



Child Protection in Football What Every Coach Needs To Know



Contents

- CHILD PROTECTION AND SPORTS **1**
- DO YOU REMEMBER THAT FIRST MOMENT IN FOOTBALL WHEN YOU ACHIEVED? **3**
- WHO IS A CHILD? **5**
- WHAT IS CHILD PROTECTION? **5**
- WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE? **5**
- WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A FOOTBALL COACH **5**
- WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CHILD ABUSE **7**
- HOW CAN I KNOW IF A CHILD IS BEING ABUSED **8**
- WHAT ARE SOME “DO’S” AND DONT’S OF COACHING –
TO ENSURE CHILDREN ARE PROTECTED **9**
- WATCH YOUR COMMUNICATION **10**
- BULLYING **11**
- LISTENING TO CHILDREN **12**
- HOW CAN YOU HELP THE CHILD WHO WANTS TO DISCLOSE ABUSE TO YOU? **13**
- REPORTING ABUSE **13**
- PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM BEING ACCUSED OF ABUSE **13**
- DEVELOPING YOUR CHILD PROTECTION POLICY **14**

CHILD PROTECTION AND SPORTS

Child protection is the protection of children from abuse, harm or neglect. It is the responsibility of coaches to care for children in such a way that neither they nor others cause harm to children, and to report and record all concerns related to a child being harmed.

The contents of this booklet were adapted from the WICB fair play Cricket and Child Protection Manual (with kind permission of the WICB). Information was also obtained from Safeguarding Children and Young People in Football, Child Protection Policy, Procedures and Implementation Guidance for Grassroots Football produced by FIFA.



DO YOU REMEMBER THAT FIRST MOMENT IN FOOTBALL WHEN YOU ACHIEVED?

Maybe your achievement was scoring your first goal. We know that sports allows children the opportunity to have fun and to develop self-esteem, confidence, leadership and teamwork skills. This can only happen when we all put children's welfare first, and create and develop a culture where individuals are listened to and respected.

Even though sports programmes play a valuable role in the well-being of children, they can also be, if the proper policies and procedures are not in place nor practiced, a place where children are abused, excluded or taken advantage of.

Coaches are in a unique position to be role models and mentors for young participants, but there are also countless stories of coaches misusing their influence and power to take advantage of youth – harassing, manipulating, neglecting and abusing them.

Coaches have a vital role to play in safeguarding children, and will often become the focus for children and their activities. Good coaching is about providing a fun and safe environment in which children can enjoy what may be their first experience of a sport, gain some success and be motivated to want to go on playing.

As a coach, you are in a position to be able to detect signs of abuse that may occur among children in your care. You must also be able to recognise signs of abuse and know what to do when you feel that abuse has taken place. As you work with children on a regular basis, you may be the person a child chooses to talk to about something happening in their life. It is important that you know how to respond to a child in danger, and how to share information appropriately with those who can help.

During the time that children are under your supervision as a coach, it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure that they are protected and not abused by you or others.

Football like any sports, has a remarkably strong and largely positive impact on children and young persons. There is a valid assumption that children will be protected from abuse and injury in the environments we create. This is underpinned by the existence of a moral responsibility to protect young people in any sport.

This booklet has been developed for coaches working with children between the ages of 6 and 18 years.





WHO IS A CHILD?

According to the UN Convention on The Rights of A Child anyone, up until their 18th birthday, is a child.

Even if a child is living independently, has reached the age of 16, is in hospital, or prison, that person is still a child. While this may seem obvious to you, the perception of the age of what constitutes childhood varies widely in the Caribbean.

A study across six caribbean countries in the region in 2009 reported that there is a significant number of people who believe that childhood ends at age 13. Going even further, there are some in the study who believe that once a girl child becomes pregnant she is no longer a child, no matter how old she is.

WHAT IS CHILD PROTECTION?

The term child protection is a broad term that defines the guidelines, procedures, and policies that provide protection for children from both intentional and unintentional harm.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse is any action, or series of actions that lead to harm, the potential for harm, or any threat of harm to a child. Abuse may take several forms.

Abuse includes physical harm, emotional or psychological harm or sexual molestation or exploitation.

