



North Okanagan Youth Soccer Association

Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Children in Sport

Sport offers incredible experiences and opportunities for children. These experiences are integral to communities and enhancing child development. Positive experiences are tied to healthy relationships between athletes and coaches, as well as to safe environments where there are clearly established guidelines for professional boundaries between adults and children. As such, the purpose of these guidelines is to establish a common understanding of expectations for adults interacting with children in sport, and a sense of safety for those who need to bring forward any concerns of misconduct towards 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 under 18 years old.

This document does not address every situation nor is it meant to be an exhaustive list of acceptable or unacceptable conduct. It is meant to provide a framework within sport in which individuals are expected to exercise common sense and good judgment when interacting with children.

The Coach and Athlete Relationship

Generally, coaches are in a position of trust, and it's through professional boundaries that this foundation of trust between coaches and athletes is built. If boundaries are broken, that pillar of the relationship crumbles.

The coach and athlete relationship is also characterized by a power imbalance in favour of the coach. Athletes are taught to respect and listen to their coaches, and they are dependent upon the coach's knowledge and training to further develop their skills.

Both trust and power can be used to breach the coach-athlete relationship, and often this happens through boundary violations, which occur when the adult places their needs above the needs of the child and gains personally or professionally at the child's expense.

The responsibility is always with the adult to establish and maintain appropriate boundaries with children.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Behaviour

Individuals working or volunteering in sport are expected to uphold high standards and model behaviour that upholds public confidence and enhances healthy relationships with children and families.

Examples of Appropriate Behaviour:

- → Interactions with athletes are goal-oriented
- → Interactions with athletes are outcome focused
- → Supportive language, tone and attitude towards others
- → Model professional physical and emotional boundaries (know the line)
- → Responsive to athlete's needs and not engaging with the athlete to meet the adult's needs
- → Engaging with athlete in a manner that would be seen by a reasonable observer as maintaining reasonable boundaries
- → Keeping practices open to observation by parents (transparent interactions)
- → Communication with children (including electronic) is transparent and accountable and tied to job description and professional qualifications

Examples of Inappropriate Behaviour:

- Sexualized attention
- Humiliating or intimidating children
- Inappropriate touching of children (e.g., massaging, stroking, caressing, roughhousing, tickling)
- Confiding or sharing overly personal information with a child (e.g., sharing financial or relationship problems)
- Asking children to keep secrets
- Treating child as an "adult" under guise of maturity
- Creating an emotional dependency and isolating the athlete from other teammates/ staff/parents (e.g., pitting athlete against other teammates and/or against other athletic team staff)
- Electronic communication with athletes that is personal and not directly tied to coaching duties
- Communication that excessive, not tied to work duties or athlete goals
- Pictures taken with personal devices or in change rooms
- Giving athlete inappropriate gifts

Standard of Measure for Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries

All interactions and activities with children should be (including electronic communication):

→ Transparent → In response to meeting the child's needs → Accountable → Reflect a duty of care and protection

→ Tied to coaching/volunteer duties

Parents and Coaches Play a Role

It can be difficult to respond to a situation where you notice a coach and athlete relationship that appears inappropriate. Reporting inappropriate behaviour creates accountability so proper action can be taken and expectations can be re-established. Parents or coaches who have concerns should speak with that coach's supervisor.

Parents and coaches should also have regular age-appropriate conversations with children about personal safety and boundary-breaking behaviour. Some topics to talk with children about are the qualities of healthy relationships, importance of personal boundaries, and how to get help/where to bring concerns. For this information and more, visit: kidsintheknow.ca/safetysheets.

If you are concerned about a sexual image that has been shared, visit Cybertip.ca. This site has information for teens and adults. For more information on reporting inappropriate conduct and child sexual abuse visit commit2kids.ca/safesport.

*This information sheet is part of the Commit to Kids® program. The contents of this sheet are provided as information only and do not constitute legal advice.