

PARENT AND GUARDIAN'S HANDBOOK FOR SAFER SPORT

TALKING TIPS FOR SCHOOL-AGE KIDS (6-12)



At this age, your child should be establishing healthy boundaries. Help them respond appropriately to smaller occurrences of misconduct, so they know what to do if it escalates.

Here are ways you can have important conversations with school-age kids as they get more involved in sport.

- ▶ Use conversations in carpools, on the sideline, before or after practice, and among other kids to learn about coach and team dynamics. You might hear something that gives you an opportunity to privately ask your child more specific questions later.
- ▶ Check in regularly with your child and coaches after practices and games. Be present, make eye contact with coaches and players, and let your child know that you really are interested.
- ▶ Check in with your child before team-related travel so they understand the expectations. Also, check in afterward to learn how comfortable they were in the vehicle and overnight. Confirm that room arrangements were carried out as planned.
- ▶ Pay attention to your child's cues so you can distinguish whether a frustration or concern is related to their own performance, lack of interest in a sport, or how they were treated by a coach or teammate.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT EMOTIONAL MISCONDUCT:

Encourage your child to include their peers or teammates when playing. They should let you know if a coach continually isolates them or another child. Ask them to think about how they would feel if they were the only one not picked for a team, or if no one ever threw the ball to them.

Ask your child questions specific to their sport rather than questions about their performance. What is their favorite position to play? Stroke to swim? Gymnastics apparatus? Show them you are engaged in their enjoyment of the sport, as you would expect from their coach.

Reinforce that a coach may criticize a specific behavior—a kick, a catch, a run—but should never criticize the child personally.

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COMMUNICATING ABOUT PHYSICAL MISCONDUCT:

Continue to review with your child your discipline rules for home and school, so they will understand when a coach's behavior crosses a line.

Help your child understand that making behavioral mistakes (such as not following rules) is different from making skill-related mistakes. They should not be punished for trying and learning new skills.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT:

Continue to make discussing sexual topics a normal part of your home environment. You can introduce relevant news stories to generate a dinner table or carpool discussion about safety. Reinforce that no one is allowed to speak to them or touch them in a sexual manner.

Talk with your child about what to do if a coach or much older kids ask them to keep something a secret from you or other trusted adults. Encourage them to tell you, even if the secret is something they feel confused or ashamed about.

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