



What can be done
if a coach
misbehaves? ►

Most children have enormous respect for their coaches. According to one study, 96 per cent of young athletes stated that coaches were a greater source of influence on their behaviour than teachers, parents, or their peers. But when coaches encourage children to cheat or abuse them in any way, the impact can be serious.

Gaston Marcotte, a professor of physical education at Université Laval in Québec City, has been a very outspoken critic of the lax approach most sport clubs have to the selection and monitoring of coaches. He notes that the people who prepare the ice surfaces at hockey arenas have to be licensed and trained, but any volunteer can walk in off the street and coach a team without even a background check.

One problem that could occur in coaching is cheating. Parents who hear of coaches who encourage cheating should inform them that teaching children to cheat is unacceptable and should let the other parents know what is going on. If the coach denies or refuses to change the behaviour, parents can go to the convenor for action. If nothing is done, look for a better sport environment. Unfortunately, taking a child off the team is hard because you're penalizing the child instead of the coach.

Children are also vulnerable to sexual abuse by adults involved in sport. Sporting environments increase the potential for abuse. Sexual abusers find it easy to work in locker rooms and showers, on trips, and during tournaments. The traits that make children good athletes — obedience, pliability, an eagerness and willingness to please — also make them targets for sexual abuse. Children are afraid the coach will reject them if they say “no” to improper advances. As parents, be wary of situations that are inappropriate. For example, never let your child train alone or go to a coach's house unattended.

If possible, make sure another adult is involved in the coaching process. This means that contact with children is always in the presence of another adult. If individual coaching is required, make sure the room is open so the children can be seen by other people. Be sure that all touching is limited to what is strictly needed for proper coaching such as spotting or the correction of errors.

Verbal abuse is another problem that may occur in coaching. Coaches who value winning above all else may berate young children for missing a shot or not landing a jump. This type of behaviour is inappropriate for any coach — at any level of sport.