

PARENT AND GUARDIAN'S HANDBOOK FOR SAFER SPORT

TALKING TIPS FOR YOUNGER KIDS (5 AND UNDER)



Your child is just learning to establish healthy boundaries in sport. Help them learn what to look for and how to respond if anything makes them uncomfortable.

Here are ways you can talk about boundaries and introduce simple rules for kids new to sport.

- ▶ Tell your child that you value their safety first. If a coach does something that hurts their feelings, hurts them physically, or makes them feel uncomfortable, encourage them to tell you (or another trusted adult) as soon as they can.
- ▶ Talk about other adults in their world they consider “safe.” This helps your child feel comfortable sharing concerns with another trusted adult if you are not available. In some families, these may be aunts, uncles, or grandparents. For others, a trusted adult might be a best friend's parent, a teacher, caregiver, or pediatrician.
- ▶ Ask open-ended (rather than Yes or No) questions that can draw out detailed answers (such as “What was your favorite/least favorite part of practice?”).

COMMUNICATING ABOUT EMOTIONAL MISCONDUCT:

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

**Teach your child the difference between helping words (such as “you can do it” or “great job trying”) and hurting words (such as “you’re stupid” and “you can’t do anything right”).
Tell them they should let you know if a coach uses hurtful words when they talk to them.**

COMMUNICATING ABOUT PHYSICAL MISCONDUCT:

**Talk about physical boundaries with your child before they attend their first class/practice.
That includes boundaries between themselves and other players, and the coach.**

Discuss disciplinary techniques that you as a parent consider inappropriate. Tell your child you would want to know if another adult used those on them. This helps them feel comfortable coming to you when something a coach does feels wrong.

**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.**

This resource was supported in part by grant numbers 2018-KY-B8-0001 and 15PSMA-21-GG-02193, 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.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT:

Talk about what to do if a coach or much older kids ask your child 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.

**Discuss boundaries with your child about who should be touching them and when.
Example: "It's okay for the doctor to look at your private parts during an exam when I'm there, but it's not okay for anyone else to do that."**

Use the correct names for body parts when talking with your child and encourage them to use those names as well.

Remind your child that nobody should be touching their private parts (even if they ask), not even their friends.

Monitor the relationship of coaches or older kids taking special interest in your child, to ensure grooming is not taking place.

This resource was supported in part by grant numbers 2018-KY-B8-0001 and 15PSMA-21-GG-02193, 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.