



Guidelines for Appropriate/Inappropriate Conduct between Adults/Adolescents and Children

Sport offers incredible experiences and opportunities for children. These experiences are integral to enhancing child development. Positive experiences are tied to healthy relationship between athletes and coaches, as well as to safe environments where adults are accountable for their actions and behaviours. 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 eighteen (18) years old.

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, the 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.

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:

14 or 15 years old **The age difference must be LESS THAN 5 years AND the relative positions of the parties must be such that a child is able to give consent.¹**

16 or 17 years old The relative positions of the parties must be such that child is able to give consent.

¹ For all children aged 12-17: If the other person is in a position of trust or authority over the child (i.e. 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 ages 18 or older is capable of consent.** The increased age considers the inherent vulnerability of the child and is meant to protect the child in situations that involve a power or other imbalance.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Behaviour

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

Examples of Appropriate Behaviour

- Respectful language, tone and attitude towards others
- Respectful of personal physical and emotional boundaries
- Responding to children to meet the child's needs and not the adult's
- Engaging with children in a manner that would be seen by a reasonable observer as maintaining reasonable boundaries
- Keeping practices open to observation by parents
- Communication with children (including electronic) is transparent and accountable

Examples of Inappropriate Behaviour

- Disrespectful language
- Humiliating or intimidating children
- Inappropriate touching of children (i.e. massaging, stroking, caressing, roughhousing, tickling)
- Confiding or sharing overly personal information with a child
- Asking children to keep secrets
- Electronic communication with children that is personal and not directly tied to coaching duties
- Communication that is sexual or flirtatious
- Pictures taken with personal devices or in change rooms

Standard of Measure for Maintain Appropriate Boundaries

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

- Transparent
- Accountable
- Tied to coaching/volunteering duties
- In response to meeting the child's need

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 sexual abuse, visit commit2kids.ca/safesport.