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Building a curling team

A HouseCall guide to choosing teammates and planning a season together

Mary Deuhs · HouseCall

Learn the game. Love the game.

Start with the whole team

Four good curlers do not automatically make a good team. A team also needs a shared purpose, dependable teammates and a way to work through the difficult moments.

In four-player curling, a shot is a shared effort. The skip calls the shot. The person delivering tries to send the stone on the intended line with the right weight and release. The sweepers judge, communicate and act as the stone travels. The person in the house uses that information to manage the shot. Sometimes the best sweeping decision is to leave the stone alone. [1]

Team fit means how well your skills, expectations and ways of treating one another work together.

A supportive, reliable teammate may be a better choice for your team than someone with stronger individual shot-making who makes everyone else uncomfortable. Consider what each person brings to the whole group: listening, sound judgment, honest effort, useful feedback and the ability to move on after a miss.

Today's skill level is a starting point. With practice, players can develop their shots and learn one another's calls, releases and habits. That learning goes both ways. Choose people you want to grow with.

Chemistry means the working relationship you build together. You will spend time together in games, on long drives, over meals and through delays. Look for people you can enjoy, talk honestly with and share a laugh with, including after a hard day. Keep humour kind. A joke should include a teammate, not make them the target.

Use this guide before committing to a season, when adding a player or when your current team needs a fresh start. Talk first, curl together, then write down what you agree to do.

The on-ice examples use four-player curling with sweeping. Other formats can use the planning questions and adapt the roles. Wheelchair curling, for example, has no sweeping. [2]

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Agree on the season you want

Ask each person to answer these questions before the group discussion. Give everyone time to speak.

- What would make this a good season for you?
- How much curling can you realistically fit into your life?
- What would make the season stressful or disappointing?

Put ambitions into ordinary words

“We want to be competitive” can mean different things. One person may mean trying hard on league night. Another may expect travel, regular practice and championship play.

Choose a starting point together:

- **Recreational team:** a team built around enjoyable, dependable participation. You might choose weekly league play, a little practice and an optional local bonspiel.
- **Competitive team:** a team working toward agreed performance goals. You might choose regular team practice, selected events and a plan for reviewing your play.

These are useful descriptions, not fixed categories. A recreational team can care deeply about playing well. A competitive team can make room for fun and life outside curling.

Talk about the real commitments

Attendance: Agree on game nights, practice frequency, arrival time and how to report an absence. Decide who finds a spare and who confirms the change.

Travel: Name the events or maximum weekends you can manage. Discuss distance, transport and overnight stays before anyone books.

Budget: Include entry fees, practice ice, coaching, equipment needs, transport, lodging and meals. Set a comfortable limit. Nobody should have to explain private finances to say that a cost is too high.

Participation: Ask what practical arrangements help everyone take part. Think about communication, transport, access and the workload on the ice. Keep personal details private unless someone chooses to share them.

Time together: Talk about the social side too. Do you enjoy the same sort of joking? Does someone need quiet time after a game? Make room for both company and personal space.

Pick goals you can use

An **outcome goal** is a result you hope to achieve, such as reaching your league playoffs. A **process goal** is an action you can control, such as confirming the shot before delivery.

Choose one shared season aim and two useful habits. Put a review date on the calendar. Revisit the plan if work, family, health or finances change.

Try saying: “I can commit to league night and one practice a month. I can travel for one weekend. Would that fit the team you want?”

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Choose roles that work together

Start with the jobs the team needs done. Avoid placing everyone on a ladder from weakest to strongest.

In traditional four-player curling, **lead**, **second**, **third** and **fourth** describe delivery order. Each player delivers two stones. The **skip** directs play; the **vice-skip** takes over that duty when the skip delivers. The skip commonly throws fourth but does not have to. [2]

Look for complementary strengths

Complementary skills are different strengths that help the group cover its needs. Use these questions when trying a lineup:

- Who enjoys setting up an end and repeating a clear job patiently?
- Who can adjust when the shot requirement changes?
- Who reads the ice carefully and explains a decision simply?
- Who enjoys sweeping, judging weight and sharing what they see?
- Who stays useful when a difficult shot or a disappointing end adds pressure?