Each community has different customs and ways of raising children, so what is considered to be abuse in one country might not be considered to be so in another. In many countries, any physical punishment of children at any age is abusive and against the law. On the other hand, in some cultures in the Caribbean, if parents or adults do not beat a child, it is regarded as neglect! We must begin to realise that even though some practices are culturally acceptable, they may still be harmful to children.

WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A FOOTBALL COACH

Your first job as a coach is to ensure the safety of those children in your care. As a coach, the welfare of the child is paramount. It is your responsibility, to create an environment where children will be safe, protected from harm, discrimination and any treatment that is degrading. The rights and wishes of children must be respected while under your care.

For you to meet these responsibilities, there are some things that you need to know.

- ★ **You must be able to recognise child abuse when it occurs or is reported to you.**
- ★ **You must be able to recognise the signs of child abuse and to respond with appropriate procedures and actions.**
- ★ **You must observe and promote sound practices when working with children.**



OVERUSE

Injury prevention. As a coach, you can prevent injuries that occur as a result of overuse in children. Make sure that the children get enough rest breaks during practices and matches. Do not have the players on the field for extended periods of time. Also, to avoid injury, you must monitor the condition of the field before play or practice. That includes checking such items as the condition of the field; the removal of any debris or other external agents that might pose a threat to the safety of the children, the suitability of the weather for safe play, and any other factor that might impede the safe performance of your coaching responsibilities.



CONDITIONING

Nothing is more effective in preparing for your session with the children than making sure that they are properly prepared for football. Start with about 10 minutes of jogging, jumping jacks or anything that brings the heart rate up gradually. Then stretch all major muscle groups, holding each stretch for 20-30 seconds.



ADVANCE

Planning can help you make sure that you are prepared for any emergencies that might occur on the pitch. Make sure to save all of the parents' contact information in your cell phone. Also, there should be a first aid kit handy, and you should have a plan in place for any medical emergencies.



CHECK

The children often! Observing the physical condition of children while they are playing is an essential step in guaranteeing their safety. In their youthful exuberance, children may not understand the danger of not resting or overworking themselves while they are playing.



HYDRATION

– is critical. Again, in the heat of our beautiful Caribbean, it is always necessary to make sure that children, especially younger children, have enough water. Do not wait for the children to tell you that they are thirsty. Rather, have them drink water at least 30 minutes before you begin training or a match, and then every 15 or 20 minutes thereafter.



EQUIPMENT

Make sure that children have the proper equipment for playing. Ill-fitting or ill-suited equipment can be dangerous!



SAFETY

Training is widely available, both through coursework and the internet. One resource available online is the organisation Safe Kids Worldwide. Their website is safekids.org.

There are a few fundamentals that are useful in guiding you in the correct handling of safety when coaching young children. They are summed up in the acronym C-O-A-C-H-E-S

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CHILD ABUSE

There are four major categories of child abuse:

- ✦ **neglect**
- ✦ **emotional abuse**
- ✦ **physical abuse**
- ✦ **sexual abuse.**

Abuse against children may take place anywhere, and that includes on the field or in the locker room areas. Coaches may unintentionally be engaged in abusive behaviours. Types of abuse against children in sports are:

How can **NEGLECT** occur in sports

- ▶ **Neglect on the playing field includes such acts as the failure to provide a child or children with their basic physical and emotional necessities, harming them or putting them at risk of harm.**
- ▶ **One example of neglect in sport would occur if a team's best player has an injury. Keeping that child on the field playing just to win the game despite the injury is an example of child neglect in sports.**
- ▶ **Other examples of neglect include not ensuring that children have the proper gear and kits necessary for play, not checking the playing field for the safety of children before play begins, or making sure that weather conditions are adequate for the playing of football.**

How can **EMOTIONAL ABUSE** occur in sports

Emotional abuse includes any behaviour that has the effect of psychologically harming children or young persons.

