

AVOIDING CHILD ABUSE

Guidelines for those working with children in tennis

Child abuse is a very emotive and difficult subject. Below there is information for everyone involved in children's tennis. It is explained what abuse is, how to recognise it and what to do if you have concerns. It offers advice for parents, coaches and sports organisations to ensure they do everything they can to protect children from abuse.

What's child abuse?

It is a term used to describe ways in which children are harmed

Who does usually abuse from children?

- Adults
- Often by people they know and trust

Where can be children abused?

- Within or outside their family
- At school
- In other environments: sports, etc.

Which are the effects of child abuse?

- They can be devastating, especially if children are left unprotected or do not receive help to cope with the abuse
- The most serious effect is that children can or do die as a result of abuse
- They can develop behavioural difficulties, problems at school, their development can be delayed and they can become depressed and withdrawn
- Some of these problems, if left untreated, can persist into adulthood

How can children be abused?

There are different forms of child abuse that are included in the table below

NAME	CHARACTERISTICS
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physically hurt or injure children which is not the result of an accident - Ex. Bruising which is recurrent and on parts of the body where accidental injury would be unlikely to occur - Injuries: Marks, burns, scalds. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It may be difficult for the child to explain and may have not been treated. - They may be covered by clothing - They may only be noticed if, for example, the child removes clothing during exercise - Concern may arise from the reluctance of a youngster to remove clothing when warm - Give children alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison - Attempt to suffocate or drown children - In sport: when the nature and intensity of training exceeds the capacity of the child's immature and growing body
Neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fail to meet a child's basic physical needs (e.g. food, warm, clothing) - Consistently leave children alone and unsupervised - Fail or refuse to give children love, affection or attention - It may be a long term, so it is important to notice physical and behavioural signs - Indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It may be indicated by a child failing to attain the development expected to the age - The child is badly cared for - The child may often lack friends because of his appearance - The child may arrive late and leave alone from coaching sessions - In sport: if the coach fails to ensure that the students are safe or exposes them to undue cold or risk of injury
Sexual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When adults use them to meet their own sexual needs - Full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, fondling - Showing children pornographic books, photographs or videos, taking pictures for pornographic purposes - Indicators: The child will often be threatened not to reveal what is happening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children often feel responsible and ashamed - They may find it difficult to reveal what has happened to them - They are concerned about the outcome - Sometimes, the child will find the courage to tell someone about it - Indicators may be physical (pain, discomfort) or behavioural - The child can seem very sexually aware for the age or be afraid of a particular adult - In sport: In situations which involve physical contact (eg. supporting or guiding children) could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed. Abusive situations may also occur if adults misuse their power over young people
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When there is persistent lack of love or affection - When there is constant overprotection which prevents children from socialising - Children are frequently being shouted at or taunted - Children are continually made to feel inadequate by remarks made by parents - There is neglect, physical or sexual abuse - Indicators: It will be very difficult to recognise unless the child is known for a period of time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child loses interest on tennis - Child avoids situations such as matches because they fear the verbal abuse which a poor result will bring - Change in the behaviour of the child that may be abrupt or gradual - Inability to grow and thrive - Speech may be affected - The child may become withdrawn and quiet and develop nervous behaviour - In sport: When parents or coaches subject children to constant criticism, bullying or unrealistic pressure to perform high expectations

How would you recognise a child is being abused?

The signs would include the following:

- Unexplained bruising or injuries
- Sexually explicit language or actions
- Sudden changes in behaviour
- Something a child has said
- Something another person says
- A change observed over a large period of time either in terms of behavioural or physical signs (e.g. the child losing weight or becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt)

However:

- A child could be displaying some or all of these signs, or behaving a way which is worrying, this does not necessarily mean the child is being abused
- There may not be any signs, you may just feel something is wrong

What to do if you have concerns?

- It is not your responsibility to decide if it is abuse but, it is your responsibility to act on your concerns and do something about it. Any action which you take should be undertaken professionally and confidentially and by direct contact with people who can help
- First talk to the parents or carers, but if your concerns are about sexual abuse or violence doing so may put the child at a greater risk
- Other possibility is to consult the person in charge or someone you can trust, a senior colleague, employer or reliable person who can help.
- The last possibility is to contact the Social Services or the Police:
 - They have a duty under the law to ensure children are protected and to help those who have been abused
 - They are trained to deal with child abuse
 - They will give advice and take responsibility for any action which is necessary
 - They have a responsibility to investigate all concerns about child abuse

What should you do if a child tells you s/he is being abused?

- Stay calm: ensure that the child is safe and feels safe
- Show and tell the child that you are taking what he says seriously
- Listen to what the child has to say and not suggest ideas
- Use open questions
- Reassure the child and stress that s/he is not to blame

- Be honest, explain you will have to tell someone else to help stop the abuse
- Make a note of what the child has said as soon as possible after the event
- Record facts, not opinions
- Maintain confidentiality, only tell others if it will help protect the child

What shouldn't you do if a child tells you s/he is being abused?

Never

- Rush into actions that may be inappropriate
- Make promises you cannot keep
- Take sole responsibility, consult someone else in order to protect the child and gain support for yourself
- Do nothing and hope that the problem will 'go away'
- Think that if you do something it might make things worse: taking appropriate action takes courage but it protects a young life

What can you do to protect children from abuse?