Discuss both current strengths and skills people want to develop. Someone may be a willing learner in a new position. A player should understand the proposed role and have a chance to say whether it suits them.

Share the work around the game

Name someone to manage the calendar, event entries, money records and spare requests. Split these jobs if that works better. Skipping does not automatically make one person responsible for every off-ice task.

An **alternate**, often called a fifth, is an additional player who may replace an on-ice player under the applicable rules. [6] Discuss practice access, expected playing time, travel costs and how selection will work before the person commits.

A coach can help a team plan practices, work on skills and build clear communication. Curling Canada and USA Curling both offer coaching education for supporting player development. [3, 5] Agree on the coach’s role, cost and availability. A recreational team might start with one session.

Try saying: “You give clear weight calls and stay engaged all game. Would you like to try lead with us? What would you want from that role?”

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Make communication part of the shot

Weight is the speed or force given to a stone. **Line** is its intended or observed path. [6]

Before delivery, agree on the shot, target, weight and an acceptable second choice. During the shot, the thrower can report how the release felt, the sweepers update their weight judgment, and the person in the house manages line. Keep exchanging information until the play is finished. [1]

Decide in practice who makes the final call when weight and line needs compete. Use words or signals everyone understands. A quiet player still needs a reliable way to be heard.

Build a small shared vocabulary

These are examples to try together:

- “Top four” names a target near the front of the four-foot circle.
- “Light, needs help” reports that the stone may stop short.
- “For line” explains why sweeping is being requested.
- “Off” means stop sweeping, under the system you have agreed.

Check what each phrase means to your own team. Ask for clarification early. Practise hearing and responding while moving, not only while standing together.

Be useful after a miss

Give a teammate something they can use. “The call was late” is more helpful than “You never listen.” Ask what happened before deciding why it happened.

Try this short reset:

1. Take a breath and describe one fact.

2. Own your contribution when you know it.

3. Agree on one adjustment, then prepare for the next shot.

Example: “I called the weight too late. Next time I’ll give you my first read sooner.”

Save longer technique or strategy discussions for an agreed break or after the game. Ask whether a teammate wants a cue now or a conversation later. Avoid sarcasm, eye-rolling and a running account of someone’s mistakes.

Never speak badly about your teammates on social media. Handle disagreements privately and respectfully. Don’t post blame, mocking comments, or screenshots of team conversations.

Praise useful work as well as the final result: a clear call, a good decision, sustained effort or an honest correction. Support and accountability can sit comfortably together.

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Curl together before you commit

A conversation gives you a starting point. A practice and a few games show you how the group works on the ice.

Tell everyone whether you are trying a possible team or selecting players for limited places. Explain the criteria, who will decide and when each person will hear back. Do not promise the same place to several people.

Try a simple team session

Agree on a safe practice plan suited to your experience. A coach can help. Curling Canada’s sample practice specifically trains communication using a thrower, sweepers and someone in the house. [4]

Here is a HouseCall discussion and practice outline:

1. **Start together.** Each person names one thing they want to learn about the team.

2. **Practise familiar shots.** Try the proposed roles. Notice whether the shot is understood and whether useful information reaches the right person.

3. **Play a short game or a few ends.** Include ordinary decisions and time pressure appropriate to your level.

4. **Talk afterward.** Each person names something that helped and something to try differently.

If possible, meet more than once. Different ice, a close game and an ordinary off-night can reveal different things. A single great shot or poor game is a small sample.

Notice whether you are learning each other's habits and adjusting together. A developing player who listens and practises may bring more to the team over time than your first impression suggests.

