OCTOBER — The Hard Stop Reset: Managing Pressure

(DBT Origin: STOP Skill)

Acronym: STOP!

Get Ready:

October is when the season starts to take shape. Competition picks up, coaches raise expectations, and roles become more defined. With that shift often comes more intensity, more frustration, and more emotional pressure. Hockey is fast. Mistakes happen in seconds. Reactions happen even faster. The Hard Stop Reset comes directly from DBT's STOP skill and gives athletes, parents, coaches, and officials a way to pause before reacting, especially in moments when emotions run high.

STOP:

- **Stop**
- **Take a Breath**
- **Observe Your Physical Response**
- **Proceed Mindfully**

How to Practice (Five Minutes):

- Think of a recent moment when you reacted too quickly or too strongly.
- Replay that moment in your mind and imagine placing a large internal STOP sign right before the reaction.
- Take three slow breaths, emphasizing a smooth exhale.
- Notice what is happening in your body and around you.
- Visualize yourself choosing a calmer, more controlled next step.

Why It Matters:

The STOP skill creates a gap between what you feel and what you choose to do. That brief pause can prevent penalties, arguments, emotional outbursts, and spirals that can take players out of the game. It supports composure, helps athletes stay focused on the next play, and reinforces emotional discipline under stress. For coaches and parents, it is equally valuable in diffusing tension and modeling calm responses.

Takeaway:

Choose one real moment this week to practice the Hard Stop Reset. It might be in a drill that goes poorly, a disagreement at home, or a stressful shift in a game. Notice how the pause changes the tone of your response and the control you feel afterward. Over time, STOP becomes second nature, a core part of emotional resilience both on and off the ice.

Hockey Example:

A questionable call goes against your team. Your first reaction might be frustration or disbelief. Using the Hard Stop Reset, you pause, breathe once, observe your physical response, and choose to turn away, reset your shoulders, and focus on the next shift. That small shift prevents emotions from escalating and keeps you mentally in the game.

Written by Abby Woodford, USA Hockey (2026)

The Hard STOP

October – Managing Reactions Under Pressure

This worksheet helps you practice creating space between reaction and action. Move through each step in order. Take your time and actually pause where prompted.

Step 1: Recall the Moment

Think of a recent moment when you reacted too quickly or too strongly, in a game, practice, or off the ice. Choose a moment that still feels clear in your mind.

Briefly describe what happened:

Step 2: STOP the Reaction

Close your eyes or soften your gaze. Replay the moment in your mind, but this time imagine placing a large internal STOP sign right before your reaction.

What were you about to do or say before the STOP?

Step 3: Take a Breath

Take three slow breaths.
Breathe in through your nose.
Let the exhale be smooth and longer than the inhale.



After the breaths, I notice my body feels:

☐ more tense ☐ about the same ☐ slightly calmer ☐ much calmer

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Step 4: Observe
Looking back on that moment, describe what you remember noticing. Do not judge it or try to change it.

Physical response (body):
What do you remember noticing in your body at that moment?
(Examples: tension level, breathing, heart rate, posture, jaw, shoulders)

Environment (around you):
What do you remember noticing around you?
(Examples: noise, bench, score, teammates, coach, rink)

Reflection:
Looking back on that moment, imagine choosing a calmer, more controlled response. Consider what you could have done differently to stay composed and focused.

A calmer next response would have been:
(Examples: turn away, reset shoulders, deep breath, cue word, eyes on puck)

The STOP Reset does not remove emotion; it creates space.

That space allows you to choose how you respond, rather than letting the moment choose for you.



USA HOCKEY

