

YOUR ROLE AS A PARENT OR GUARDIAN

As a parent or guardian, you know that children are constantly being put under pressure to train hard, compete and achieve at a high level. This pressure can lead athletes to make bad decisions often presented as shortcuts such as extreme dieting, over training, taking supplements or doping.

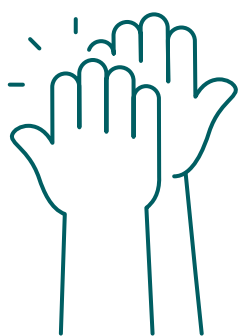
Your role as a parent is to help your children achieve their sporting goals and dreams while also being able to teach them respect, integrity and the value of clean sport.

You have the ability to be the consistent voice in their life promoting safety, good health, balance and the enjoyment of clean sport throughout their pursuit of excellence. This guide is designed to help you enhance your children's knowledge of how to protect themselves in their sport.



Sport has the power to build positive qualities such as commitment, respect, friendship, enjoyment, resilience, and healthy lifestyle choices. However, if these values are not emphasised, sport can also lead to negative behaviours such as dishonesty, arrogance, or prioritising winning over health and integrity. As parents, coaches, or role models, there are practical ways you can help embed the right values in young athletes:

- **Promote respect** - Encourage children to show respect not only for their opponents, but also for themselves, coaches, referees, and the game itself. This reinforces the idea of winning and losing with dignity and respect.
- **Focus on development, not just results** - Remind athletes that improving their skills, effort, and teamwork are more important than simply winning.
- **Model positive behaviour** - Praise your child for their effort regardless of the result, stay positive on the sideline, and speak well of opponents and officials after the match.
- **Set clear priorities** - Place respect, integrity, personal growth, and fairness above winning, and reinforce these values regularly.
- **Encourage reflection and dialogue** - Talk with your children about the values promoted in their club, team, or training environment, and help them see sport as a pathway for growth and becoming their best selves.
- **Teach life lessons through challenges** - If a child cuts corners or bends the rules, use it as a chance to discuss honesty, ethics, and the consequences of poor choices.
- **Highlight clean sport** - Be clear that performance-enhancing drugs and doping have no place in Irish sport. Share Sport Ireland's message that true achievement comes from hard work, integrity, and fair play.



By reinforcing these values, you can help ensure that children not only enjoy their sporting journey but also carry the spirit of clean and fair sport into all aspects of their lives.

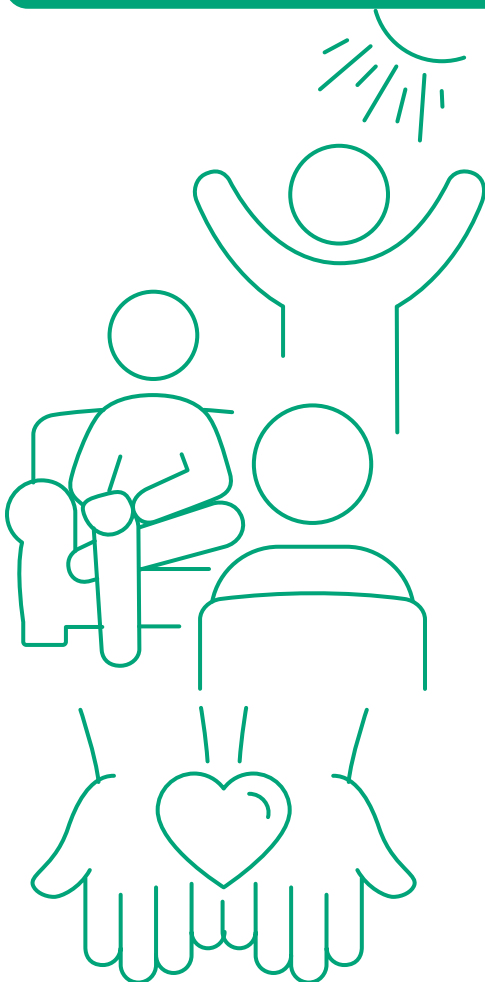
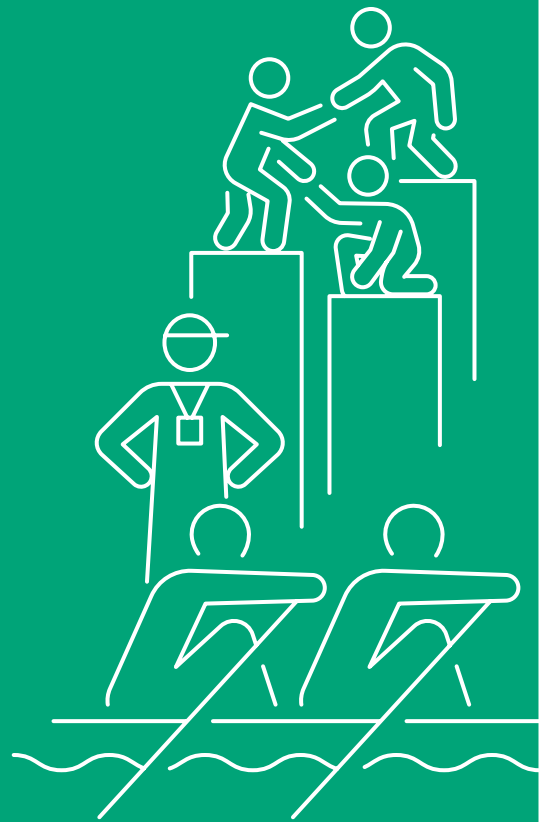
Recognising a Healthy Sporting Culture

The sporting environment that children are part of can strongly shape their values, mindset, and overall development. It is important to reflect on whether your child's club, team, or training setting is supporting their growth in a positive way.

