

Child Protection and Abuse Prevention in Sport in Ghana

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Introduction to this Resource

In recent years, there has been increasing global interest in promoting children's rights and supporting positive outcomes for all children (Walker, 2008; UNICEF, 2010). Driven and supported by the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), this new children's rights agenda is broad ranging, covering all issues that have the potential to disrupt a child's health and development, regardless of their cause. Protecting children from abuse and violence is one key strand in this new children's rights agenda. Importantly, the UNCRC states this is the responsibility of all individuals "...with clear legal, professional, ethical, and/or cultural responsibility for the safety, health, development and well-being of the child" (GC13, para. 33), which is goes on to explain includes "recreational and sports coaches" (GC13, para. 33/34). Under the UNCRC, signatory countries, of which Ghana is one, are legally bound to address child abuse:

"State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child."

(UNCRC, Article 19, Section 1)

In line with this and the focus of the workshop delivered at the University of Ghana in summer 2012, this interactive resource centres on promoting an understanding of children's rights and child protection in sport and, *ipso facto*, on preventing child abuse in sporting environments. A further resource on strategies for preventing abuse is scheduled for release in late 2013.

In support of this, a Facebook group page has been set up for anyone involved in sport, recreation and physical activity in Ghana to learn more

about safeguarding, child protection and children's rights in Ghana in sport and wider society. It is intended as a forum for users to raise awareness, share good practice, knowledge, research and ideas in the area of safeguarding, child protection and children's rights in sport in Ghana. To show your support for this important cause, join us and spread the word! The site is called *Child Protection and Abuse Prevention in Sport in Ghana* and is available here:

<https://www.facebook.com/ChildAbusePreventionInSportInGhana>

Good Practice in Youth Sport and Physical Activity

Children have the right to participate in sport in a safe and enjoyable environment, and everyone involved in sport has an obligation to ensure that “sport is practiced in a culture of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, friendship and fair play among all people” (David, 2005). Sport has long been recognised as having positive benefits for participants, having the potential to positively affect health and fitness (Bertelloni *et al.*, 2006), increase bodily awareness and self confidence (Engh, 2002), and teach rules, respect, sportsmanship and social interaction (David, 2005).

But these positive outcomes can only be achieved if the coaching environment is of the highest possible standard. We know from research that sport does not always take place with a focus on children’s rights at its centre and that abuse of all forms takes place in sport, in Ghana and elsewhere around the world (Brackenridge, 2001; Adinkrah, 2011; Brackenridge *et al.*, 2012).

Coaches, like all other adults, have a responsibility to safeguard and protect children and ensure their rights are protected. UNICEF (2010) defines children as anyone age 18 or under, so coaches working with anyone in this age range need to understand their responsibilities in making sport a safe and secure environment so the athletes they work with have their rights protected and can achieve their true potential as well as be protected from abuse and violence.

Promoting good practice is central to this broad agenda of safeguarding children and young people and promoting children’s rights. By using good coaching practice, coaches can do a lot to promote happy, healthy sport and promote children’s rights.

What is Good Practice?

Good coaching practice reflects the following three principles:

- 1. Rights** – Coaches must respect and champion the rights of every individual to participate in sport.
- 2. Relationships** – Coaches should develop a positive relationship with athletes based on openness, honesty, mutual trust and respect.
- 3. Responsibilities** – Coaches should demonstrate proper personal behaviour at all times, and should be receive appropriate training to ensure they know how best to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks to athletes (Sports coach UK, 2009).

<p>TASK: Think about the children and young people you work with. List the ways you ensure good coaching practice when working with young athletes.</p>
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Some examples of good practice suggested by coaches and PE teachers include:

Ensure the area in which you are working and the equipment being used are appropriate, safe and free from any hazards

Work with children in small groups, with each group having one appointed 'leader,' to ensure maximum participation from all children

Ensure the children are wearing appropriate clothing for the activity

Keep up to date with technical skills and qualifications

Speak in a language the children will understand

Plan your sessions to ensure the duration and type of activity is suitable to the children's age, needs and ability

Use progressive learning techniques to ensure children have time to learn simple tasks before moving on to more complex ones

Highlight children's strengths more often than their weaknesses and use motivational, constructive feedback

Act as a role model and lead by example

Make the session fun and promote fair play – don't focus on competition and winning

Be willing to be flexible – understand that not all children learn at the same rate

Set clear rules and ensure these are followed

Where possible, build a positive relationship with children's parents

Be child centred – allow children to have a voice in what's happening and to make their own decisions

Treat everyone equally and with respect and dignity

TASK: Consider each of the following scenarios and explain what you think the potential issues are and how you would handle the situation. There are some suggestions below for you to think about.

Scenario 1

After a tournament, a coach gives the children feedback that makes them cry. The team was playing against difficult competition and did the best they could. Is this acceptable?

Scenario 2

As a coach, you need to lift or support a child as he performs a task in training. How would you go about this?

Scenario 3

A 35-year-old coach you are working with has started dating one of the 17-year-old athletes in his team. Is this acceptable?

Scenario 4

One of your fellow coaches invites some of the children he's coaching to his house to see his collection of sports medals. What are your thoughts and what would you do?

Suggestions

Scenario 1

Children often get upset when they receive negative feedback so coaches should try not to give feedback that can cause upset or humiliation. Instead, coaches should learn to provide constructive criticism to allow athletes to acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses and consider how they can improve their performance.

Scenario 2

Many sports require some physical contact between sports staff and children or young people. Coaches and staff may also need to use physical contact to instruct, encourage, protect or comfort. However, physical contact in sport should always be intended to meet the child's needs *not* the coach's. Children may not understand why you are touching them or may feel uncomfortable with this. It's always a good idea for coaches to explain the reason for the physical contact to the child, and unless the situation is an emergency, try to ask the child for permission.

Scenario 3

When a coach begins dating an adult athlete, this raises serious issues given the power imbalance in the coach-athlete relationship. Where a young person is of the age of consent, the power of the adult over that young person may influence their ability to genuinely consent as a coach or other adult in a position of authority may have significant power or influence over a young person's career. To avoid this, it is advisable for sexual relationships between coaches and adults they train who are over the age of legal consent to be prohibited when the adult is in a position of trust or authority.

Scenario 4

Inviting *some* but not *all* athletes to the coaches' home may cause division between team members as some feel favoured over others, and it could cause the coach's intentions to be questioned by others, ruining his reputation. More worryingly, this situation could be a form of 'grooming,' whereby an adult attempts to befriend and establish an emotional connection with a child to lower the child's inhibitions in preparation for abuse or exploitation. Coaches should always serve as role models to athletes and avoid inviting athletes to their home.

Good practice is central ensuring children's rights are protected, positive outcomes are promoted and child abuse is prevented in sport. While each scenario may be different, the central tenet is maintaining ethical principles. For examples, consideration should be given to the holistic development and well-being of athletes, developmentally appropriate child-focused sport should be emphasized, and athletes should be recognised as active participants in the sport experience working in partnership with their trainer (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). In other words, child athletes need to be treated like children rather than athletes so that sport and physical activity contribute *positively* to the overall development of the individual physically, psychologically and socially (Clarke et al., 1994).

By following the three principles of good coaching practice mentioned earlier – rights, relationships and responsibilities – and considering how these principles can operate in sport and physical activity, everyone involved can play a crucial role in both developing happy and healthy sport and physical activity, as well as developing the lives of children and promoting children's rights.

For more information on good practice in sporting contexts, see UNICEF's child protection strategy, which is available to download on the *Child Protection and Abuse Prevention in Sport in Ghana* Facebook page, or email the author of this resource (langm@edgehill.ac.uk) or the

Child Protection and Abuse Prevention in Sport in Ghana Facebook page.

Abuse in Sport and Physical Activity Settings

In order to prevent child abuse and promote children's rights, we need to know what constitutes child abuse. This is not always easy to recognise, but everyone involved in sport, recreation and physical activity has a responsibility to act if they have concerns or suspicions about a child's welfare.

There are many definitions of abuse and most are very similar. The *International Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport*, prepared by UNICEF, Keeping Children Safe, and the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit, define abuse broadly as "the acts of commission or omission that lead to a child experiencing harm" out of recognition that legislation and cultural understandings of abuse differ internationally.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation (1999) defines child abuse as:

...all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Following this, the subsequent definitions are intended to help you identify the different forms of abuse, and specific examples have been given of how these forms of abuse may manifest themselves in a sporting environment. While you are reading these definitions, try to think about the extent to which your own ideas about what constitutes abuse are similar or different from these official definitions.

Defining Abuse

There are four main types of abuse:

- 1. Sexual abuse** – This involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual online images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

In sport, coaching techniques which involve physical contact with children could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed. The power of the coach over young performers, if misused, may also lead to abusive situations developing. It may also include verbal comments, physical advances, abusive touching, and forced intercourse and rape.

- 2. Physical abuse** – This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Examples of physical abuse in sport may be when a child is forced into excessive and intensive training and competition that exceeds the capacity of his or her immature and growing body; where the child is given drugs to enhance performance or delay puberty; beatings and other forms of violence as a spur to improve performance; nutrition and weight loss regimes that are unhealthy and can lead to eating disorders; requiring young athletes to play when injured; systematically failing to allow/provide sufficient rest, corporal punishment, and encouraging ‘hazing’ (initiation ceremonies).

