

Child Protection: The Basics

It's a sad fact that many children are abused sexually, emotionally or physically. Often, the person committing the abuse isn't even aware that what they've done is wrong.

As a soccer coach you are in a unique position to spot any signs of abuse among your children. It is vital, therefore, that you are able to recognize the signs of abuse and know what to do if you suspect anything untoward.

You also have a responsibility not to abuse the children in your care by bullying or criticizing them in front of their peers. You must also make sure that you do not expose your children to extremes of weather, leave your children unsupervised, tell them to 'get on with it!' when they have been injured or train them in an over intense way or in a way inappropriate to their age.

All these are forms of child abuse.

Your club should have a Child Welfare Officer (CWO) whose job it is to brief the club coaches about their responsibilities in this area. But if you are either working on your own or within a club that has no CWO you'll have to teach yourself about this important and sensitive subject.

There are a lot of resources and advice available. I strongly advise you to go on a course or - as a minimum - research the subject on the internet because your prime duty is to safeguard the children in your care.

A few tips:

You must:

- Treat all players and children with respect and dignity befitting of their age;
- Watch your language, tone of voice and where you put your body.

You must not:

- Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games including horseplay;
- Coach children on your own;
- Allow or engage in inappropriate or intrusive touching of any kind;
- Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged;
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in "fun";
- Let allegations a child makes go unchallenged or unrecorded;
- Invade the privacy of children when they are changing, showering or going to the toilet;
- Doing things of a personal nature that children can do for themselves. e.g. help with changing;
- Spend excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others;
- Take children alone on car journeys, however short;
- Take children to your home.

As a soccer coach you hold a position of trust and should never put yourself in a situation where that trust might be questioned.