

Erasmus+ Sport RE-Play 2.0 Mentoring program

Module 1:1 Children's rights – safeguarding and protection

This part of the mentoring program will cover what children's rights in sport are and how to understand how rights can be implemented in the work as a coach to make the sport environment a safe place for young athletes. This module embrace how young coaches can develop a protective coaching practice and how to deal with risk situations that may occur in the sport context.

This mentoring module cover:

- a) learning goals for mentors and mentees,
- b) knowledge on children's rights, why protection of children in sport are needed, and how safeguarding can be applied in sport practice.
- c) mentor-mentee activities to develop an understanding of children's rights in relation to sport practice and the coaching role,
- d) questions for mentors and mentees to discuss to strengthen the ability to transform children's rights into the daily coaching practice.



a) Learning goals for mentors and mentees

Under module 1:1, *the mentor* (university sport student) should be able to:

1. Transmit knowledge of UNCRC and its significance in youth sports to young coaches.
2. Understand how to communicate the idea of empowering children in sport with help of UNCRC art 2, 3, 12, and 19.
3. Convey the message that coaches are important in the development of a safe and sound youth sport where children and young athletes are protected.

By the end of module 1:1, *the mentee* (young coach) should be able to:

1. Understand the content of five articles of United Nation Convention of the Right of the Child (UNCRC); Art 2, 3, 12 and 19.
2. Understand how to increase children's influence and participation in the sport and to demonstrate knowledge of harm and abuse in sport that put children at risk.
3. Work consciously based on the best interests of the child.
4. Problematize situations, attitudes and social interactions in sport practice that may involve a risk for violation of children's safety and rights in sport.

b) Safeguarding and protecting children

Why do we need to protect children in sports?

Sport clubs should adopt a child centred approach that explicitly recognises children as rights-holders. This should be embedded in the sport club's culture and practices but also inform all decision-making. It is evidently from sport research and sport practices that sport sometimes fails to take full account of the children's views and the risks of abuse, violence and exploitation children and young athletes are exposed to in various sports.

There are organisational cultures who silences problems of harm, abuse and inequity in children's sports (Brackenridge, Kay & Rhind, 2012). Coaches are in a position with responsible to ensure that sports with young people takes place in safe environments. Children have the right to participate in sport in a safe, equitable and enjoyable environment. Their rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Problems of abuse, violence, and exploitation

Over the past 15 years victims of all forms of violence in sport have started to be able to have their voices heard and responded to. Previously there has been little questioning of the perception that sport is only good for children and young people. Until early 2000s very few sports organisations had put in place systems and structures to protect children with children's rights in mind or to respond to complaints about behaviour of adults or other young people in sport that could lead to negative results for children.

Power of coaches – children subordinated position

*Often adults take the decision and plan for what should be done in practice and competition. This has led to a construction of a youth sport based mostly on an adult perspective of sport where children are in a subordinated position in many sports practices. To share the power with young people and to decrease the power of adults a **child-centred culture may be developed**, where protecting, promoting, and realising children's rights is crucial to empowering children, so they can thrive, both now and in the future.*

Dominating cultures of performance and winning

Children are increasingly placed under pressure to be competitive and succeed at all costs, which results in them resorting to practices that are not in their best interests, e.g., selective mechanisms, injuries from overtraining and inappropriate dietary habits linked to body image concerns.

Lack of preventive work for protection of young athletes

Sport clubs may be keen to protect children from exploitation and harm. But their knowledge of the UNCRC and children's rights more generally is typically limited. Child safeguarding in sport has been given too little attention by many clubs, organisations, funding bodies and governments for a considerable amount of time. The most common reactions being that it does not happen, is someone else's responsibility or is an isolated incident.



What are children's rights about?

The most comprehensive human rights document regarding children under 18 years old is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC was adopted in 1989. The United Nations (UN) wrote the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The UN promotes CRC content which is of social and cultural benefit to children's well-being; providing children the rights to recreation, leisure, freedom of expression and association, and to be consulted on matters affecting them; and protecting children against abuse, neglect and exploitation.



UNCRC article no 2. No discrimination

Article two means that everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect and not be discriminated against based on without regard for the child's or its parents' gender, race, age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, beliefs, religious or political affiliation.

Article 2

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

UNCRC article no 3. Best interests of the child

Article three means that the best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

Article 3

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

UNCRC article no 12. Respect for children's views

Article twelve means that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

UNCRC article no 19. Protection from violence

Article nineteen means that every child has the right to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Article 19

1. States 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.

How to develop a safe and protective coaching practice

In sport coaches should always act in the best interests of the child and protect children under 18 years old from abusive behaviour. However, there is a gap between the policy and practice in sport when it comes to children's rights and preventive work (Eliasson, 2019).

1. *Make children's views visible and take them seriously*

Children, coaches, and parents have sometimes different views on what was most valuable in children's sports, and this affects their expectations and interactions (Eliasson, 2015). Abused children are afraid to talk about their experiences. Therefore, children's views must be made visible and put into the centre of children's and youth's sports.

- a) Devote time and attention to listening to children and youth athletes and develop listening skills among coaches and athletes. When talking to children, try to understand their viewpoints and take these seriously and integrate in sport practice.
- b) Plan regular sharing views and listening activities into your training week. Make eye contact and ask open-ended questions, listen to their opinions, and seriously show interest in what they are saying.
- c) Encourage children to express their views, listen to each other in different situations and show the importance and value of expressing views and listening to others' views.

2. *Recognising abusive actions and interactions among peers and coaches*

Good coaches are vital role models in children's sport, and they generally provide children with skilled instruction in a safe and non-threatening environment (Child Protection in Sport Unit, 2022).

To recognise abusive actions and interactions:

- a) Be concerned about poor practices, winning at all cost practices, overzealous coaching, abuse exclusion and selection mechanisms, and the commodification of young athletes.
- b) Be aware of abuse such as emotional abuse, bullying, neglect, sexual and physical abuse
- c) Develop measures aimed at recognising abuse in sport. Take steps to minimise any abuse identified through a risk assessment

3. *Understanding risk for emotional abuse in competitive situations*

Children and young people in sport are often dependent on adults in sport, and for example the coaches for selection or for participation in competition. Coaches may use their position of power in a way that leads to experiences of emotional abuse (Gervis, & Dunn, 2004). To understand the risk;

- a) Be aware of dependencies between coaches and athletes. For talented young people who dream of success in sport this bond may be even harder to deal with.
- b) Create awareness of initiation ceremonies which involve abusive and violent tendencies. This should not be sanctioned or ignored by adults as it is difficult for a young athlete to speak out against older peers.
- c) Educate young athletes and coaches about UNCRC and risk for abuse in sport.

4. *Action plan for preventing and managing violation of children's rights*

Codes of conduct, practice and ethics are one of the most common mechanisms for raising standards of safety and behaviour (Brackenridge, Fasting, Kirby et al. (2010).

- a) clarify the objectives of codes of conduct aimed towards preventing violence against children in sport and assure effective codes of conduct
- b) an effective code includes clear aspirational standards based on consensus principles that include explicit guidance to help sport coaches make informed decisions in ethically ambiguous situations.
- c) Set up child safeguarding strategies for sports structures, activities, and events

c) Mentor-mentee activity

Meeting 1

For safeguarding to be effective, procedures must be credible for children and help to ensure a prompt response to concerns about a child's safety or well-being. Violence against children is distressing and can be difficult to deal with. Sport organisations have a duty to ensure that advice and support is in place to help people to play their part in safeguarding children.

Focus: Discuss mentee experiences, needs and development objectives regarding children's rights and safeguarding in his or her sport context. Watch part one of video Module 1:1 Safeguarding and protecting children and young athletes

Assignment 1. To do until next meeting: *Find out what safeguarding procedures is developed in your sport club and how children's rights are integrated in rules or guidelines for coaches. How have your organisation made information available to children, parents, and coaches?*

Meeting 2

Children's sport should be carried out in a safe, positive, and encouraging atmosphere. Standards of behaviour set a benchmark of what is acceptable within the sport environment.

Focus: Discuss and elaborate on the results and experiences of assignment from the first meeting.

Assignment 2. To do until next meeting: *Find out if your sport club has developed codes of conduct for coaches that describe what an acceptable standard of behaviour is and how this promotes a best practice. Find out how your coaching practice and your coaching behaviour can be even more adjusted to the rights of the child and all the children in your group or team.* Watch part two of video Module 1:1 Safeguarding and protecting children and young athletes

Meeting 3

Organisations need to know whether safeguarding is effective and if improvements and adaptations are needed.

Focus: Discuss and elaborate on the results and experiences of assignment 2 a) from the second meeting. Discuss questions (d) or any questions which the mentee find relevant and significant to understand safeguarding of young athletes in sport.

d) Questions to discuss

1. How can a coach adopt a child centred approach that explicitly recognises children as rights-holders?
2. How can a coach integrate children's rights and safeguarding in the daily sport practice?
3. What may be difficult with working as a coach with children's rights in mind?
4. If you have worked with safeguarding in sport, what reactions have you got from young athletes and others?

References

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Figure 1. United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child. Unicef.org

1  DEFINITION OF A CHILD	2  NO DISCRIMINATION	3  BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD	4  MAKING RIGHTS REAL	5  FAMILY GUIDANCE AS CHILDREN DEVELOP	6  LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT	7  NAME AND NATIONALITY
8  IDENTITY	9  KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER	10  CONTACT WITH PARENTS ACROSS COUNTRIES	11  PROTECTION FROM KIDNAPPING	12  RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS	13  SHARING THOUGHTS FREELY	14  FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION
15  SETTING UP OR JOINING GROUPS	16  PROTECTION OF PRIVACY	17  ACCESS TO INFORMATION	18  RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS	19  PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE	20  CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILIES	21  CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED
22  REFUGEE CHILDREN	23  CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES	24  HEALTH, WATER, FOOD, ENVIRONMENT	25  REVIEW OF A CHILD'S PLACEMENT	26  SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HELP	27  FOOD, CLOTHING, A SAFE HOME	28  ACCESS TO EDUCATION
29  AIMS OF EDUCATION	30  MINORITY CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION	31  REST, PLAY, CULTURE, ARTS	32  PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL WORK	33  PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL DRUGS	34  PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL ABUSE	35  PREVENTION OF SALE AND TRAFFICKING
36  PROTECTION FROM EXPLOITATION	37  CHILDREN IN DETENTION	38  PROTECTION IN WAR	39  RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION	40  CHILDREN WHO BREAK THE LAW	41  BEST LAW FOR CHILDREN APPLIES	42  EVERYONE MUST KNOW CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
43-54  HOW THE CONVENTION WORKS	CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD					