



## Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Children in Sport

Sport offers incredible experiences and opportunities for children. These experiences are integral to enhancing child development. Positive experiences are tied to healthy relationships between athletes and coaches, as well as to safe environments where adults are accountable for their actions and behaviours. As such, the purpose of these guidelines is to establish a common understanding of expectations for adults interacting with children in sport, and a sense of safety for those who need to bring forward any concerns of misconduct towards children.

*For the purpose of this document "a coach or adult" refers to any person working, volunteering or otherwise interacting with children in sport. "Children" refers to anyone under 18 years old.*

*This document does not address every situation nor is it meant to be an exhaustive list of acceptable or unacceptable conduct. It is meant to provide a framework within sport in which individuals are expected to exercise common sense and good judgment when interacting with children.*

### The Coach and Athlete Relationship

Generally, coaches are in a position of trust, and it's through professional boundaries that this foundation of trust between coaches and athletes is built. If boundaries are broken, that pillar of the relationship crumbles.

The coach and athlete relationship is also characterized by a power imbalance in favour of the coach. Athletes are taught to respect and listen to their coaches, and they are dependent upon the coach's knowledge and training to further develop their skills.

Both trust and power can be used to breach the coach-athlete relationship, and often this happens through boundary violations, which occur when the adult places their needs above the needs of the child and gains personally or professionally at the child's expense.

The responsibility is always with the adult to establish and maintain an appropriate boundaries with children.



#### Age of Protection in Canada

The age of protection (also called the age of consent) is the age at which a young person can legally consent to sexual activity. The age of protection in Canada is generally 16 years old, but the *Criminal Code* increases that age to 18 in the context of certain relationships, if the child is:


Under 12 years old	No person can engage in sexual activity with the child under any circumstance.
12 or 13 years old	The age difference must be <b>LESS THAN 2 years</b> AND the relative positions of the parties must be such that a child is able to give consent.*
14 or 15 years old	The age difference must be <b>LESS THAN 5 years</b> AND the relative positions of the parties must be such that a child is able to give consent..
16 or 17 years old	The relative positions of the parties must be such that a child is able to give consent.*


**For all children aged 12-17: If the other person is in a position of trust or authority over the child (e.g., a coach, teacher, etc.), the child is dependent on the other person or the relationship is exploitative of the child, the child is NOT able to give consent, making sexual activity in the context of such relationships illegal. In these situations, only a person aged 18 or older is capable of consent. The increased age takes into account the inherent vulnerability of the child and is meant to protect the child in situations that involve a power or other imbalance.**

# INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT


## STEPS FOR REPORTING:


This card is a component of the Commit to Kids® program. It is intended as a quick reference for use in a sporting environment and is not meant to be exhaustive or to replace legal advice. Users are strongly encouraged to consult with any or all of child welfare, law enforcement and legal counsel as appropriate to a given situation.


**1**  A child **discloses information or information is discovered** indicating that a coach/volunteer may have acted inappropriately. (Document)


**2**  Coach who receives the report **notifies the supervisor/manager**. (Document)


**3**  Manager **notifies the head** of the organization.


**4**  **Consultation** between the manager and head of the organization to decide if concern is warranted. (Document)


**5**  If warranted, meet with accused coach/volunteer to **discuss allegations and concerns**. The individual is told about the complaint without disclosing the source. The individual is asked to respond to the allegation. (Document)

**6**  If the head of the organization determines that the nature of the conduct is not sufficiently serious to warrant formal action, the organization may choose to **clarify expectations** with the coach/volunteer as outlined in the Code of Conduct to Protect Children. (Document)

 As part of any investigation or internal follow-up process, an organization should **critically assess the adequacy of existing child protection policies** and practices in light of concerns raised. If needed, strengthen policies and practices to better protect children.

