

The parent's role in preventing inappropriate behaviour

Parents of a child who plays sport may help prevent inappropriate behaviour, harassment, and violence against their child in sport. For example, parents can help by ensuring their child joins a safe sports club, supporting them in their hobby, and teaching them about their right to self-determination and safety skills.

1. Choose a safe sports club

- A sports club should have clear, well-communicated rules to protect children and young people from maltreatment. These rules should be available to parents on request.
- Adults working with children should have clear policies on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour within the club. As a parent, you can ask about the club's policies for working with children. Examples of matters that the club should consider when developing these policies can be found in the 'You are not alone' service's model rules for coaches.
- Each training group should have rules for children, which can be developed together with them. Talk with your child about these rules and what they mean.
- The club must have a designated person responsible for investigating cases of inappropriate behaviour. If any problems occur, find out who the club's contact person is.
- The club should also have established procedures for investigating inappropriate behaviour or addressing bullying. Feel free to ask the club how they handle bullying or other inappropriate behaviour.
- The club must check the criminal records of all adults working with children if their employment lasts more than three months. The 'You are not alone' service also recommends criminal record extract checks for volunteer adults working with children.
- The club should actively communicate about preventing violence and inappropriate behaviour. Parents' evenings should address child safety and explain how to act if a child experiences any inappropriate behaviour in club activities.

2. Be supportive of your child's hobby: show interest, offer support, and listen

Every child or young person is the expert in their own experiences and has their own motivations and goals in their hobby. These may differ from yours, so take this into account in your discussions, respect their motivations, and allow them to set their own goals. Show interest in your child's or young person's hobby by asking how practice went and letting them share their experiences. Be present and attentive to what is happening in their life. A child or young person may not always want to talk, but it is important for them to know they can come to you if something is troubling them.

Encourage your child or young person in their hobby, and help them learn to appreciate and respect others and their opinions while fostering a positive team spirit. Encourage them to stand up for others and to seek adult help when needed. Remember that your attitude and the way you speak have a strong influence on them.

Give positive feedback on what your child or young person does well and encourage them if they wish to improve in certain areas. Ensure they also have enough time outside of their hobby for rest, recovery, and spending time with friends.

3. Support your child's right to self-determination

Explain the Rights of the Child

The Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, are legally binding on states that are party to the Convention. This Convention requires everyone to consider human rights from the child's perspective. Sports clubs have a responsibility to ensure that the rights of children and young people are respected in their activities. It is advisable to discuss these rights with your child or young person and to remind them that these rights apply to everyone, including themselves in their own behaviour. At a minimum, discuss the following rights relevant to hobbies with your child.

The right to psychological integrity

- Children and young people have the right to be treated with respect. They must not be belittled, shouted at, threatened, or humiliated under any circumstances. No one should have to tolerate racist or discriminatory language.
- Everyone has the right to equal treatment also during practice.
- Sexual and gender-based harassment is prohibited.

- Sexual harassment may include, for example:
 - inappropriate sexually motivated talk, such as jokes or sexually suggestive remarks or questions about a person's body or intimate life sexually suggestive gestures or expressions
 - sharing inappropriate sexual content via social media, WhatsApp, Snapchat, text messages, email, or phone calls
 - suggestions or demands for sexual intercourse or other sexual acts
- Gender-based harassment may include, for example:
 - degrading comments about a person's gender
 - belittling someone because of their gender
 - bullying based on gender

Everyone has the right to enjoy their hobby in peace, free from sexual or gender-based harassment. Everyone also has the right to express their gender as they wish; there is no single way to be a boy or a girl, and no sport is intended for only boys or girls. Everyone also has the right to define their own gender – or not to define it at all.

The right to physical integrity

Sexual self-determination means that every person has the right to bodily integrity, to set their own boundaries, and to live free from violence, regardless of gender, gender expression, or sexuality. Among young people, sexual self-determination may be violated through, for example, unwanted touching, inappropriate messages, verbal harassment, unequal dating relationships, or sexual violence. The right to sexual self-determination means that children have the right to decide who may touch their body. No one may touch another person without consent.

Explain what physical contact is part of the hobby

Physical contact in the hobby must always be based on the child's needs, such as providing guidance and assistance, offering encouragement in an appropriate way, or giving comfort. A child has the right to refuse physical contact at any time, except where refusal would put their safety at risk. Adults should protect the physical integrity of young people and intervene immediately if it is violated.

The instructor should explain and clearly verbalise any physical contact that is part of the sport. Parents can also talk with their child about the instructor's physical contact, for example when assistance is needed for learning or safety. You can practise with your child how to tell an instructor if a touch feels uncomfortable.

It is advisable to discuss the difference between appropriate and inappropriate physical contact. Appropriate contact may include comforting hugs or pats on the back, or high-fives to celebrate success. An inappropriate contact is contact that cannot be refused or feels unpleasant, strange, or painful. Talking about this helps children recognise when their boundaries are crossed and gives them the confidence to defend themselves and tell someone if something is wrong.

Tell your child about ages of consent

The Finnish Criminal Code sets two ages of consent, 16 and 18. Children should be informed about these age limits in an age-appropriate way.

- The law prohibits sexually motivated acts involving anyone under the age of 16, as children under 16 are considered to need special protection in their sexual, mental, and overall development.
- The 18-year age of consent protects children and young people from sexual activity within the family, in relationships of trust, or with someone in a position of authority. A person in such a relationship with a young person must not engage in any sexual activity with anyone under the age of 18. A person in a relationship of trust or a position of authority may include, for example, a child's or young person's teacher or coach.
- Consensual sexual activity is not punishable if it occurs between minors of a similar age and at a similar level of physical and mental development.

It is advisable to discuss with your young person that they should immediately tell a trusted adult about sexualised behaviour from an adult. Sexually motivated attention from an adult can make the young person feel embarrassed and guilty, but you should emphasise that it is never their fault. The following acts may constitute criminal offences when the victim is a child or young person under 16:

- inappropriate sexual talk, such as jokes or sexually suggestive questions or remarks about a person's body or intimate life
- sexually suggestive expressions or gestures, for example miming masturbation
- sharing inappropriate sexual content via social media, WhatsApp, Snapchat or other messages, text messages, emails, or phone calls
- suggestions or demands regarding sex, sexual intercourse or other sexual acts
- luring a child or young person to watch pornography, masturbation, intercourse, or sexual activity
- telling about sexually charged events or suggesting intercourse, sex or other sexual acts

- encouraging a child to behave in a sexually explicit way, such as touching or caressing intimate areas, while being observed by the perpetrator (including via webcam), or the perpetrator showing their genitals to the child (including via webcam)
- touching a child's or young person's body in areas typically regarded as sexually relevant, such as breasts, genitals, buttocks, or thighs, or kissing

4. Teach safety skills

Children's right to self-determination is strengthened through safety skills. Teaching young people these skills helps strengthen their own resources, deepen their understanding of sexual rights, and build emotional skills. These skills help prevent children from being subjected to bullying, violence, or harassment, and enable them to act and protect their boundaries if such situations arise. Learning to respect other people's boundaries is also an essential part of safety skills. Discussing safety skills at home helps children understand them and gain the confidence to set their own boundaries in different situations.

When talking about safety skills with your child, consider the following themes, depending on their age:

- Encourage your child or young person to express their own needs, wishes, and boundaries, and to respect those of others. Explore a range of emotions with your child or young person, such as feelings of love and attraction, insecurity, shame, jealousy, and fear. You can also talk with them about the differences between friendship, love, and passion, and help them accept that people feel differently in different situations.
- Encourage your young person to make responsible decisions and informed choices about their sexual behaviour. They should have basic knowledge of hygiene and contraception, as well as where to find help and additional information. Address sexuality also in a positive way (its impact on well-being and health), and encourage your young person to ask questions and share concerns.
- Encourage your young person to ask for help and support when facing difficulties. Together, discuss where they can get help, and reassure them that they can always talk to you.
- Support your young person in recognising and managing high-risk situations. Explain sexual harassment, sexual violence, and the importance of seeking help. You can also discuss factors that can increase risky behaviour (for example alcohol, peer pressure, or bullying). Always emphasise that the responsibility lies with the perpetrator.

Explain the three-point rule to your child. They need to know what to do if something, an event, or touch makes them feel uncomfortable.

- **Say no.** Teach your child to say no firmly. Although it can be challenging, they have the right to say no if they feel uneasy about a situation. Also teach your child how to respond when someone says no to them.
- **Leave the situation.** Your child has the right to leave a situation, close a website, or block people on social media without needing permission or giving prior warning. They have the right to do this if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe. This is not unfriendly behaviour – it is a safety skill.
- **Tell a trusted adult.** You and your child can plan in advance who the trusted and safe adults in their life are, so they know whom to turn to with even about difficult issues. Discussing this beforehand makes it easier for them to reach out when needed.

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