

Guidelines for coaches: Intervening in sexual harassment between young people in sports clubs

1. Intervene

a) If you witness sexual harassment, intervene immediately by explaining that harassment will not be tolerated in the sport.

- “That’s not OK. We don’t tolerate sexual harassment here”
- “Hey, we don’t use language like that here. Do you understand what you did wrong?”

b) Explain that the sport should be a place that everyone can enjoy. Comments about sexuality can offend the target of the comments as well as other people who are present.

2. Listen and investigate

a) If an athlete tells you about sexual harassment, it’s important to listen to how the young person experienced the incident and the emotions it evoked in them. Give the young person who has experienced sexual harassment the time and space to explain what happened.

b) Take sexual harassment seriously. Do not downplay the harassment as a joke or place blame on the victim of the harassment.

c) Talk to all of the children or young people who were involved separately. Try to find out what happened in as much detail as possible.

d) Write down what you have discussed.

e) Tell the club management what has happened and discuss any disciplinary measures.

f) Speak to the parents of the children or young people involved. Find out whether the children or young people have spoken about the matter at home or have e.g. not wanted to come to practice.

3. Support change

Once you've found out what has happened, you can strive to prevent sexual harassment from continuing or reoccurring. Thank the people who brought the sexual harassment to light.

a) Support the victim of the sexual harassment

- Listen to the victim of the sexual harassment. Assure them that you will do everything you can to help.
- Tell the victim of the sexual harassment that the harassment is not their fault. Everyone has the right to physical integrity and their own boundaries. Sexual harassment cannot be justified through jokes or considered to be flirting.
- Together with others, think about what you could do if sexual harassment occurs again. A young person could, for example, tell the perpetrator to stop, try to leave, or tell a coach.
- Ask the young person what you can do to make them feel safe.

b) Speak to the perpetrator(s).

- Stay calm. Do not raise your voice.
- If the perpetrators are a group of children or young people, speak to each of them individually. Discuss how everyone is individually responsible for their own behaviour.
- Explain why the perpetrator's behaviour constitutes sexual harassment. Explain why harassment is harmful to the target of the harassment as well as to the entire team or group. Reiterate that sexual harassment is not acceptable under any circumstances.
- Communicate in the first person.
 - "I will not allow for our teammates to be treated in that way.
 - I don't think what you said was very funny. I'm surprised that you said that."
 - "Even though you wanted to get someone's attention, it isn't okay to violate another person's sexual autonomy."
- Discuss with the perpetrator why they harassed another person. What were they aiming to achieve? If the offensive behaviour was intended as a joke, discuss other ways to use humour. If the intention was to demonstrate interest, explain the differences between flirting and sexual harassment. Flirting is always mutual. Everyone is entitled to their own boundaries.

- Try to understand the reasons behind the sexual harassment. The young person may also be having issues at home. If you are concerned about their situation at home, you can always contact the duty child welfare social worker in your area to ask for advice.
- Other reasons for sexual harassment may include the desire to be part of a group, copying a friend's behaviour, attention-seeking, or a feeling of superiority towards the target of harassment.
- Agree on how the perpetrator(s) will change their behaviour in the future.
- Do not label the child or young person. Labels can make it harder for a young person to grow and rectify their behaviour.
- Explain that the situation is being monitored and that they now have the opportunity to change their behaviour.
- Speak with the perpetrator's parents about the situation so that they can support the child or young person in changing their behaviour.

4. Review and seek support

Check in with the victim after a few weeks to see whether the situation has changed. If you need additional support or would like to consult with someone, contact a school psychologist, school social worker, or other professionals who have experience with sexual harassment. You can also contact the [Et ole yksin service](#).

5. Prevent the recurrence of sexual harassment

Go through the steps of preventing sexual harassment together with your group using the [Et ole yksin service's guidelines](#).

Sources:

Ei meidän koulussa (*Not in our school*). <http://www.eimeidankoulussa.fi/?lang=en>
https://www.ouka.fi/documents/64277/104164/Seksuaalinen_hairinta.pdf/725a79ad-78ff-49b5-8285-909bce86a5b4

Safeguarding athletes from harassment and abuse in sport IOC Toolkit for IFs and NOCs