 **NOTE: Consider when/if the child's parents should be notified about allegations of inappropriate conduct.**


**7**  If the head of the organization determines that the nature of the conduct is sufficiently serious to warrant action, an **internal follow-up** takes place. (Document)


**8**  Organization conducts an internal follow up. (Document)  
**OUTCOME OF FOLLOW-UP:**

**A) Inappropriate conduct is not substantiated.** Follow internal policies. No further action necessary but organization may choose to take the opportunity to remind all coaches/volunteers of the Code of Conduct to Protect Children.

**B) Inappropriate conduct is substantiated.** Next steps will depend on severity of the conduct, the nature of the information gathered during internal follow-up, and other relevant circumstances (such as past inappropriate conduct of a similar nature). Varying levels of disciplinary action may be appropriate. For example, it may be prudent for an organization to report concerns to child welfare or law enforcement.

**C) Inconclusive.** Next steps will need to be carefully considered and depend on the nature of the information gathered during the internal follow-up. Work through options, assess risk and consult professionals as needed.

**9**  Adequately **supervise and monitor** coach/volunteer, consistent with internal policies. (Document)

 **Many of these steps would also apply when:**

- A coach/volunteer reports observing inappropriate behaviour by another coach/volunteer
- A peer discloses on behalf of another child



*The safety of the child and other children in the organization must be ensured at all times in the process.*



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## Reporting Child Sexual Abuse and Misconduct

### What do you do if you have concerns about possible child sexual abuse?

When a person becomes aware that a child may be or has been abused, there is a legal and ethical responsibility to take action. The legal responsibility comes from child welfare legislation within each province and territory and may also be a duty of a person's profession or workplace.

**The responsibility to report means that a person who has knowledge or information that a child is being or is at risk of being abused must report it to someone:**

- 4 If the information relates to potential abuse of a child by the child's parent or guardian, the person must report it to child welfare or police.
- 4 If the concern involves potential abuse by any other person, the individual should report it to the child's parent or guardian and may also be obligated to report it to child welfare and/or police.

**O** People are responsible for reporting concerns, not proving abuse.

#### Reporting information about potential child abuse allows:

- 4 An authority, like child welfare or police, to determine whether it is necessary to investigate.
- 4 The parent(s) or guardian(s) to proactively take steps to protect their child.

Mandatory reporting legislation removes any personal or professional dilemma from becoming a barrier to reporting. It is not uncommon for people to minimize or deny what a child tells them during a disclosure. People are often concerned about being wrong and causing problems. Remember, reporting may disrupt existing or future sexual abuse from occurring against other children, as well.

If a person learns about past child sexual abuse that is no longer occurring, it's still important to report the abuse. The offender may still have access to other children and those children may be at risk.

## How do you report misconduct/concerning behaviour?

While obvious sexual acts are easier to identify and address, behaviour that doesn't meet the threshold of abuse still needs to be acted upon. Misconduct is considered adult behaviour towards a child that is inappropriate and that breaches reasonable boundaries:

- If you observe or hear about concerning behaviour or an inappropriate situation between an adult and your child or another child within the organization, report your concerns to the organization.
- If you have contact with the child outside the organization (e.g., you know the child's parents), you should still report to the organization and also report your concerns to the child's parents.
- In some circumstances, particularly if your concerns are not addressed or you become aware of more information, you may wish to consider involving the appropriate authorities.

Flagging the concerning behaviour to the organization should trigger a review in an effort to correct and stop the possible misconduct. It will also allow an organization to address any behaviour that's not consistent with its policies and procedures.

Flagging concerning behaviour to a parent may help the parent address the issue with the organization and discuss it with their child if appropriate.



