

Best Practice

In keeping children and young people at the forefront of planning and practice, coaches can be confident that participants will enjoy their football experiences and that their actions are regarded as safe and in keeping with the principle that the welfare of children is of paramount consideration.

Coaches are given a position of trust by parents/guardians and players, and should show the highest standards of behaviour whilst in the company of under age players. It is important that coaches follow an agreed code of good practice and parents/club officials are satisfied that coaches are suitable to lead the activities undertaken. The comprehensive Code of Ethics & Best Practice guidelines is available on our website at www.fai.ie It is important to note that in adhering to these guidelines we ensure not only a safe environment for children but also a safe environment in which coaches and volunteers can operate.

Coaches/volunteers should never:

- Exert undue influence over a participant in order to obtain personal benefit or reward.
- Share a room with a young person alone on away trips.
- Engage in rough physical games, sexually provocative games or allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any kind, and/or make sexually suggestive comments about or to a child.
- Use any form of corporal punishment or physical force on a young person.
- Take measurements or engage in certain types of fitness testing without the presence of another adult.
- Undertake any form of therapy (hypnosis etc.) in the training of young people.

Most coaches work in an environment where it is recognised that, in a sporting context, certain types of coaching require a 'hands on approach', i.e., it may be necessary to support a participant in order to physically demonstrate a particular technique. This should only occur when necessary and in an open and appropriate way with the knowledge, permission and full understanding of the participant concerned and his/her parents/guardians.

Coaches must realise that certain situations or friendly actions could be misinterpreted, not only by the player, but by outsiders motivated by jealousy, dislike or mistrust and could lead to allegations of sexual misconduct or impropriety. Therefore coaches should be aware of, and avoid all situations conducive to risk.

Where possible, coaches/volunteers should avoid:

- Spending excessive amounts of time with children away from others.
- Taking sessions alone (always employ "Two Deep" supervision).
- Taking children to their homes.
- Taking children on journeys alone in their care.

Safety

Coaches have a responsibility to ensure the safety of the players with whom they work as far as possible within the limits of their control. Therefore, coaches should seek to create a safe and enjoyable environment in which to play and train.

In this respect:

- Regular safety checks should be carried out in relation to premises, training facilities and equipment.
- Appropriate safety rules should be adopted and implemented.
- Parents/guardians should be informed of the starting and finishing times of training sessions and matches.
- A first aid kit should be available at all training sessions /matches and injuries should be recorded, with a note of action taken in relation to each one. Never play injured players.
- Parents/Guardians should be notified of injuries/illness which their children incur while participating in any football activity a positive approach to the involvement of children in sport.

FAI Ireland has amended its rules to include a child protection element in line with Children First (Department of Health & Children), the Irish Sports Council's Code of Ethics & Good Practice and relevant recent child welfare legislation. Specifically coaches/volunteers are required to operate within these recommended codes of conduct and best practice. The complete code of conduct for coaches is posted at

Sport for young people is about Fun and Participation,
Best Effort and Fair Play in a Safe Environment"

In promoting "Sport for Fun" coaches should:

- Encourage participation and fun.
- Promote the development of skills as opposed to winning at all costs.
- Emphasise and praise effort.
- Act as a good role model.
- Actively discourage children/young players from abusing referees, officials, team mates or opponents (take off offending players).
- Insist on FAIR PLAY (take off offending players).
- Be realistic with your expectations.
- Be aware of children's feelings.
- Teach players to respect different cultures.

Children in Football are entitled to:

- Be safe.
- Be treated with dignity, sensitivity and respect.
- Participate in football on an equal basis, appropriate to their ability and stage of development.
- Be happy, have fun and enjoy football.
- Make a complaint in an appropriate way and have it dealt with through a proper and effective complaints procedure.
- Be afforded appropriate confidentiality.
- Be listened to and to be believed.
- Have a voice in the running of the club.

Children should also be encouraged to realise that they also have responsibilities to treat other children, fellow players, referees, coaches and volunteers with the same degree of fairness and respect.

In this regard children should undertake to:

- Play fairly, do their best and have fun.
- Make high standards of Fair Play the standard others want to follow.
- Respect opponents, they are not the enemy; they are partners in a sporting event.
- Shake hands before and after the match, whoever wins.
- Give opponents a hand if they are injured, put the ball out of play so they can get attention.

- Accept apologies from opponents when they are offered.
- Respect fellow team members and support them both when they do well and when things go wrong.
- Treat players from minority groups with the same respect you show other people.
- Be modest in victory and be gracious in defeat **"BE A SPORT"**.
- Approach the club Children's Officer with any questions or concerns they might have. Coaches and parents should encourage children to speak out and support them in doing so.

Children should not:

- Cheat.
- Use abusive language, or argue with, the referee, officials, team mates or opponents.
- Use violence, use physical contact only when it is allowed within the rules.
- Bully.
- Tell lies about adults or other children.
- Spread rumours.
- Take banned substances to improve performance.
- Keep secrets about any person who may have caused them harm.

Responsibility to Report

Any person, who has concerns about a child's welfare or who suspects that a child is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, has a responsibility to report their concerns to the Health Board or Gardai.

Persons unsure about whether or not certain behaviours are abusive and therefore reportable are advised that they can seek advice from the duty social worker in their local health board area where they will receive appropriate advice.

In cases of emergency where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the duty social worker is not contactable, call the Gardai.

Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities.

All clubs should have clear procedures for responding to reports or concerns relating to the safety and welfare of children. Coaches/volunteers, children and parents/guardians should be aware of how and to whom they report concerns within the club or organisation.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are often given to children for security, enabling parents to keep in touch and make sure they are safe.

However such technology has also allowed an increase in direct personal contact with young people, in some cases used to cross personal boundaries and cause harm. Within clubs there is a need to encourage responsible and secure use of mobile phones.

In this respect Coaches are advised to:

- Use group texts for communication among players and teams and inform parents of this at the start of the season
- It is not appropriate to have constant communication for individual players
- Don't use the phone in certain locations; inappropriate use of your camera phone may cause upset or offence to another person, e.g. changing rooms

Guide for Parents / Guardians

Parents/guardians play an important role in promoting children's happiness and success in football and sport in general. Parental expectations and behaviour have a significant bearing on children's attitude and behaviour while participating in football. Parents/guardians need to be aware of why children want to play football. Children want to learn new skills, make new friends, be part of a group, to win and be successful, experience challenges, excitement and action. While winning is important, it must be remembered that winning at all costs does not meet the needs of players. Results are not necessarily a good indicator of coaching effectiveness or ability, the improvement level of players and their level of enjoyment is.

Code of Conduct for Spectators

- Remember that although children play organised soccer they are not miniature professionals. Don't place excessive pressure on children to perform to unrealistically high expectations. Children play soccer to develop their skills, to have fun and enjoy the game.
- Be on your best behaviour and lead by example. The behaviour of a team's supporters will often be remembered long after the result of the game. Be remembered for the right reasons.
- Applaud good play, sportsmanship and best effort by the visiting team as well as your own.
- Welcome and respect all your teams opponents. Without them there would be no match.
- Condemn the use of violence in all forms at every opportunity.
- Verbal abuse of players, match officials or opposing supporters cannot be accepted in any shape or form. Players or match officials should never be regarded as fair targets for ignorant or abusive behaviour.