Signs of a healthy sport culture include:

- **Supportive leaders and personnel** - Coaches, mentors, and support staff foster respect, fairness, and personal development.
- **Integrity in coaching** - Coaches act with good character, prioritise athlete well-being, and show a commitment to ongoing learning and improvement.
- **Learning from setbacks** - Mistakes or losses are framed as opportunities for growth rather than reasons for blame.
- **Positive peer influence** - Teammates encourage one another, celebrate effort, and strive to improve together.
- **Balanced pressure** - Training and competition should challenge young athletes without creating unhealthy stress or burnout.

If the sporting environment consistently undermines these values, it may be worth considering whether it is the right place for your child. Sport Ireland promotes environments that prioritise integrity, fairness, and respect so that every athlete has the chance to thrive.



Finding Balance

Young athletes need guidance to learn how they should balance their many responsibilities. From demanding training schedules, to schoolwork and education to spending time with family and friends.

There are ways that you can help ensure that your child is able to find balance within their busy lives:

- **Stay organised** – Use schedules, calendars, or planners to manage training, schoolwork, and downtime.
- **Ask for support** – Teach them it's okay to seek help from coaches, teachers, or parents if they feel stressed or overwhelmed.
- **Prioritise well-being** – Reinforce the importance of proper rest, quality sleep, and good nutrition as the foundation for performance and recovery.

Sport Ireland highlights that developing these habits early helps young athletes enjoy sport, avoid burnout, and build lifelong healthy routines.

Clean Sport Essentials for Parents

Checking Medications

To keep your child safe and compliant with anti-doping rules, it's important to check every medication before use. Many medicines can contain substances that are banned in sport under the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Prohibited List. It's important to make sure that any medication your child takes is permitted.

- **Check every medication** – Medication should be checked from the country it is bought in. Medication bought in the Republic of Ireland should be checked on Medcheck (<https://medcheck.sportireland.ie/>). Medication bought in Northern Ireland, the UK, the USA or elsewhere globally should be checked on GlobalDRO (<https://www.globaldro.com/Home>).
- **Inform healthcare professionals** – Always let your doctor know that your child is an athlete and subject to anti-doping rules.
- **Ask about alternatives** – If a prescribed medicine contains a prohibited substance, ask the doctor if there is a permitted alternative.
- **Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE)** – If no alternatives are available and the medication is essential a TUE can be obtained. For most young athletes: there is no need to apply in advance. If tested, a retrospective TUE can be submitted afterwards. Please visit our TUE Guide for more information.



By checking medications carefully, parents, guardians and athletes can protect both their health and their right to compete clean.

The risk of supplements

Sport Ireland encourages a food first approach to nutrition. For most athletes, a well-planned and balanced diet will meet all nutritional needs. Supplements are rarely necessary and can carry serious risks for both health and sporting careers. There is little evidence to support the need of supplements to complement a healthy diet.

Key points to remember:

- **No guarantees** – There is no guarantee that any supplement is free from prohibited substances.
- **Food first approach to nutrition** – Excellent nutrition and hydration remain the safest and most effective way to support performance, recovery, and lifelong health.
- **Supplement contamination** – Some supplements pose serious dangers to health due to contamination that can occur during the manufacturing process. Supplements can also be contaminated with prohibited substances which can lead to anti-doping rule violations.
- **Marketing myths** – Be aware of unrealistic or “too good to be true” marketing claims. No supplement manufacturer can guarantee the safety of their supplements.
- **Gateway to doping** – Research shows supplement use can increase the risk of future doping behaviours.
- **Strict Liability** – Athletes are always responsible for what is in their system, regardless of intent. Ensure that you and your children understand the Strict Liability Principle.
- **If supplements are used** – Only consider products that have been batch tested. This reduces, but does not eliminate, the risk of contamination. Informed Sport is the world's leading testing and certification program for brands producing sports and nutritional supplements. The supplement should be checked on Informed Sport to determine whether it has been batch tested. This reduces, but does not eliminate the risk of contamination.
- Sport Ireland advises that supplements should only be used when absolutely necessary and under the guidance of a qualified professional.

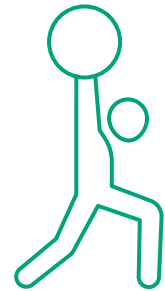


Recognising Athletes at Greater Risk of Doping

Understanding which athletes may be more vulnerable to doping helps parents and support personnel take proactive steps to protect them.

