

RELATIONSHIPS



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Developing good relationships leads to positive behaviour on and off the pitch. Positive relationships are essential for creating the right environment. Unfortunately, there may be occasions where inappropriate relationships with children and young people are formed through football.

Within the Scottish FA all members of staff and Associated Persons are expected to be proactive in promoting positive relationships with all children and young people involved in football. This Practice Note sets out how members of staff and Associated Persons can develop positive relationships, it includes information about 'positions of trust', and it highlights behaviour which is inappropriate and the response that should be taken by anyone involved in football if they have any concerns.

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Positive relationships are essential for creating an environment of inclusivity and fun. They lead to effective learning and create a place where children and young people feel able to share any worries or concerns. Where children and young people feel included, respected, safe and secure they are more likely to develop self-confidence, resilience and positive views of themselves.

HOW TO DEVELOP POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



DO

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have fun and help children and young people get the most out their football experience • Support the children and young people to understand their rights in football • Treat them with respect, dignity, sensitivity and fairness • Listen to what they have to say and, when possible, include them in decisions on matters that affect them • Set clear boundaries so they know what to expect from you and what you expect from them | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate the success but put the interests of each child before winning • Encourage them to be the best version of themselves and to recognise their strengths and weaknesses • Give enthusiastic and constructive feedback • Challenge inappropriate behaviour e.g. bullying behaviour, swearing or sexualised language • Involve their parents and carers, wherever possible |
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DON'T

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have favourites' – this could lead to resentment and jealousy by other children and could be misinterpreted by others • Spend excessive amounts of time alone with children and young people away from others • Make sexually suggestive comments to a child or young person, even in jest | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form intimate emotional, physical or sexual relationships with children and young people • Have a child or young person to stay at your home where this is not part of a pre-existing family relationship or social relationship with other members of your family |
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POSITION OF TRUST

In football, as in many sports, children and young people look up to the adults involved in the game and those in leadership roles. They see these individuals as **idols, role models** and sometimes the people who can help them **achieve their goal** of becoming a professional footballer, whether this is real or perceived.

A **position of trust** is any position of authority that requires the holder of the position to enjoy the trust of a person over whom they exercise this authority and can also be known as a 'relationship of trust'. In the context of this Practice Note, people who hold positions of trust are generally adults but will also apply to young people who are aged under 18 and have taken on leadership roles.

The power and influence a member of staff and/or Associated Person has over a child or young person, who they are coaching or looking after in football, cannot be underestimated. Therefore, members of staff and Associated Persons will be considered to be in a position of trust by the Scottish FA.

If there is an additional competitive aspect to the activity and the person in the position of authority could be seen as having a role in the child or young person's success or failure, for example, through team selection, then the dependency the younger person has upon the person in a position of authority will be increased. It is therefore vital for everyone to recognise the responsibility they have and ensure that they do not abuse their position of trust.

Current sexual offences legislation classifies any sexual activity involving children under 16 years old as unlawful. The **Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009** defines specific roles and settings where sexual activity between 16 or 17 year olds and those in a position of trust, responsibility, or authority, constitutes a criminal offence. The legislation does not currently include sports roles (e.g. coaches, instructors or helpers) or sports organisation settings (e.g. clubs, leisure facilities or events) within these definitions. Nonetheless the Scottish FA recognises the influence that a member of staff and/or Associated Person has over children and young people, and that by virtue of their role they have the capacity to influence their personal, social and sporting development.

Genuine relationships do occur, however, no intimate relationship should begin whilst the member of staff or Associated Person is in a position of trust with the young person, regardless of whether they are both over the legal age of consent.

ANY CONCERNS THAT A MEMBER OF STAFF AND/OR ASSOCIATED PERSON IS OR HAS ABUSED THEIR POSITION OF TRUST MUST BE REPORTED TO THE WELLBEING AND PROTECTION DEPARTMENT.

CHILD ON CHILD ABUSE

Football is a great place to make new friends and increase your social circle. Through a common interest in football friendships will form and relationships will develop between the children and young people. This may include intimate emotional relationships between children and young people. Often no harm comes from them, indeed they can be positive relationships. However, children and young people who suffer abuse can do so at the hands of other children and young people. **Peer on peer abuse may include physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse.** The Scottish FA takes harmful behaviour by children and young people towards other children and young people seriously.

'Positions of trust' also apply to children and young people who have taken on a leadership role within football. If there is a concern that a young person has abused their position of trust, or acted inappropriately towards another young person, this will be responded to in line with the [Responding to Concerns Procedure](#).

Any concerns about such conduct must be reported to a member of the Wellbeing and Protection Department and, if appropriate, reported to the police and local statutory services.



GROOMING

The vast majority of adults involved in Scottish FA activities with children and young people participate with the aim of providing a fun and positive experience for those with whom they work. However, the Scottish FA recognises that some people (though a minority) may use football as a way of gaining access to children and young people for inappropriate reasons, including sexual abuse.

In order to gain access to children and young people, those who commit offences often first earn the trust of people surrounding the child or young person. This may include representatives of the child or young person, members of the Scottish FA, clubs, coaches and volunteers, parents and carers and other children or young people. This process is referred to as 'grooming'. **This predatory behaviour is an offence and may be prosecuted separately to direct sexual abuse.** Those who commit offences often portray themselves as caring and trustworthy individuals so they are freely entrusted with the care of children or young people. Once they have gained access

to children or young people, they befriend them in order to break down any pre-existing barriers. As soon as a trusting friendship has been established, they manipulate and control children or young person into gratifying their sexual needs. It is important to recognise that this can occur over a very short or a very long period of time, depending on the individual and the role they have. For example, if a person is perceived by the child or young person as being able to influence their sporting career then the process can be very short indeed.

Some children or young people who have been sexually abused may not consider that they have been abused as a result of grooming and instead may think that they are in a 'loving' relationship with the adult. It is important to understand that grooming is part of the abuse and is a criminal offence. The **Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005** addresses the predatory behaviour of those who "groom" children with the aim of abusing them by introducing an offence of "grooming".

Any member of staff or Associated Person must report any suspicions or allegations of grooming to the Wellbeing and Protection Department in line with the Responding to Concerns Procedure.

OPPORTUNISTIC AND SITUATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Not all people who abuse children and young people are predatory or go into a role with the intention of abusing children or young people. In some circumstances, the adult may take advantage of the opportunity through **misuse of their position of trust** and a **lack of clear boundaries** ("opportunistic behaviour"). Others may be in a situation where through working with a child or young person they **start to feel an attraction** ("situational behaviour"). For those whose behaviour is opportunistic or situational, they may have never previously considered abusing a child or young person or had a sexual attraction to children or young people and may be just as confused about their own behaviour, thoughts and feelings. This does not mean that their behaviour is any less concerning or abusive. The wellbeing and safety of the child or young person must always be the paramount consideration and all actions should be taken in their best interests.

Any concerns of such behaviour must be responded to under the Responding to Concerns Procedure and reported to the police, if possible criminal behaviour.

In circumstances of opportunistic or situational behaviour the Appointment and Selection Procedure becomes less effective as a preventative measure and prevention planning becomes necessary as part of an on-going assessment to the safety of all children and young people involved in the activity or event.



SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Within football, as within other activities, sexual relationships do occur. It is important to address sexual activity both between young people and between adults and children.

Sexual activity between children and/or young people involved in football is prohibited during team events, in facilities and social activities organised by the Scottish FA. Inappropriate or criminal sexual behaviour committed by a child or young person may lead to the information being shared with the child's Named Person, if applicable, and may lead to reports being made to external agencies, such as the police or social services.

Sexual activity between children and young people is unlawful if one or both are aged under 16.

Sexual interactions between adults and young people (aged 16 and over) involved in football, while not illegal raise serious issues given the power imbalance inherent in the relationship. Where a young person is of the age of consent, the power the adult has over that young person may influence their ability to genuinely consent to sexual activity. Members of staff and/or Associated Persons in a position of authority may have significant power or influence over a young person's career.

SEXUAL ACTIVITY BETWEEN ADULTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 16 AND OVER) INVOLVED IN FOOTBALL IS PROHIBITED WHEN THE ADULT IS CONSIDERED TO BE IN A POSITION OF TRUST OR AUTHORITY (E.G. COACH, OFFICIAL ETC).

Inappropriate or criminal sexual behaviour committed by an adult will lead to suspension and disciplinary action in accordance with the Scottish FA Disciplinary Procedures, which in the case of criminal behaviour must include contacting the police.

Sexual activity between adults and children or young people under the age of 16 is a criminal act and should be immediately reported to the Wellbeing and Protection Department and the police.

References and information provided on legislation listed above has been taken from '10 Steps to Safeguard Children in Sport' published online by the Safeguarding in Sport Service:

https://www.childrenfirst.org.uk/media/eduoz5yd/10_steps_to_safeguard_children_in_sport_2013.pdf





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