

Coach/Athlete and the Importance of Appropriate Boundaries

(adapted from Commit to Kids)

Healthy relationships between adults and children are key to a child's sense of safety and security. Children rely upon the guidance and judgment of adults to keep them safe. They are also vulnerable within the dynamics of the adult-child relationship given the imbalance of power in favour of the adult within the relationship. Consider what healthy boundaries are and know how to recognize interactions that cross the line. Remember, it is always up to adults to establish and maintain (regularly re-establish) boundaries with children.

Concerning adult behaviour to pay attention to:

- Repeated use of poor judgment when interacting with children
- Normalizing or minimizing inappropriate interactions with children
- Distorting relationships with children (i.e. using children to meet their own emotional needs)
- Frequently initiating or creating opportunities to have exclusive time alone with a child (or certain children)
- Making others feel uncomfortable by ignoring social, emotional, or physical boundaries or limits with children
- Refusing to let a child set her/his own limits (e.g. may use teasing or belittling language to keep a child from setting limits)
- Excessive touching, hugging, kissing, tickling, wrestling with or holding a child
- Frequently making sexual references or telling sexual or suggestive jokes with children present
- Exposing children to adult sexual interactions without apparent concern
- Encouraging children to behave sexually towards each other
- Giving special attention to certain children
- Displaying favouritism towards certain children
- Displaying preferences for children of a certain age and gender

The following are examples of behaviours that may be inappropriate and warrant reporting:

1. Communication by adults working or volunteering with children that goes beyond their role with your child and/or is not occurring within the context of their employment/volunteer duties and responsibilities, including:
 - Writing personal letters or text messages to your child
 - Making personal phone calls to your child
 - Having personal Internet exchanges with your child (e.g. email, instant messaging, chatrooms, social networking, etc.)

- Sending personalized gifts to your child

Note: It is not misconduct to give a contextually appropriate thank you card, seasonal card, or other nominal gift to a child, where such a gesture would be considered reasonable in the circumstances. All gestures taken together should not be excessive in number and any such exchanges should be carried out within the child-serving organization environment, in the presence of others, and with the knowledge of the organization.

2. Inappropriate interactions with your child that go beyond the individual's role with your child, including:
 - Offering unauthorized personal rides to your child
 - Spending time with your child outside of designated work times and activities except when such activity has been disclosed to and approved by the parent and the organization in advance
 - Favouring your child and giving her/him personalized gifts
 - Inappropriate physical boundaries, touch and sexualized behaviours
 - Telling sexual jokes to your child
 - Showing your child sexually explicit or sexist material (signs, cartoons, calendars, literature, photographs, etc.) or displaying such material in plain view
 - Taking pictures of your child, except when specifically requested to do so by the organization and provided that only cameras owned or under the control of the organization are used to take such pictures

Note: An adult working with your child should not use her/his cellular phone or personal camera to take pictures of a child, nor upload or copy any pictures s/he may have taken of a child to the Internet or to any personal storage device without signed parental permission.
3. Behaviour that would be concerning to anyone who witnessed it.
4. Behaviour that embarrasses, humiliates or shames your child.
5. Physical contact with your child that makes her/him feel uncomfortable, violates reasonable boundaries, or is not appropriate for the context of the situation.
6. Inappropriate boundaries between an adult and your child, sexualized behaviours (e.g. sexual talk, leering, flirting) or touching that make the child and/or others feel uncomfortable.