Certain personality traits, attitudes, and circumstances can increase risk, including:

- Low self-confidence or self-esteem
- Strong pressure to achieve results (from self, parents, or others)
- Concerns about body image or weight control
- Participation in sports with weight categories, endurance demands, or high emphasis on strength/speed
- Success measured by comparison with others rather than personal improvement
- Impatience with progress or desire for quick results
- Tendency to bend or break rules
- Belief that “everyone else is doping”
- Underestimating or denying the dangers of doping
- Family history of substance misuse
- Admiration of athletes who have doped



By being aware of these risk factors, parents can create an open environment to discuss pressures, reinforce positive values, and emphasise Sport Ireland’s commitment to clean sport.

Preventing the use of performance enhancing results

Parents, guardians and Athlete Support Personnel (ASP) play a crucial role in helping young athletes make the right choices. Preventing doping starts with clear expectations, open conversations, and consistent reinforcement of clean sport values.

EDUCATE

- Be clear with your child that you expect them to compete clean and avoid drugs.
- Reinforce that doping is cheating and goes against the values of sport.
- Talk regularly about ethics, proper training, balanced nutrition, hard work and recovery.
- Explain the health risks linked to doping substances and steroid abuse.
- Learn how to recognise the possible signs of doping behaviours.

ADVOCATE

- Encourage performance improvement through safe training, recovery, and good nutrition rather than shortcuts.
- Support your child in aiming for their personal best, not unrealistic perfection.
- Work with coaches to ensure they also promote clean sport values and maintain a zero-tolerance approach to drugs.



COMMUNICATE

- Keep conversations open and ongoing to make it clear that you expect your child to avoid performance-enhancing substances.
- Reassure them and stay supportive even when results don’t go their way. Highlight positives and use setbacks as learning opportunities.
- Stay connected with coaches and check in regularly about your child’s progress and well-being.
- Monitor any supplement use carefully and talk openly about the risks of using supplements. Foster a food first approach to nutrition.

Sport Ireland promotes a proactive, values-based approach to education in order to build resilience and support every athlete.

Protecting the Clean Athlete: Understanding the Sample Collection Process

Key Points for Parents and Athletes:

- **Understand Strict Liability** – Every athlete is responsible for everything they put into their body regardless of intent or how it got there. Ensure your children know this principle and its implications.
- **Explain testing procedures** – Athletes may be tested regularly in and out of competition to protect clean sport. Discuss why testing is important for fairness and safety.
- **Review the process together** – Go through the stages of sample collection so your child knows what to expect and feels confident during testing.
- **Rights and responsibilities** – Ensure your child understands their rights and responsibilities throughout the doping control process.
- **Use reliable resources** – Consult Sport Ireland Clean Sport and WADA resources to get accurate information and guidance for parents and athletes.

By educating your child on anti-doping procedures and rights, you help them navigate sport safely, confidently, and with integrity.

Recognising Possible Signs of Drug Use

Being able to identify potential warning signs helps parents, guardians and ASP intervene early and protect athletes from the risks associated with performance-enhancing substances and other drugs.

AT-RISK BEHAVIOURS

- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other recreational substances
- Frequent or non-discretionary use of dietary supplements
- Relying on untrustworthy or misinformed sources for performance advice
- Setting unrealistic goals or expectations for performance
- Self-medicating with drugs or supplements
- Engaging in other risk-taking behaviours



POSSIBLE SIGNS OF ANABOLIC STEROID USE

Athletes using anabolic steroids may display one or more of the following:

- Rapid weight gain
- Increased acne
- Hair loss
- Development of more masculine features in females (e.g., body hair growth, deepened voice)
- Abnormal breast development in males
- Needle marks or evidence of injections



POSSIBLE SIGNS OF OTHER DRUG USE OR ABUSE

Athletes using or misusing certain drugs may show one or more of the following:

- Mood swings or aggressive behaviour
- Sudden increase in training intensity
- Signs of depression
- Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
- Rapid weight gain or loss



Early recognition, combined with open communication and education about clean sport, is essential in supporting young athletes and preventing harm.

What to Do if Your Child is Doping

Even with strong guidance and support, young athletes can be exposed to pressures or influences that may lead them to consider performance-enhancing substances. Ignoring warning signs can have serious consequences, so it's essential to act quickly and maintain open communication.

React quickly if you think your child may be using performance enhancing drugs.

- **Act promptly** – If you suspect your child may be using prohibited substances, address it without delay.
- **Seek understanding** – Speak openly with your child to understand their perspective and voice your concerns.
- **Consult professionals** – Involve your child's doctor or a qualified health professional to discuss safe alternatives and proper recovery methods.
- **Be persistent and supportive** – Your guidance, care, and ongoing influence are critical in helping your child make the right decisions.



Sport Ireland emphasises that early intervention, education, and professional support are key to protecting the health and career of young athletes while promoting clean sport values.

For educational and informational purposes only.

If you require further information please contact us at cleansportededucation@sportireland.ie



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