

Violence in Sport: Principles, Categories, and Examples

ETHICS OF PROFESSIONAL TOUCH



DEFINITION OF HARRASMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORT

Abuse and harassment in sport are any form of:

- ▶ Physical violence
- ▶ Sexual violence
- ▶ Psychological violence
- ▶ Economic violence
- ▶ Gender-based violence
- ▶ Discrimination
- ▶ Exploitation

that jeopardizes an individual's physical, mental, emotional, or social well-being.

(IOC)

FORMS OF VIOLENCE IN SPORT

PHYSICAL ABUSE	The use of force that causes injury (e.g., hitting, excessive punishment, extremely demanding training sessions “training until you collapse”)
PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE	Humiliation, insults, isolation, threats, constant criticism, comparison with other athletes
SEXUAL ABUSE	Any sexual activity without free, informed, and explicit consent (touching, threats, pornography, sexualization of the body).
GENDER BASED ABUSE	Violence directed against a person based on their gender, identity, or societal gender norms (e.g., discrimination against women, homophobia, transphobia).
FINANCIAL ABUSE	Control over finances, exploitation of image, withholding of prizes, charging parents with unnecessary expenses.
ONLINE/SYBER ABUSE	Harassment/unwanted contact through social media or text messages, unauthorized sharing of private photos, defamation, humiliation, threats, blackmail.
DISCRIMINATION	Humiliation and insults based on race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or any other personal characteristic.
SEXUALLY SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS	Joking comments about appearance, clothing, or body proportions, especially directed at young athletes who are still developing physically.
NORMALISATION OF DAMAGING BEHAVIOUR	Accepting violence as a “method of motivation.”

SEXUAL HARRASMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORT

PROTECTION OF MINORS FROM SEXUAL HARRASMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORT

DEFINITION of sexual harrasment and abuse:

- ▶ Child sexual abuse includes any activities that involve a child in sexual acts that they do not understand or cannot freely consent to.
- ▶ Harassment is unwanted sexually conotated or sexual behavior that undermines a person's dignity and creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

The IOC specifically emphasizes that a power imbalance between coach and athlete makes any sexual relationship between them unacceptable, even if both are adults.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE	Any involvement of a child in sexual activities (physical, verbal, or via technology).
SEXUAL HARASSMENT	Unwanted touching, comments, jokes, pornographic content, pressure for sexual favors.
PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE	Humiliation, threats, isolation, emotional manipulation, bullying.
PHYSICAL ABUSE	Any physical punishment, excessive physical strain, or violence.
DISCRIMINATION AND HOMOPHOBIA	Discriminatory behavior based on gender, identity, or sexual orientation (e.g., mocking).
ONLINE ABUSE	Sexualization of children via the internet, sharing images, spying

FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST A CHILD

Violence in sport is a violation of human rights

Source:

Council of Europe, Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)

A PHENOMENON OF TOUCH

PHYSICAL CONTACT COACH to ATHLETE

1. Touch is an essential aspect of our human developmental needs,
 2. Touch can have very beneficial and therapeutic effects.
 3. **Inappropriate** touch can be disturbing, offensive and even traumatic.
- ▶ In modern sport, physical contact between coach and athlete is common and often necessary.

Example: when a coach corrects posture, demonstrates hand positioning, adjusts movements, assists with an exercise, especially in contact sports.

- ▶ Not every touch is acceptable!

The boundary between:

educational/necessary contact

inappropriate (potentially abusive)
contact

must be clearly defined and known to all participants.

Educational (Applied) Touch - Acceptable and Professional

Definition:

Intentional, functional touch that serves a clear educational purpose

- ▶ correcting technique,
- ▶ ensuring safety,
- ▶ demonstrating movements

in accordance with professional standards and respecting boundaries.

Characteristics:

Purpose	Correction of movements, demonstration, safety of execution
Type	Short, functional, visible, done with the back of the hand
Location	Open space, on the field or in the gym, in the presence of others
Recommended way of communication	Purpose of the touch explained beforehand (“Let’s adjust your leg position”)
Athlete’s awareness	The athlete is aware, engaged, and able to provide feedback if they feel uncomfortable.
Recommended approach	Always with respect, without any sexual or humiliating comments.
Presence of a third person	Recommended, especially when working with children

Inappropriate (Potentially Abusive) Physical Touch

Definition:

- ▶ Touch that has no educational purpose,
- ▶ Occurs outside the context of training,
- ▶ Is prolonged,
- ▶ Isolated,
- ▶ Or directed toward intimate parts of the body,
- ▶ And may cause discomfort, fear, or humiliation.

