



## MANDATORY REPORTING COURSE

# IS IT APPROPRIATE COACHING— OR ABUSE?

Coaches who act in appropriate ways make athlete well-being a priority. Since emotional, physical, and sexual misconduct are never appropriate, it's important to be aware of which behaviors coaches should model, and which they should avoid.

It is important for coaches to adapt coaching practices to each setting. Words and behaviors that may be appropriate for older or elite athletes may not be for younger or recreational athletes, or athletes with certain disabilities.

These tips will help you recognize the difference between abusive behavior and appropriate coaching.

# MANDATORY REPORTING COURSE



## ABUSE

**PHYSICAL MISCONDUCT:** A coach acting intentionally to endanger or cause physical harm to an athlete, regardless of reason or motive behind the behavior.

### EXAMPLES

**Overexertion:** Instructing team members to run excessive laps because of poor performance or attitudes.

*This can cause physical harm to athletes' developing bodies, especially if they are already fatigued, temperatures are extreme, or they are told to run through injuries.*

**Dehydration:** Refusing to allow water breaks.

*This can cause muscle cramps, increase pulse and heart stress, and lead to faster breathing, in addition to negatively affecting performance.*

**Injury:** Ordering players to re-enter games despite signs of injury or not having been medically cleared to return.

*This can lead to reinjury and generally reduce athlete physical health and well-being.*

## APPROPRIATE COACHING

**ACCOUNTABILITY AND SAFETY:** A coach holding athletes accountable to program standards and practices that safely improve performances.

### EXAMPLES

**Discipline:** Clearly explaining why an athlete is being removed from a starting lineup (e.g., for violating team rules) and applying these standards consistently.

*This helps athletes associate specific consequences with specific behaviors.*

**Respect:** Requiring athletes to arrive at practice early to help set up equipment.

*This teaches athletes to respect the time of coaches, staff, and teammates.*

**Recognizing Limits:** Knowing how much and how far to push athletes, to maximize results while maintaining safety.

*This helps athletes improve their performance without harming their bodies.*

# MANDATORY REPORTING COURSE



## ABUSE

**EMOTIONAL MISCONDUCT:** A coach repeatedly using words or behaviors that negatively control, intimidate, demean, or harm athletes, damaging their self-esteem and causing them emotional distress.

### EXAMPLES

**Intimidation:** Using fear and punishment to get results.

*This can harm athletes, even if it might occasionally lead to short-term compliance.*

**Controlling:** Not allowing athletes or parents to ask questions, give input, or make decisions.

*This sends the message that the coach is more important than the athlete.*

**Demeaning:** Using hurtful words, including nicknames, to reduce athlete self-esteem.

*This can cause lasting emotional harm and does not increase overall performance.*

## APPROPRIATE COACHING

**MOTIVATION AND SUPPORT:** A coach talking to athletes in ways that increase their self-esteem, build trust and camaraderie, and encourage athletes to reach their full potential.

### EXAMPLES

**Encouragement:** Giving concrete instruction during training to help athletes improve technique.

*This increases self-esteem and helps athletes overcome obstacles.*

**High expectations:** Setting achievable goals that encourage athletes to reach their full potential.

*This motivates athletes to improve without pushing them past their limits.*

**Athlete intuition:** Teaching athletes to listen to their bodies instead of shaming them for doing so.

*This shows athletes they are valued as people and that their well-being is more important than winning.*

If you notice or suspect any type of abuse or misconduct, report it: [uscenterforsafesport.org](https://uscenterforsafesport.org)  
You play an important role in protecting athletes and promoting well-being.

#### REFERENCES:

- » Carson, S. (2014). *Positive discipline builds team dynamics, support*. *Managing School Athletics*, 16(6).
- » Fry, M. D., & Moore, E. W. G. (2019). Motivation in sport: Theory and application. In M. H. Anshel, T. A. Petrie, & J. A. Steinfeldt (Eds.), *APA Handbooks in Psychology series. APA Handbook of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Vol. 1. Sport Psychology (p. 273-299). American Psychological Association.
- » Hansen, B., Gilbert, W., & Hamel, T. (2003). Successful coaches' views on motivation and motivational strategies. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 74(8), 45-48.

This product was supported in part by grant number 2018-KY-B8-0001, awarded by the SMART Office, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.