Some of the more common examples that we find in football include:

- ▶ **Forcing a child to participate in a sport**
- ▶ **Not speaking to a child after he/she plays poorly in a game or in practice**
- ▶ **Asking a child why he/she played poorly when it meant so much to you**
- ▶ **Hitting a child when his/her play disappoints**
- ▶ **Yelling at a child for not playing well or for losing**
- ▶ **Giving a child a negative nickname based on their play**
- ▶ **Punishing a child for not playing well or for losing**



- ▶ Criticising, cursing and/or ridiculing a child for his/her performance or for his or her physique (“that boy too fat to play”)

How can PHYSICAL ABUSE occur in sports

- ▶ Physical abuse in sports occurs when there is non-accidental injury and/or harm to a child or young person, caused by another person such as a parent, care-giver, coach or even an older child
- ▶ For example, physically punishing a young person for losing a game by hitting, throwing equipment, pushing or shoving are all examples of physical abuse

How can SEXUAL ABUSE occur in sports

- ▶ Sexual abuse of children includes any sexual act or sexual threat, intimidation or coercion imposed on a child
- ▶ Sexual abuse may include Inappropriate touching/fondling during coaching.
- ▶ Exposing a child to pornography or sexually explicit materials (e.g. during social events)
- ▶ Sex-ting
- ▶ Showing a child private parts or asking to see his/her private parts
- ▶ Using sexually inappropriate language to a child

HOW CAN I KNOW IF A CHILD IS BEING ABUSED

There are several signs that may indicate that a child is the victim of child abuse. It is important to remember that even though a child could be displaying some or all of these signs, this doesn't necessarily mean the child is being abused.

As a coach, if you see signs in a child that are worrying, it is not your responsibility to decide if it is abuse, but it is your responsibility to act on your concerns and do something about it.

Some signs of abuse are:

- ✦ Unexplained bruising or injuries
- ✦ Sudden changes in behaviour
- ✦ Something a child has said
- ✦ A change in the child that is observed over a long period of time (eg. losing weight, becoming increasingly dirty)



WHAT ARE SOME “DO’S” AND DONT’S OF COACHING TO ENSURE CHILDREN ARE PROTECTED

THE “DO’S” OF COACHING CHILDREN

There are a series of good practices that, as a coach, you should use to ensure that children have a safe environment to play the sport. As a coach, you are responsible for making sure that the sport is fun and enjoyable and you must, at all times, promote fair play.

Non-Discrimination

Your responsibility includes treating all children equally, with respect, dignity, and fairness. You must build healthy relationships based on mutual trust. That means including children in the decision-making process of competition wherever possible.

Best Interest of the Child comes first

It is essential that you put the welfare of each child ahead of “winning”. That may seem like an anomaly in a culture where “winning isn’t everything, it is the only thing”, as American National Football League coach Vince Lombardi once said, but when it comes to protecting children at play, we must evolve beyond that thinking as a society.

Give enthusiastic and constructive feedback

You must also begin to give enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism. Many coaches operate under the theory that they aren’t impressing the importance of correct technique or good play on children unless they are yelling and screaming – harshly criticising mistakes. That’s wrong!

COACHING “DO’S”

- ▶ DO put the welfare of each child ahead of “winning”.
- ▶ DO give enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- ▶ DO avoid pushing children against their will and putting undue pressure on them.
- ▶ DO take into account the environmental condition of the grounds and the pitch, including weather.
- ▶ DO avoid being with a child (male or female) in an isolated or unobserved situation.
- ▶ DO set boundaries between coaches and children that may not be crossed.
- ▶ DO recognise the different developmental needs and the capacity of children.
- ▶ DO make sure that if mixed sex teams travel, they are always accompanied by a male and female chaperone.
- ▶ DO make sure you never enter a child’s room or invite them into your room when travelling.
- ▶ DO ascertain whether children you are coaching have any medical conditions that might impact on their play.



COACHING “DONT’S”

- ▶ Spend excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others.
- ▶ Take or drop off a child at an event.
- ▶ Take children to your home or transport them by car, where they will be alone with you.
- ▶ Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games.
- ▶ Share a room with a child.
- ▶ Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching or physical abuse.
- ▶ Take part in, or tolerate, behaviour that frightens, embarrasses or demoralises a footballer or affects their self esteem.
- ▶ Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- ▶ Make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun.
- ▶ Make a child cry as a form of control.
- ▶ Allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or ignored.
- ▶ Do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves.
- ▶ Shower with a child.

Avoid excessive training and competition

Avoid excessive training and competition - pushing children against their will and putting undue pressure on them. This involves recognising the unique needs and abilities of children, avoiding too much training or competition, and not pushing them against their will.

Take into account the environmental condition

As a coach, you must also take into account the environmental condition under which the sport is being played among children. Your responsibilities include encouraging the children to wear loose, lightweight, light-coloured clothing made from a natural fibre (for example, cotton).

