



EDMONTON SOUTHWEST UNITED

soccer club | established 1982

GUIDELINES FOR ADULTS INTERACTING WITH CHILDREN IN SPORT

Approved July 6, 2025

Review on July 6, 2026 or before, as required

Purpose & Scope

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear expectations for adults interacting with children in our Club and to create an environment where concerns about misconduct can be safely reported. These guidelines apply to all SWU members, including players, coaches, volunteers, and team officials working with athletes aged younger than 18 years of age.

Preamble

Sport offers children meaningful experiences that promote growth, learning, and lifelong skills. Positive experiences depend on healthy relationships between adults and athletes, and on environments where adults are accountable for their actions and behaviour.

These Guidelines define expectations for all adults interacting with minors in SWU programs. For the purposes of this document:

- “Adult” refers to anyone in a position of trust (coach, staff, volunteer, team official, etc.).
- “Child” or “Minor” refers to anyone under the age of 18.

This document is not exhaustive but provides a framework for appropriate interactions, emphasizing common sense, sound judgment, and respect for boundaries.

Coach-Athlete Relationship and Power Imbalance

Coaches and adults in sport hold a position of trust and authority. The coach-athlete relationship involves a clear power imbalance—athletes rely on adults for instruction, mentorship, and evaluation. It is the adult's sole responsibility to establish and maintain appropriate boundaries. Breaches of these boundaries—especially when adults place their needs ahead of the child's—undermine trust and can lead to exploitation.

Understanding Age of Protection in Canada

The Age of Protection, also called the Age of Consent, defines when a young person can legally consent to sexual activity:

- Under 12 years old: No sexual activity permitted under any circumstance.
- 12–13 years old: Age difference must be less than 2 years, with no position of authority or exploitation involved.
- 14–15 years old: Age difference must be less than 5 years, with no position of authority or exploitation involved.
- 16–17 years old: Sexual activity is only legal if the other person is not in a position of trust, authority, or dependency, and the relationship is not exploitative.

For all minors aged 12–17, if the other person holds a position of trust or authority (e.g., coach, teacher, team staff), the child cannot legally give consent. This law protects children from exploitative relationships, especially those involving a power imbalance.



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Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Behaviour

Appropriate Behaviour Includes:

- ✓ Using respectful language, tone, and body language
- ✓ Respecting children's physical, emotional, and personal boundaries
- ✓ Engaging with children in ways visible and observable to others
- ✓ Keeping practices, games, and activities open to parental observation
- ✓ Communicating with minors in a transparent, accountable, and professional manner
- ✓ Interactions motivated by meeting the child's needs, not the adult's

Inappropriate Behaviour Includes:

- ✗ Disrespectful, belittling, or intimidating language or behaviour
- ✗ Inappropriate physical contact (e.g., massaging, tickling, caressing, roughhousing)
- ✗ Sharing overly personal details with minors
- ✗ Asking children to keep secrets
- ✗ Electronic communications that are personal, secretive, or unrelated to coaching duties
- ✗ Sexual, flirtatious, or suggestive communications
- ✗ Taking photos or videos in private areas such as change rooms or hotel rooms

Standards for Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries

All interactions, whether in person or electronically, should be:

- ✓ Transparent — observable by others
- ✓ Accountable — aligned with team roles and responsibilities
- ✓ Professional — in service of athlete development, safety, and well-being
- ✓ Motivated by meeting the child's needs, not the adult's personal interests

Role of Parents and Coaches in Safeguarding

Adults play a vital role in recognizing, addressing, and preventing inappropriate behaviour:

- ✓ Parents and coaches should speak to the coach's supervisor if concerned about a relationship that appears inappropriate.
- ✓ Parents and coaches should engage in regular, age-appropriate conversations with athletes about:
 - Healthy relationships
 - Respecting personal boundaries
 - How to report concerns or seek help

For resources on child protection, visit: kidsintheknow.ca/safetysheets.



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Reporting Concerns

If you have concerns about misconduct or boundary violations:

- Speak to the coach's supervisor or SWU Club Administrator
- For concerns about inappropriate images shared online, visit: Cybertip.ca
- For broader concerns about misconduct in sport or child sexual abuse, visit: commit2kids.ca/safesport

Reporting protects athletes and ensures adults are held accountable.

Final Reminders

- Coaches and adults in positions of trust must always act in a professional, ethical, and transparent manner.
- Maintaining clear boundaries builds trust, fosters positive experiences, and protects children from harm.
- SWU takes all concerns regarding athlete safety seriously and will act promptly to address violations.

Acknowledgements

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