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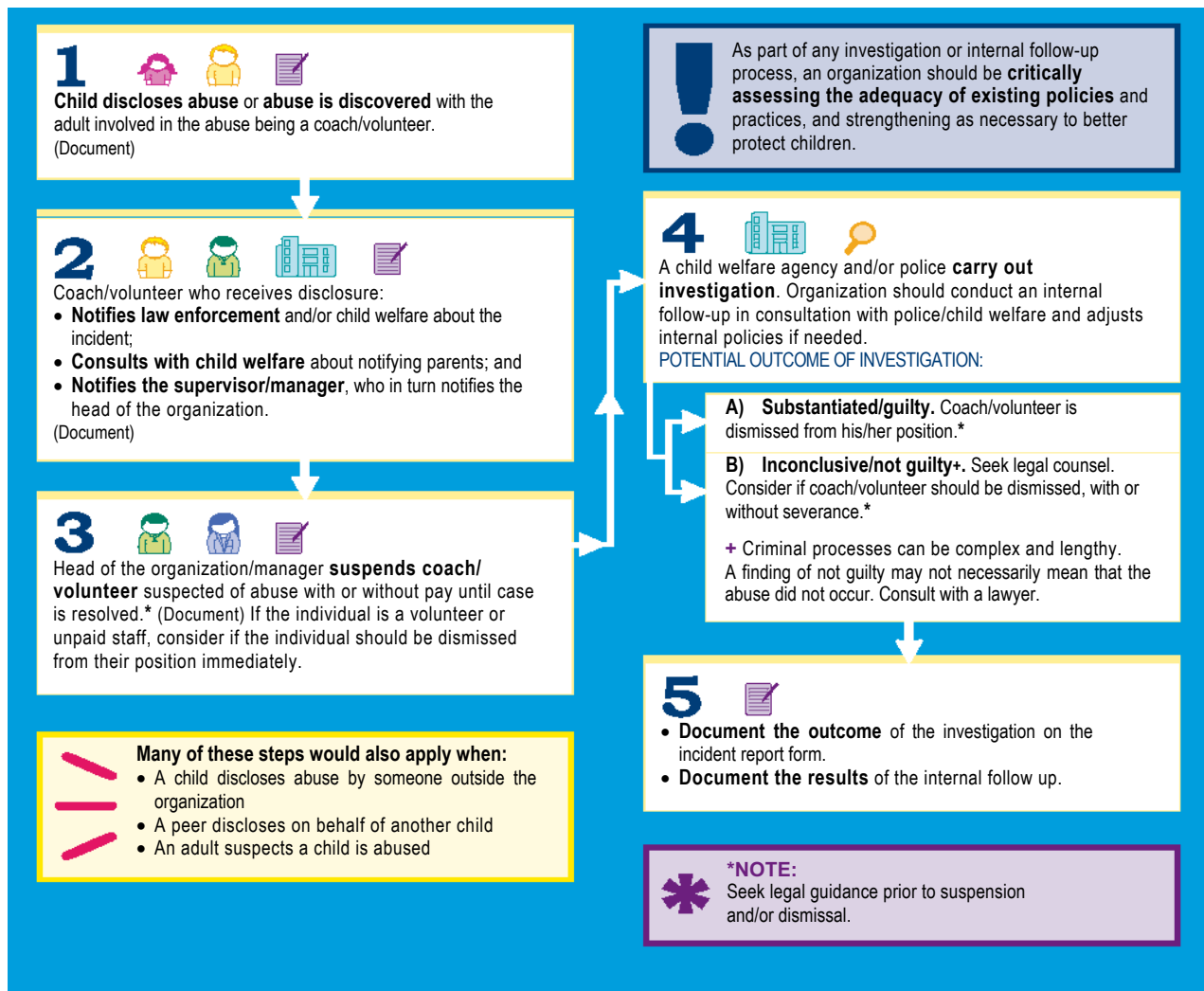
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This information sheet is part of the Commit to Kids® program. The contents of this sheet are provided as information only and do not constitute legal advice. The exact requirements for reporting vary by province and territory. Consult the child welfare legislation in your province or territory, your local child welfare authority, law enforcement and/or legal counsel as appropriate in a given situation.

# CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

## STEPS FOR REPORTING:

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