Also be sure to avoid intense activity in hot or humid conditions, and monitor participants carefully for signs of heat illness. Help the children avoid sunburn by encouraging them to slip on a t-shirt, slap on some sunscreen (even among darker-skinned children!) and put on a hat, and encourage participants to drink plenty of fluid before the activity begins and schedule regular drink breaks during the activity (at least every 30 minutes).

THE “DONT’S” OF COACHING CHILDREN

Watch Your Communication

Coaches, as a rule, should never contact a child without the knowledge or presence of the child’s parent(s) or guardian(s). This includes inappropriate telephone calls, text messages, internet communication (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or meetings with children away from the grounds. Whenever possible, you must involve parents or caregivers in the design and execution of your football programmes.

Do not tolerate any acts of aggression

As a coach, it is your responsibility to not tolerate any acts of aggression. You should also practice giving positive and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.

Do not put yourself in situations where you are vulnerable to accusations of abuse

Other practices to avoid when coaching children include spending an excessive amount of time with children away from other children or adults; putting yourself in situations where you are vulnerable to accusations of abuse such as taking a lone child to an event or home after an event by yourself; becoming involved in physically or sexually provocative games with a child; sharing a room on the road with a child; take part in any inappropriate touching of a child; embarrassing or frightening a child; allowing children to curse or use abusive language or making sexually suggestive comments to a child, even if it is done as “a joke” or “in fun”.

Be sure that you don’t try to make any child cry as a way to exercise control over them. When a child asks you to do something, make sure it is something that they aren’t able to do for themselves. Older children, especially, may use this as an attempt to endear themselves in inappropriate ways to coaches.

Travelling with children’s teams also create opportunities for abuse to occur that coaches must avoid. Do we need to mention that while on the road you should never shower with a child?



BULLYING

What is Bullying?

Bullying is the use of aggressive behaviour with the intention of hurting another person either physically or emotionally.

Studies have shown that children who are bullied during their early years are up to three times more likely to harm themselves than their peers when they reach adolescence. Half of 12-year-olds who harm themselves were frequently bullied.

Sports and Bullying

As a coach you must take bullying seriously. Children and parents should be assured they will be supported when bullying is reported, and bullying will not be tolerated.

Recognising Signs of Bullying

A child may express the fact that they are being bullied through their behaviour. Coaches and other adults working in the football programme should be aware of signs and investigate if a child:

- ✦ Says they are being bullied
- ✦ Changes their usual routine
- ✦ Is unwilling to go to the programme
- ✦ Becomes withdrawn anxious, or lacking in confidence
- ✦ Comes to practice or matches with clothes torn or belongings damaged
- ✦ Has possessions which are damaged or go missing
- ✦ Asks for money or starts stealing money (to pay the bully).

Procedures to Follow When Bullying Occurs

You should always report incidents to the relevant persons in your organisation. Parents should be informed and should be asked to come to a meeting to discuss the problem. This includes the parents of the child being bullied, as well as the bully, if applicable.

The bullying behaviour or threats of bullying must be investigated and the bullying stopped quickly, and attempts must be made to help the bully or bullies change their behaviour.

TYPES OF BULLYING

Verbal:

name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours and teasing

Emotional:

being unfriendly, excluding, tormenting (for example: hiding kit, or making threatening gestures).

Physical:

pushing, kicking, hitting, punching or any use of violence.

Racist:

racial taunts or gestures

Sexual:

unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments.

Homophobic:

because of, or focusing on, the issue of sexuality.

Cyber-bullying:

All areas of the internet, such as email and internet chatrooms. Cyber-bullying also includes mobile threats by text message and/or calls or the misuse of associated technology, such as cameras – both still and videos. Examples of this can be the posting of unflattering photos or videos online.

LISTENING TO CHILDREN.

Children Should Be Seen and not Heard.

How often have you heard that said? As a coach working with children, forget you ever heard it! As their coach, children will look up to you. If a child decides to talk to you about abuse, you need to listen, and you need to know what to do. You also need to understand your duty of care towards young footballers. This will protect the children you coach and reduce the potential for misunderstandings and inappropriate allegations being made.

One of your most important roles as a coach is listening to the children with whom you work. This is never truer than when a child claims that they have been abused either physically, emotionally, sexually or that they have been neglected.

