

Be the Sixth **Player**

COACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

5

When Young People Say Something Harmful

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF YOUNG PLAYERS AND SPECTATORS

Children are innocent, as the saying goes. But what happens when we overhear a young person using harmful stereotypes and demeaning language toward girls and women athletes and teams? A young boy stating that women are not “strong enough” to play sports or adolescent girls making derogatory comments about a female teammate show that hurtful language has no minimum age requirement.

When you overhear a child or adolescent making hateful remarks or engaging in harassment, these incidents should not be dismissed as youthful mistakes. Without timely intervention, young people may repeat such behavior and, over time, become less inclined to consider the negative impact of their statements on others.

Children may be unaware of the full range of harms that their hateful comments can cause. They may not even understand what they are saying, merely repeating what they heard from an admired adult or peer. So, what can you do?

COACHING FROM THE OUTSIDE

If you hear children making derogatory comments, whether on purpose or not, coach them to understand the impact of their words and give them a better alternative. You may also be concerned that the child’s parents may not appreciate interventions with adult strangers or those that are not family members. But early intervention matters from trusted adults in children’s lives. Your words and actions can help a child learn more respectful and inclusive behavior. For example, you can say to a child respectfully and firmly, “Where did you hear that? How would someone feel receiving that message?” After talking about the impact of the statement, focus on empathy. Then, you can emphasize, “It’s not okay to use language that disrespects others. What is a more respectful way to express yourself?” Be the Sixth Player.



Be the Sixth Player

COACHING THE NEXT GENERATION · THE GAME PLAN

5

The Game Plan

DON'T

- ✗ Don't dismiss a child's hateful statements as "youthful mistakes"
- ✗ Don't assume children or teens understand the full consequences or meaning of their words
- ✗ Don't belittle or yell at a child or teen engaging in harassment, which can backfire

DO

- ✓ Do set a respectful, firm boundary and let them know their words are not respectful
- ✓ Do ask questions to help them understand the impact of their words on others
- ✓ Do keep interactions and explanations short and succinct
- ✓ Do check in on bystanders who appear to be upset by what they overheard
- ✓ Do follow up with an explanation, if the young person is in your care; if they are not, then do keep any response brief and respectful, or ask a caregiver, coach, teacher, usher, or event staff member to step in.

If you need an easy playbook to remember in the heat of the moment, use the [5 Ds of Bystander Intervention](#): **D**irect, **D**istract, **D**elay, **D**elegate, and **D**ocument.

RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS

Want to know more about calling foul on hate and harassment? Click on the resources below to learn more:

- ▶ [PERIL. Not Just a Joke: Understanding & Preventing Gender- & Sexuality-based Bigotry \[Report\].](#)
- ▶ [PERIL. Building Resilience & Confronting Risk: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization \[Report\].](#)
- ▶ [University of Illinois. Bystander Intervention Strategies.](#)