3. Emotional abuse – This is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child’s developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction.

It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying, causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Examples of emotional abuse in sport include subjecting children to constant criticism, name-calling, and sarcasm or bullying, and humiliating athletes based on gender, body shape or performance. Putting them under consistent and/or excessive pressure to perform to unrealistically high standards is also a form of emotional abuse.

4. Neglect – This is the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may failing to protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger; ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment; ignoring, or being unresponsive to, a child’s basic emotional needs.

Examples of neglect in sport could include: failing to provide proper care and attention such as not ensuring children are safe;

deliberate negligence such as exposing them to undue cold or heat or to unnecessary risk of injury, denying them sufficient rest, or imposing isolation.

(Examples taken from: David, 2005; Child Protection in Sport Unit, 2011)

Importantly, the World Health Organisation and International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (2006) note that child abuse/maltreatment, is a form of violence and is linked to other forms of violence – including domestic violence and suicide – and that violence and abuse often occurs alongside other types of violence and abuse. Therefore, it is useful to view child abuse within a wider categorisation of violence, according to the context in which it is committed:

- Self-directed - where the perpetrator and the victim are the same person, such as with self-harm and suicide.
- Interpersonal - between individuals, for example within the family, such as child abuse; and between intimate partners, such as with domestic violence; and within communities, such as abuse and maltreatment committed between acquaintances and by strangers.
- Collective - committed by larger groups of people, such as social, political and economic violence and abuse.

Regardless of the type of abuse and/or context, all forms of violence, abuse and maltreatment can have devastating and long-term effects for the victim (Brackenridge, 2001; Fasting et al., 2002; Sundgot-Borgen et al., 2003; David, 2005). These include “physical injury, gynaecological problems (for girls), headaches, asthma, depression, fear, low self-esteem, poor school performance, inability to trust, guilt, anger, sexual dysfunction, eating and sleeping disorders, fear of intimacy, post-traumatic stress disorder and ultimately suicide” (David, 2005, p.57). In

sport, recreation and physical education contexts, there can be additional consequences, including obsessive and compulsive behaviours such as excessive training; eating disorders, self harm and drop out/retirement from sport (David, 2005).

To learn more about the consequences of all kinds of abuse, see the following website from the US department of Health and Human Services:

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long_term_consequences.cfm

Why is this Relevant to Sports Coaches and Physical Educators?

Children and young people who are happy and safe in sport and physical activity settings are more likely to perform well, remain in sport and physical activity and get the benefits this has to offer. Abuse, violence and exploitation occurs in all countries, all settings and among all groups of people (Hodgkin & Newell, 2002; UNICEF, 2010). In Ghana, the use of corporal punishment as a form of discipline is said to be commonplace in many homes (Ashiagbor, 2008), and coercion has been found to be common among adolescents having their first sexual experience (around 21% among girls and 5% among boys said they ‘were not willing at all’ at their first sexual experience) (Krug *et al.*, 2002).

Meanwhile, despite a statutory ban in the public school system, the use of corporal punishment within schools remains common (Ashiagbor, 2008) and more than one quarter of schoolgirls in one study said they had been sexually propositioned by their school teacher (Leach *et al.*, 2003).

Unfortunately, abuse also occurs in sport, recreation and physical education settings. Although there is an absence of data on the prevalence and incidence of abuse in sporting environments in Ghana, evidence from other countries suggests that some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with young people in order to harm them. It is likely, then, that some children are suffering abuse within a sporting environment.

We know that the perpetrators of abuse in sporting contexts tend to be authority figures – coaches, teachers, team doctors, physiotherapists and others in positions of trust; in other words, people who are often role models to athletes (UNICEF, 2010). Unfortunately, some people in these positions use their status to exploit and take advantage of children and young people. Coaches, instructors, teachers and other officials often have regular contact with children and young people in sporting contexts and are therefore in a position to identify abuse and abusive behaviours

within and beyond sport and to stand up for children's rights through taking preventative measures.

Identifying Suspected Abuse

Identifying abuse is often difficult; children, through shame, will often try and hide what is happening to them; abusers are often extremely cautious and devious to avoid arousing suspicion; and personal feelings of shock, anger or disgust can interfere with the recognition that abuse is taking place. Nevertheless, everyone involved in sport, recreation and physical activity has a responsibility to act if they have concerns or suspicions about a child's welfare, and there are certain signs and symptoms you can look out for to help you with this responsibility.