If you are a coach or your work with children

As a general rule, all coaches, teachers and leaders should:

- demonstrate integrity and respect for young people
- promote fair play and the positive aspects of sport and physical activity
- display high standards of behaviour and personal needs of young people
- conduct sport and physical activity in a safe and encouraging manner
- give all young people equal opportunities to participate, appropriate to their experience and level of maturity
- recognise the importance of fun and enjoyment in sport and physical activity
- achieve appropriate qualifications and competence
- be positive and enthusiastic
- give feedback in a constructive and encouraging manner. Those who constantly criticise players and rebuke them may be responsible for the young player deciding against tennis as a sport
- never use any form of physical or emotional punishment to discipline participants
- not drink alcohol or smoke when working with young people
- involve parents and guardians whenever possible.
- be aware of their own behaviour in preventing any form of abuse
- be aware of the impact of their own words and language on young players
- have a duty to prevent physical injury
- ensure that their verbal and non-verbal communication is positive and that the players are not affected emotionally
- consider where the boundaries of their responsibility are if they use over-demanding and inappropriate training methods and routines which result in physical damage.
- consider whether their training and practising methods are appropriate to individual players

If you are a parent or a carer

- Check to see if the club has a policy which ensures children are protected and kept safe from harm
- Check that staff and volunteers are carefully recruited, trained and supervised
- Know how to voice your concerns or complain if there is anything you are not happy about
- Ensure your children know how to voice their concerns or complain if there is anything they are not happy about
- Encourage your child to talk to you about any worries

If you're an official, club or association manager, you may use the following checklist

- Does your organisation have established procedures for recruiting selecting training and supervising persons who will 'work with young people'?
- Do you encourage coaches, teachers and leaders to gain appropriate qualifications?
- Do all coaches teachers and leaders have clearly defined and understood roles?
- Do you, where there are mixed sex classes ensure a balance between male and female coaches' teachers and leaders in each activity?
- Do coaches' teachers and leaders have the skills to meet the special needs of young people with a disability who chose to participate in your activities?
- Do you maintain written records of attendance, parental consent and accidents?
- Do you have a written health and safe policy covering fire procedures, telephone access, first aid and emergencies?
- Are adults familiar with all written instructions on the use of specialist facilities and equipment when working with young people?
- Do parents, guardians and young people know who to approach if they fear something wrong and how to make a complaint?
- Do you have your own policy on safety and security for young people and is everyone familiar with it?

If you have to recruit a coach or an employee:

- define the role by listing tasks to be undertaken and the skills required: specify which qualifications are necessary
- issue an application/profile form to each individual together with information about the organisation and the role of vacancy. Ask about an individual's past career, interests, qualifications and experience, check for any gaps and omissions; ask why they left any previous position. Make it clear that this information will be treated in confidence
- tell applicant that they must declare any past criminal records or cases pending
- ask for two unrelated people who can provide confidential references; at least one should relate to the applicant's previous contact with young people. Tell referees about the role, and ask them to give an opinion about the applicant's suitability in writing. If you have any doubts discuss these with the referee by telephone.

- if possible, with at least two interviewers present, see the applicant in person so that you gain a sense of their suitability and motives
- recruit for an initial trial period before confirming their appointment

When training coaches or staff members:

Support volunteers and paid employees working with young people by:

- providing an induction programme to familiarise them with your organisation and their role
- assessing their needs to carry out their role effectively, and then providing them with coaching, training and support to acquire fine qualifications and experience they need
- identifying a suitable person to provide them with supervision at regular intervals, and whom the adult can approach at any time if they are uncertain about what to do

Make sure your organisation has a well-publicised complaints procedure so that parents, guardians and young people can tell you if they have any problems.

If you are a coach, how can you protect yourself from allegations of abuse?

You can reduce situations for abuse of children and help to protect staff and volunteers by promoting good practice.

It is very important to realise that whilst you have a duty to children with whom you work, so you also have a duty to yourself to prevent any accusations of abuse or improper behaviour with players. The following guidelines are important in this respect.

Anyone working with children in tennis should:

1. be professional and maintain the highest standards of personal behaviour at all times.
2. be aware of situations in which actions can be misconstrued or manipulated by others, for example if you are alone with the last player to leave the clubhouse or changing rooms you are open to the possibility of allegations into your behaviour. As a general rule, it does not make sense to spend excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others
3. be vigilant and aware of how actions can be misinterpreted. For example, adolescent girls can have strong emotional feelings towards male coaches. Whilst these should not be dismissed and the youngster hurt as a result, neither should they be encouraged in any way.
4. not appear to favour one child more than another.

5. be very aware that physically handling a player, perhaps to help develop a game skill such as the backhand swing, can be misconstrued by an observer or even by the player.

6. be aware of the discussions they have with children and the language they use. You should not swear or use or respond to sexual innuendo.

7. design and use training methods which are wholly appropriate for the player. This means that consideration should be given for example to changes in the player such as growth spurts during puberty.

8. consider their position when working with individuals whose parents are not present or, for example when driving them alone, going into your home or going into their home. When any of these are unavoidable, ensure they only occur with the full knowledge and consent of someone in charge in the organisation or the child's parents. It is important to realise that the presence of other people is an insurance against the possibility of false accusations.

9. conduct all dealings with children in a public environment as much as possible, in order that all behaviour can be readily observed

In the event of an allegation of improper behaviour being made against you, your personal conduct at all times will be very important evidence. To perpetrate child abuse the child and the adult will be alone and away from the public view. Thus the best defence is to avoid situations which place you in a potentially difficult position.

You should never

1. engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
2. allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any form
3. allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
4. make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun
5. let allegations a child makes go unchallenged or unrecorded. Always act
6. do things of a personal nature that children can do for themselves. However, it may be sometimes necessary to do things of a personal nature for children, particularly if they are very young or disabled. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of parents. In an emergency situation which requires this type of help parents should be fully informed. In such situations, it is important to be sensitive to the child and undertake personal care tasks with the utmost discretion.

References

Protecting children from abuse. Sports Council
Guidelines for those working with children in tennis. LTA
Safe and secure: young people in sport. Scottish Sports Council