

POSITION STATEMENT

The Use of Physical Punishment of Children and Youth in Sport and Recreation

The CCES is committed to ensuring that sport in Canada is fair, safe and open.

The CCES believes that for sport experiences to be positive, sport organizations and coaches must be deliberate and intentional in ensuring that their policies, programs and practices are driven by the 7 Principles of True Sport.

Recognizing that:

The CCES recognizes that good sport has significant positive effects on the short- and long-term development of children and youth.

The CCES knows that physical punishment has significant negative effects on the short- and long-term development of children and youth.

The CCES understand that the use of physical punishment of children and youth in sport is prevalent.

The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport opposes the use of physical punishment of children and youth in sport and recreation.

Definition of Physical Punishment of Children and Youth in Sport

The CCES defines physical punishment of children and youth in sport as any activity or behaviour required as a consequence of poor sport performance or some other undesirable behaviour that causes an athlete physical pain, discomfort or humiliation and is:

1. disconnected from, or not logically related to, the sport performance or behaviour it is intended to change; or
2. disconnected from, or not logically related to, improving performance in the sport; and
3. not consented to by the athlete (and/or their parent or guardian) engaged in such activity or behaviour.

For the purposes of this definition, children and youth athletes are individuals who have not reached the age of majority in their respective provincial or territorial jurisdictions.

The Positive Benefits of Sport

In Canada there is growing evidence that sport can have a positive impact on participants. Research also indicates that for sport to *do good*, it must *be good*. Several recent reports synthesize these findings.^{i,ii}

Canadians believe in the potential of sport to have a positive impact on the development of children and youth, but they also believe that the current sport system is not living up to this potential.ⁱⁱⁱ Canadians want the sport their children engage in to be better. They want good sport.

Good sport is values-based and principle-driven and in Canada we have increasingly come to refer to good sport as ‘true sport’. True Sport is sport driven by True Sport’s 7 Principles.^{iv} The CCES has played a leadership role in the development and growth of the True Sport Movement, a movement designed to help sport live up to its full potential to have a positive impact on individuals and communities. The True Sport Movement is helping to ensure that the sport experience is driven by the 7 Principles of True Sport.

Physical Punishment of Children and Youth

There is increasing evidence that physical punishment is emotionally and psychologically harmful to children and youth, both in the short- and the long-term. Canadian child abuse experts Ron Ensom and Joan Durrant have just released a 20 year review of research on physical punishment of children and youth in which they show that physical punishment poses risks to the healthy development of children and youth.^v

Research evidence summarized in the *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth*^{vi} also notes a strong link between physical punishment and the development of violent attitudes and behaviours in children which is often displayed as bullying. Violence is modelled and nurtured by the use of physical punishment.

For these reasons, concerted efforts are needed to reduce the use of physical punishment of children and youth.

Physical Punishment of Children and Youth in Sport

The use of physical punishment in sport and its effects on children and youth have not been studied extensively. However, if the use of physical punishment in other contexts (e.g., the family, school) has been shown to be emotionally and psychologically harmful to children and youth, then it follows that the use of physical punishment in sport might be similarly harmful.

Proper physical conditioning for sport and the performance of certain sports, particularly at the highest competitive levels, often involves physical pain or discomfort. This is very different, however, from the use of physical punishment in sport to cause physical pain, discomfort and humiliation that is disconnected from, or not logically related to, the sport performance or behaviour it is intended to change; or disconnected from, or not logically related to, improving performance in the sport.

In their paper “*Physical Punishment of Children in Sport and Recreation: The Times They Are A-Changin’*”,^{vii} Ron Ensom and Joan Durrant consider the difference between training in sport and physical punishment in sport. They use **intent** and **consent** as two criteria to make crucial distinctions between what is appropriate and what is punitive in sport. In terms of **intent**, the fundamental questions are these: Is the physical activity engaged in primarily to cause physical pain, discomfort or humiliation? Is the physical activity imposed for poor performance or some other undesirable behaviour that is unrelated to the physical conditioning or skills required for the sport? In terms of **consent**, the pivotal question is whether by virtue of participating in the sport the individual consents to the kind of physical activity that is being imposed.

Practices that are physically punitive and intended primarily to humiliate children and youth in sport do not build athletic skill, speed, strength, endurance, or respect. They only cause harm.

References

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http://www.caaws.ca/ActivelyEngaging/documents/CAAWS_CS4L_Engaging_Women.pdf
- ⁱⁱ Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport. *What Sport Can Do: The True Sport Report* Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 2008 http://www.truesportpur.ca/files/tsreport/TS_report_EN_webdownload.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport. *2002 Canadian Public Opinion Survey on Youth and Sport* Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 2002
<http://www.truesportfoundation.ca/files/Documents/CCES-RPT-2002Survey-E.pdf>
- ^{iv} Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport *7 Principles of True Sport* Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport. <http://www.truesportpur.ca/en/page-11-principles-for-sport>
- ^v Durrant J, and Ensom R. Physical Punishment of Children: Lessons from 20 years of Research. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2012; 184(2): 1373-1377.
- ^{vi} Durrant, J.E., Ensom, R. and Coalition on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth (2004), *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth*. Ottawa: Coalition on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth. www.cheo.on.ca/en/physical punishment.
- ^{vii} Ensom, R. And Durrant J. Physical Punishment of Children in Sport and Recreation: The Times They Are A-Changin’ *Coaches PLAN* 2010; 17(2): 43-44.

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