Carateristics:

Purpose	Has no clear educational purpose; may be of an intimate, controlling, or sexualized nature.
Type of touch	Prolonged, repetitive, unnecessary, mostly close to intimate parts of the body including: thighs, chest, hips, waist, neck...
Location	In private spaces, off the field, without others present (e.g., office, locker room).
Communication	Without explanation, without consent, accompanied by threats or emotional pressure, or flattering or affectionate speech with a sexual connotation
Athlete's reaction	The athlete feels uncomfortable but is afraid to speak up or stop the coach's behaviour
Approach	Conducted in secrecy, with a prohibition on telling others.
Context	The touch is repeated, occurring outside the scope of training.

Examples of inappropriate touch:

- ▶ The coach touches the athlete's thigh "to check muscle tone," but without an educational purpose.
- ▶ The coach hugs the athlete after every training session, even though the athlete shows discomfort.
- ▶ The coach playfully slaps the athlete after every training session, even though the athlete shows discomfort.
- ▶ The coach calls the athlete into the office to "correct posture," without a third person present.
- ▶ The coach massages the athlete without consent and outside a professional context.
- ▶ The coach touches the athlete's chest or waist during a demonstration, even though it is unnecessary.

How to distinguish educational touch from inappropriate touch?

KEY CRITERIA:

1. Does it have an educational purpose?
2. Is the touch necessary?
3. Is it in a public space?
4. Have I informed the athlete about the touch beforehand?
5. Is the touch brief and does it end once the demonstration or correction is completed?
6. Does the touch involve areas near intimate parts of the body?
7. Could the touch be replaced by other methods or tools, verbal instruction, or a recorded demonstration?
8. Can the athlete be asked for consent to perform the demonstration on their body without causing discomfort?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COACHES AND SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS

For Coaches:

- ▶ Always explain the purpose of the touch before it occurs.
- ▶ Seek verbal consent, especially for sensitive corrections.
- ▶ Use alternatives - demonstrate on themselves, use equipment, or provide verbal instructions.
- ▶ Avoid touching intimate parts of the body - if necessary (e.g., medical assistance), always in the presence of a third person.
- ▶ Be aware of the athlete's reaction - if discomfort is felt, stop immediately.
- ▶ Do not use touch as a reward or punishment.

For Sports Organizations:

- ▶ Implement the “2+1 Rule”: no private contact between coach and athlete without a third person present.
- ▶ Include physical touch guidelines in coach certification
- ▶ Keep records of any touch involving intimate parts of the body - documenting purpose and presence of a third person.
- ▶ Provide an anonymous channel for reporting suspicious behavior.
- ▶ Appoint a child protection officer to oversee relationships between coaches and athletes.

IS TOUCH A TABOO?

- ▶ A touch in sport practicing does not have any single clear ethical basis.
- ▶ Ignorance, fear and prejudice often align touch with sexual contact and thus abuse.
- ▶ Cultural & gender differences make a significant impact to this.
- ▶ Avoiding touch in sport practising on account of fear of boards or attorneys is unethical.
- ▶ Rigidly withholding touch from the athletes who can benefit from it, such as those who are anxious can be harming and therefore unethical.
- ▶ Physical touch in sport is not automatically abuse - however, it can become inappropriate or abusive if it occurs outside an educational context, is done in secrecy, without consent, or involves intimate parts of the body.
- ▶ We need to be clear and open with our athletes, colleagues in clubs, and officials in sport about when and how we or they might cross these boundaries between educational and potentially abusive touch.
- ▶ The key lies in transparency, professionalism, and respecting boundaries.

KEY MESSAGE

1. Sport is an international environment; behavior and norms accepted in one culture might be seen as inappropriate or offensive in another.

➤ Develop cultural sensitivity and awareness.

2. Women in sport are often vulnerable to gender-based violence and may fear reporting abuse due to stigma or career risks.

▶ Create safe environment where women can speak openly and be protected.

3. Children (all those under 18) have specific rights to protection of harassment and abuse, because of their need to be cared for and owing to their dependency on others.

▶ Identify and address risks and generate appropriate systems in place in clubs and among personnel to adequately respond to concerns.

THANK YOU!

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