher level of play or transferring to another team?

A player moving up to U18, Major Junior, signing a college commitment, transferring elsewhere creates an opening etc. These moves are often announced publicly on team social media, Elite Prospects, or local news.

Notes per team:

Have any players at your position on this team already announced or committed to junior, college or pro programs?

A player with a commitment to a university program will likely be departing at the end of the season or within a year. This factors into how much runway exists for a new player stepping into the depth chart. If you want to put this exercise on steroids for a team you really like, you can build a 2-year roadmap to see how many opportunities may be there in 2 seasons if you aren't quite ready.

Notes per team:

3.2 Roster Volatility

Has this team made a high volume of trades or roster changes in the past two seasons? (Predominantly Junior focused)

A team with frequent trades can signal instability, a coaching staff that has not yet found its identity, or a management group that is actively trying to win now by moving younger players for veterans. None of these are automatically bad, but they are signals worth understanding. A stable roster usually means a stable culture. Look at the record as well. High turnover plus strong record usually means high standards. High turnover plus weak record usually means poor environment. Low turnover generally signals stability, irrespective of record.

Notes per team:

Are these roster research questions important to you? Why or why not?

Some players and families will find this level of detail overwhelming or unnecessary. Others will find it essential. The goal is not to have a perfect answer for every question but to have a much sharper picture of each team than the average player reaching out has. That alone sets you apart.

PLAYER: What matters most from this section?

PARENT: What matters most from this section?

After completing Sections 1 through 3, you should now have a shortlist of approximately 5 to 10 teams that genuinely fit your geography, your lifestyle preferences, your priorities in an organization, and where real opportunity appears to exist. This is your target list going into Phase 2.

Building Your Outreach Roadmap

Phase 2 only begins after you have completed all of Phase 1. Everything in this section depends on the work you did above. Do not skip ahead.

SECTION 4 — Outreach Readiness

Most players reach out to coaches with messages that sound like this:

"Hey, are you looking for any players this season?" or "Hi, I am a goalie looking for a team. Can I come try out?"

These messages get ignored. Not because the player is bad, but because the message shows no research, no genuine interest, and no reason for the coach to respond. You are going to do something different.

4.1 Personalized Outreach Preparation (Per Team)

For each team on your final shortlist, answer the following before drafting any message:

In two sentences, why is THIS team a fit for YOU specifically?

Reference something real. The city, the coach's background, the team's trajectory, the pathway their graduates take. This proves you did the work. If you cannot answer this in two sentences without being generic, you are not ready to reach out yet.

Your two-sentence answer per team:

What do you know about this team that most players reaching out would not know?

This could be a roster gap you identified, a connection between the coach's background and your own goals, or a specific aspect of the team's culture or community that genuinely appeals to you. The more specific, the better.

What you know that others likely do not:

What specifically are you offering this team?

Not just your position. What qualities, work ethic, attributes, or game elements make you a fit for what this team needs right now? This does not require you to be the best player in your age group. It requires you to know yourself as a player and be honest about what you bring. Take your time with this and know your strengths because this is where most players run the risk of making it about what they want rather than what the team needs or is potentially looking for. Bonus points if you can relate your style to a gap you identified from one of the players moving on. CORE FOCUS: Make this about what you have identified, or you think the team is looking for, not about you.

PLAYER: What do you bring?

PARENT: What does your player bring?

4.2 Final Alignment Check

Before sending a single message, answer these as a family:

Does the player and family agree on the shortlist?

PLAYER: Yes / No / Notes

PARENT: Yes / No / Notes

Are there any unresolved gaps from the previous Phases that need a conversation before moving forward?

For example: a player who wants full independence but parents who want them close to extended family. Or a player who wants a rebuild situation but parents who want stability. These conversations are better had now than after a commitment is made. I revisit the importance of this because if you are not CERTAIN and aligned as a family, it will show up as a lack of conviction or support in more subtle ways than you predict or expect.

Unresolved gaps to discuss:

What is the timeline? When do tryouts, ID camps, and outreach windows open for each team on your list?

Junior hockey has seasonal rhythms. Some teams hold formal tryouts in the spring. Others run ID camps in the summer. Some respond well to early outreach in January or February. Use AI or team websites to map out the calendar for each team on your list so you know when to act. A rule of thumb is it's never too early to make an introduction, even if you don't get an active response, just be sure to follow up and reconnect during that team's/league's specific recruiting season/window.

Timeline and key dates per team:

You now have everything you need to reach out with intention. You know why you want to play for these teams. You have a good idea of what they need. You know what you offer. Your outreach will be specific, genuine, and different from every other player in their inbox. That is your edge.

If this resource has helped you get more clear on your plan and future for hockey, I'd be grateful to hear about it. I love reading about your journey navigating the world of hockey development. Send me any email at kenny.batke@prodigyathletics.ca. I look forward to hearing from you.

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