Notice the teammate as well as the delivery

- Do they arrive prepared and follow through?
- Do they listen, ask questions and share useful information?
- Can they accept a decision they did not prefer?
- How do they treat a player who is struggling?
- Do they acknowledge their own mistakes?
- Does everyone have room to contribute?

Watch your own behaviour too. Selection is a chance for each person to decide whether this team suits them.

Make a clear next step

Choose to commit, try another session or part respectfully. Be specific about what you are offering: a league season, selected events or a trial period with a review date.

Try saying: “I enjoyed playing together. I think our plans fit. Shall we agree to the fall league and review things after our first month?”

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Make decisions and handle change

Agree on decision ownership before an urgent choice arrives. Your skip can lead on-ice strategy while the team agrees separately how to choose events, approve spending and decide the lineup.

For a disagreement, speak privately and promptly. Describe a specific event, explain its effect, listen to the other view and ask for a practical change. Agree when to check whether it helped. If you remain stuck, ask an agreed coach or neutral club person to help. Threats, harassment or unsafe conduct should go through the club's safeguarding or reporting process.

Handle roster conversations directly and before making a public announcement. Explain the decision respectfully, confirm any remaining commitments and settle shared costs. Avoid discussing someone's shortcomings around the club. A different team can be a better fit without making either person a bad curler.

Use the next two pages to record your working agreement. Review it together rather than leaving it in a drawer.

Sources and further reading

The planning questions, examples and worksheet are HouseCall suggestions. The sources below support the curling roles, communication and coaching background. This guide is independently prepared and is not an official governing-body publication.

1. Curling Canada and World Curling Federation, Discover Curling, 2015, especially printed pages 7 and 50-52. Team roles and shared shot communication.

2. World Curling, What is curling. Delivery order, skip and vice-skip roles, and different formats.

3. USA Curling, Member Programs, Coaching Certifications. Athlete-centred coaching and communication.

4. Curling Canada, Plan a Practice, page 4. A team communication practice example.

5. Curling Canada, Club Coach. Club-level practice planning and instruction.

6. World Curling, Rules of Curling. Current rules, team roles, alternates and terminology.

Check the current rules for your league or event, including eligibility, substitutes, delivery order, sweeping and coach access. Older teaching manuals are useful background but may contain superseded rules or equipment advice.

Our team working agreement

Our season and commitments

Complete these two pages together. Use a separate copy of the personal questions if that helps everyone prepare. Write specific, realistic answers and give each teammate a copy.

Team or group: _____

Season or trial period: _____

Players: _____

First answer individually

What do I want from this season? What can I reliably contribute? What limit or concern should the team understand?

Our shared season aim

Two habits we will work on

1. _____
2. _____

Our calendar

League or games: _____

Practice frequency and time: _____

Events and travel limit: _____

Arrival expectation: _____

Our spending plan

Agreed limit per person or for the team: _____

What this includes: _____

Who approves extra costs before booking: _____

Absences and practical arrangements

How and when to report an absence: _____

Who finds and confirms a spare: _____

Participation or travel arrangements to remember: _____

Our team working agreement

Our roles and ways of working

Our starting lineup

Lead: _____ Second: _____

Third: _____ Fourth: _____

Skip: _____ Vice-skip: _____

Alternate and agreed role, if any: _____

Coach and agreed role, if any: _____

Our decision owners

On-ice strategy and resolving conflicting calls: _____

Events and spending: _____

Lineup and roster decisions: _____

Calendar, entries, money records and spares: _____

Our communication

Words or signals we need to agree and practise: _____

What helps each of us after a miss: _____

What makes time together enjoyable, and what joking goes too far:

When and how we will give longer feedback: _____

How we will raise and resolve a concern: _____

Our social media and team privacy agreement: _____

Our next steps

First practice or trial game: _____

Who will confirm the plan and by when: _____

Review date and what we will review: _____

Date agreed: _____ Teammates' initials: _____

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