



# Portrane Hockey Club

Creating a child friendly environment

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## Introduction

Team sports provide children with opportunities to learn many life skills, e.g. communication, co-operation, friendship, team work. Through participation in sport children's physical, social and personal skills can develop. Those opportunities can materialise if a child friendly environment is created. The Sports Council ([www.irishsportsCouncil.ie](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie)) has identified core values and principles that are essential in children's sport. These are based on what research has identified as benefitting the development of children and on the UN Charter of the Rights of the Child (<http://www.childrensrights.ie/childrens-rights-ireland/un-convention-rights-child>)

When working with children in sport it is essential to take account of the following:

## The importance of play and fun in childhood

Opportunities to play, enjoy themselves and have fun are essential for healthy child development. Sport is an activity where play, fun and enjoyment can be integral to it. However, this has to be consciously planned for. Children's sport needs to use this as a guiding principle.

## The needs of the child

It is always essential to keep in mind the stage of development and the ability of the child. Account needs to be taken of the concentration levels and the language skills of the child, so instructions should be given in a way that the child can readily understand and follow and activities may need to be short and varied.

Children need to feel that they matter in the club/ team so that they can develop a sense of belonging. This can be particularly important for a child who does not know many of the other children in the club. They need to feel secure in order for them to develop.

## Adult / Child Relationships

Sports leaders are in a position of trust and influence and should be positive role models in how they treat all the members of the group. Leaders need to treat all the children with respect, dignity and sensitivity. Children need to feel able to give their opinions, ask for help and be listened to. The interactions should encourage the children and build their self-esteem. Abuse of any kind is totally wrong and unacceptable.

## Equality

Children should be treated equitably and in a fair manner, regardless of ability, family background, or ethnicity. Particular sensitivity needs to be shown to children with disabilities to ensure that they have opportunities to participate. We need to strike a balance between children's desire to win and children's right to participate regardless of ability. Other children's attitudes to a child with a disability will be influenced by the leader's attitude.

## Fair Play

The principle of fair play should be emphasised. Each child should feel a part of the team and know that they will have chances to fairly participate. Participation, effort and enjoyment should be stressed rather than winning.

Children should be encouraged to play in a fair way. The European Code of Sports Ethics defines fair play as “much more than playing within the rules. It incorporates concepts of friendship, respect for others and always playing within the right spirit”.