



Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Children & Adolescents

Note: This document is not meant to be used or viewed as an exhaustive list or acceptable and unacceptable conduct nor does it address every situation that could arise and should not be used in place of legal consultation. The document intends to provide a framework within sport, in which individuals are expected to exercise common sense and good judgment when interacting with children. For the purpose of this document “a coach or adult” refers to any person working, volunteering or otherwise interacting with children in sport. “Children” refers to anyone registered as a player or involved in Saskatoon Youth Soccer Programming, and not a parent.

Sport presents children and adolescents with amazing experiences fundamental to boosting growth and development. Positive experiences are tied to wholesome relationships between coaches and athletes and are conducted in safe environments where there is a high degree of accountability for adult behaviour and actions. The reason for these guidelines is to establish expectations and understanding around adults interacting with children/adolescents in sport and creating a safe space for those who need to bring to light any concerns of misconduct toward children.

Coach and Athlete Relationships

When taking on the responsibilities of the role of the coach you are also taking on a position of trust for the athlete. This trust is built on boundaries of professionalism inherent in the coach and athlete relationship. Once the trust is broken so are the foundations of this professional relationship. This relationship is also typified by a power balance of coach over the athlete, as they are taught at an early age to respect and listen to their coaches, as well as athletes depend on the knowledge and training provided by the coach to increase their skills and development in their sport of choice.

As a result, both this power and trust can be used to violate the coach-athlete relationship and more often than not is a result of boundary violations where adults place their needs above the needs of the child athlete in order to receive professional or personal gains at the child's expense. The responsibility of maintaining the professional relationship and appropriate boundaries always lies with the adult.



Age of Protection in Canada

The age of protection (also called the age of consent) is the age at which a young person can legally consent to sexual activity. The age of protection in Canada is generally 16 years old, but the *Criminal Code* increases that age to 18 in the context of certain relationships. If the child is:

Under 12 years old	No person can engage in sexual activity with the child under any circumstance.
12 or 13 years old	The age difference <u>must</u> be LESS THAN 2 years AND the relative positions of the parties <u>must</u> be such that a child is able to give consent.*
14 or 15 years old	The age difference <u>must</u> be LESS THAN 5 years AND the relative positions of the parties <u>must</u> be such that a child is able to give consent.*
16 or 17 years old	The relative positions of the parties <u>must</u> be such that a child is able to give consent.*

* For all children aged 12-17: If the other person is in a position of trust or authority over the child (e.g., a coach, teacher, etc.), the child is dependent on the other person or the relationship is exploitative of the child, the child is NOT able to give consent, making sexual activity in the context of such relationships illegal. In these situations, only a person aged 18 or older is capable of consent. The increased age takes into account the inherent vulnerability of the child and is meant to protect the child in situations that involve a power or other imbalance.

Roles of Parents and Coaches

In instances where it appears that a coach-athlete relationship seems to have been broken, it can be a hard to process and respond to this situation. However, reporting any suspected inappropriate behaviour creates accountability whereby appropriate actions can be implemented to restore and re-establish expectations. Parents and coaches who have any concerns should speak to SYSI and the zone organization as outlined in the SYSI Abuse and Safety Policy. Regular age-appropriate discussions around personal safety and boundary-breaking behaviour with children, should be conducted regularly by parents and coaches. Some examples of topics to discuss would be:

- Qualities and attributes of a healthy relationship
- Personal boundaries and their importance
- Where and who to bring concerns to and how to get help

For these topics and more, please visit: kidsintheknow.ca/safetysheets. Any concerns about any sexual images that have been shared, please visit: Cybertip.ca. As well, for more information around reporting inappropriate conduct and child sexual abuse you can visit: commit2kids.ca/safesport.

Example of Behaviour: Appropriate and Inappropriate

Individuals working or volunteering in sport are expected to model behaviour that upholds public confidence and enhances healthy relationships with children and families. Again, the example show below are not meant to be exhaustive, but illustrative.

Examples of appropriate behaviour in coach-athlete relationships:

- Use of respectful language, tone and attitude towards others
- Be respectful of personal, emotional and physical boundaries
- Respond to children to their needs and not the adult's
- Interacting with children in a manner that would be seen by a reasonable observer as maintaining reasonable boundaries
- Keeping practices and games open to observation by parents

- Communication with children/adolescent (including electronic) is transparent and accountable

Examples of inappropriate behaviour in coach-athlete relationships:

- Inappropriate and/or disrespectful language
- Humiliating or intimidating children/adolescent
- Improper touching of children/adolescent (e.g., massaging, stroking, caressing, roughhousing, tickling)
- Divulging or sharing overly personal information with a child
- Asking/telling children/adolescents to keep secrets
- Electronic communication with children/adolescents that is personal and not directly tied to coaching duties
- Sexual or flirtatious communication
- Pictures taken with personal devices or in change rooms

Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries: Standards of Measure

Any and all interactions and activities with children/adolescents should be (including electronic communication):

- Accountable
- In response to meeting the child's needs
- Related to coaching/volunteer duties
- Transparent

*The chart show on the second page of the document is adopted from the Commit to Kids Program, Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Children in Sport published by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection.