



# Peace and Child Rights

## **Policy:**

Coaches Across Continents' Child Protection Policy is based upon the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Specifically this states that children/young people have the right to be protected from violence and abuse, physical or mental.

This starting point is a deficit model, in that it highlights necessary protections for children. However, by further creating a Bill of Rights, Coaches Across Continents operates constructively and advocates a Child Rights Policy, which includes the right to kindness, equality, safety, and entitlement. These, when implemented, are positive hallmarks of 'peace', not merely the absence of abuse.

## **Philosophy:**

CAC's philosophy for ensuring child rights requires coaches to actively develop every child's sense of his/her self worth within a 'safe space' deliberately created as part of the programme.

## **Practice:**

CAC's research reveals that in many countries the law does not safeguard children. Cultural disciplinary practices are often based on physical violence. There is widespread sexual abuse within communities. Taken for granted cultural norms affect the attitudes and behaviour of coaches. It is therefore crucial to influence coaches' attitudes and develop their knowledge and skills. As advocates for child protection and child rights, they have potential to subsequently influence cultural values throughout their community.

CAC's Child Protection Workshop is designed to foster empathy whilst providing information and increasing knowledge.

An initial role-play shows a small child next to a large adult, illustrating how inadequate, weak, inferior, and dependent children feel. This image engages hearts as well as minds, engenders community responsibility for safeguarding children and ignites the desire to be role models and advocates for cultural change. Subsequently coaches publicly sign a promise to protect children and commit to action. They confirm these commitments with a handshake.

Information is given on the forms abuse can take, plus ways of addressing child protection violations. Furthermore, the CAC curriculum provides for ongoing role-modeling, experience, and discussion on treating young people with kindness and respect, demonstrating equality and entitlement and creating safe spaces for personal



growth and development. CAC's unique On-Field curriculum of soccer games reinforces key messages: be aware, consider alternatives, and take action.

CAC's culturally sensitive policy is adaptable to different contexts. As Self-Directed Learners, coaches identify locally relevant child protection and peace issues and create and coach soccer games to address them.

Empathy and information enhance child protection plus children's right to peace within their community.

### **Why is this important?**

It is clearly desirable to protect children from abuse and to keep them safe. To further support them to develop their personal capabilities, plus a sense of self-esteem, has benefits for an individual's life-long learning together with their capacity to make meaningful contributions to their families and communities. Everyone benefits. Every action has a ripple effect. CAC's initial question, "What does it feel like to be a child here?" invites questioning of previously taken for granted cultural assumptions. Resultant discussion changes both the coaching and community landscapes. Coaches Across Continents WISER monitoring and evaluation findings support this perspective.

Some aspects of safeguarding children challenge cultural beliefs. For example, coaches in Sierra Leone questioned whether tradition leads to more harm than good. In Uganda consideration of safeguarding and equality in sport highlighted the problems of disabled children being abused and discriminated against.

Local coaches and children use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to circulate their thoughts. CAC publishes a regular blog read across coaching communities. Asking questions, promoting open discussion, and sharing ideas through social media impacts the wider community in immeasurable ways, influencing attitudes, changing behaviours and altering mindsets.

### **The Future - towards an intersection of child rights and peace**

Children and young people are clearly entitled to protection, both in sport activities and throughout their communities. This is a universal truth. However, child protection practices are further enhanced by utilising constructive strategies based on recognition of benefits, which result from living in an environment, which fosters a sense of peace and self worth. These include the development of self-esteem alongside personal capacity building. Coaches Across Continents' educational methodology leads to the creation of Self-Directed Learners, capable of problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration. CAC coaches create and model 'safe spaces', places of peace, collaboration, and growth, conducive to constructive and sustainable ongoing community development.