Identifying the Signs

In order to prevent abuse and ensure children's rights are maintained, it is important to know what signs to look out for. While it is possible that a child or young person may show no outward signs and hide what is happening to them from everyone, there are also some signs to look for that could indicate potential abuse:

Sexual Abuse

- Being overly affectionate or knowledgeable in a sexual way inappropriate to the child's age
- Medical problems such as chronic itching, pain in the genitals, venereal diseases
- Other extreme reactions, such as depression, self-mutilation, suicide attempts, running away, overdoses, anorexia
- Personality changes such as becoming insecure or clinging
- Regressing to younger behaviour patterns such as thumb sucking or bringing out discarded cuddly toys
- Sudden loss of appetite or compulsive eating
- Being isolated or withdrawn
- Inability to concentrate
- Lack of trust or fear of someone they know well, or not wanting to be left alone with them
- Repeatedly running away
- Wetting the bed and/or nightmares

- Become worried about clothing being removed
- Suddenly drawing sexually explicit pictures
- Trying to be 'ultra-good' or perfect; overreacting to criticism

Physical Abuse

- Unexplained recurrent injuries or burns
- Improbable excuses or refusal to explain injuries
- Wearing clothes to cover injuries, even in hot weather
- Refusal to undress for gym
- Bald patches
- Repeatedly running away
- Fear of medical help or examination
- Self-destructive tendencies
- Aggression towards others
- Fear of physical contact – shrinking away if touched
- Admitting that they are punished, but the punishment is excessive (such as a child being beaten every night to 'make him study')
- Fear of suspected abuser being contacted

Emotional Abuse

- Physical, mental and emotional development lags
- Sudden speech disorders
- Continual self-depreciation ('I'm stupid, ugly, worthless')
- Overreaction to mistakes
- Extreme fear of any new situation
- Inappropriate response to pain ('I deserve this')
- Neurotic behaviour (rocking, hair twisting, self-mutilation)
- Extremes of passivity or aggression

(Kidscape, 2012)

Managing Suspected Abuse

Each country will have its own mechanisms for reporting suspicions of abuse. According to Ghana's Constitution, children have specific rights within the family such as care and maintenance. Moreover, the Ghanaian government has enacted comprehensive national laws covering child protection and abuse to ensure legal compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Casey, 2011). These include the passage of the Children's Act and the Juvenile Justice Act and the creation of a ministerial department responsible for women and children's issues, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs. Within this system, district-level professional welfare officers and probation officers operate alongside specialised police units from the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit, Family Tribunals and Juvenile Courts.

Within this framework, all adults who have serious concerns about a child or young person, or suspect abuse have an obligation to act to safeguard their best interests, so everyone must be clear about where they would report suspicions or concerns. In all cases, the child's welfare is paramount.

TASK: Draw a diagram that identifies those who you could report suspected abuse to. This may include people within your school or organisation and/or national/international organisations and/or government agencies.

Where Can I Report Suspicions of Abuse in Ghana?

In Ghana, suspicions of abuse in sport can be reported through one or more channels, depending on where the abuse is suspected and the mechanisms in place in that organisation. The Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service was formed specifically to manage cases of violence and abuse and deals predominantly with criminal forms of abuse (Casey, 2011).

In addition, suspected abuse can be reported to the Department of Social Welfare or to FIDA Ghana, a non-profit organisation set up to promote and protect the rights of women and children and which offers free legal aid service.

In the three regions of Northern Ghana suspected abuse can also be reported to Youth Alive, a non-profit organisation that works to protect children and promote child rights. Moreover, if mechanisms are in place, suspicions of abuse could be reported to sports clubs, national or international sports governing bodies or schools.

The important thing is that as a coach or physical education teacher, you should not have to deal with a suspicion alone. Places where you can get advice and support include:

- The Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service - <http://www.ghanapolice.info/dvvsu/dvvsu.htm>
- Regional child protection officers in Ghana (each region has at least one child protection officer)
- FIDA Ghana - <http://www.fidaghana.org/> or info@fidaghana.org or call +233 302 229283
- Youth Alive Ghana - <http://www.youthaliveghana.org/> or info@youthaliveghana.org or call +233-3720-25253 or +233-2481-57910
- The African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect – anppcanghana.chapter@yahoo.com or www.ampcanghana.org
- The African Movement for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect – Tel: 00233302 423239 or <http://ampcanghana.org/contact>
- UNICEF Ghana - accra@unicef.org or http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ghana_contact.html

- International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect – <http://www.ispcan.org/>
- Street Child Africa in Ghana - <http://www.stretchchildafrica.org.uk/pages/ghana.html>
- Afrikids - <http://www.afrikids.org/>
- Right to Play Ghana - <http://www.righttoplay.com/international/our-impact/Pages/Countries/Ghana.aspx>

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