LISTENING “DO’s”

- ▶ DO be accessible and receptive.
- ▶ DO listen carefully and uncritically, at the child’s pace.
- ▶ DO take what is said seriously.
- ▶ DO reassure children that they are right to tell.
- ▶ DO tell the child that you must pass this information on.
- ▶ DO make sure that the child is ok.
- ▶ DO make a careful record of what was said.

LISTENING “DONT’s”

- ▶ DON’T investigate or seek to prove or disprove possible abuse.
- ▶ DON’T Make promises about confidentiality or keeping ‘secrets’ to children.
- ▶ DON’T Assume that someone else will take the necessary action.
- ▶ DON’T jump to conclusions, be dismissive or react with shock, anger, horror etc.
- ▶ DON’T speculate or accuse anybody.
- ▶ DON’T investigate, suggest or probe for information.
- ▶ DON’T confront another person (adult or child) allegedly involved.
- ▶ DON’T offer opinions about what is being said or the persons allegedly involved.
- ▶ DON’T forget to record what you have been told.
- ▶ DON’T fail to pass this information on to the correct person (the Child Protection Officer or other designated person).



HOW CAN YOU HELP THE CHILD WHO WANTS TO DISCLOSE ABUSE TO YOU?

You can help a child making a disclosure by listening; saying that you believe what the child has said; emphasising that, no matter what happened, it was not the child's fault; doing everything you can to provide help and comfort. You will not be helping the student if you:

- ✦ **Question the student to get more information than they are willing to reveal when you have reasonable grounds to believe abuse is occurring. Don't try to obtain more details beyond those the child freely wants to tell you.**

Do not make promises you cannot keep, such as promising that you won't tell anyone or promising the child that because they have confided in you, the abuse will stop.

REPORTING ABUSE

You should report any case of abuse that is reported to you as a coach, or that you witness. The lines of reporting depend on the procedures established within your individual programme.

If your programme has appointed a Child Protection Officer, this is the person to whom you should report any abuse. If there is no Child Protection Officer, then you should report the incident to the relevant authorities in your country.

PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM BEING ACCUSED OF ABUSE

- ✦ **Always work in an Open environment**
- ✦ **One of the most important things that you as a coach can do to ensure that you are protected from the suspicion or allegations of child abuse is to always work in an open environment, wherever possible. Avoid being with a child (male or female) in an isolated or unobserved situation.**
- ✦ **Set Boundaries**

Your diligence in protecting children and yourself goes beyond what happens on the football field or even during practice sessions. Boundaries must be set between coaches and children that may not be crossed. An example of this is communication away from the football grounds.

Very often, children will mimic the behaviours of their elders, especially those they look up to. Therefore, you must become an excellent role model for them. Of course, it goes without saying that includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of children.

- ✦ **Recognise children develop at different rates**

You must begin to recognise the developmental needs and the capacity of children in your care. Not all children have the same ability, nor do they learn at the



same pace. Your responsibility is to understand and respect those differences, not criticise.

✦ **Be Safe while on Tours**

If you are involved in travel with a children's football programme team, ensure that if mixed sex teams are taken away, they are always accompanied by a male and female chaperone. Also, while on tour, you should never enter a child's room or invite them into your room – except in an emergency, i.e. when very unwell.

Know if medical conditions aggravated by sports

Find out if any children you are coaching have medical conditions that could be aggravated during playing or training, and keep a written record any time a child is injured in your care, along with details of any treatment provided.

DEVELOPING YOUR CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Every Club or organisation should develop a child protection policy. The purpose of this policy is to lay down a set of principles, standards and guidelines that relate to the following individual and group practices:

- ✦ **creating an environment within the programme that is both 'child safe' and 'child friendly' when it comes to protection against all types of abuse and the safety of the environment,**
- ✦ **the prevention of abuse,**
- ✦ **the issues of the recruitment and training of personnel who work with children in the Programme,**
- ✦ **guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour / attitude,**
- ✦ **guidelines for communications regarding children,**
- ✦ **recognising, reporting and reacting to allegations of abuse,**
- ✦ **the ramifications of misconduct for those who disregard or fail to follow the policy.**

The Child Protection Policy must encompass all aspects of child protection including health and safety measures to be put in place; disciplinary measures to be imposed; physical harm; working with information about children, proper recruitment and managerial procedures, and the extent of measures put in place in the event of misconduct.







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