

# Care and Caring in Competitive Youth Sport: Experiences and Challenges

---

Authors:  
Emily McCulloch & Parissa Safai.  
School of Kinesiology and Health Science  
Faculty of Health, York University

health



The purpose of our study was to gain insight about how care and caring were defined and experienced by coaches, athletes, and parents in youth sport. We conducted interviews with a youth volleyball club team in Toronto (Ontario) and reviewed the Ontario Volleyball Association's governing documents. Our results demonstrate that care remains poorly understood as simply the absence of harm or maltreatment. However, meaningful experiences of care in sport are more than that. Athletes want the coach to help them develop their skills and provide opportunities to perform. They also need the coach to communicate and explain their decisions about playing time. While organizational policies and documents can clearly define and outlaw harmful behaviours, such policies need to identify or explore caring elements such as social inclusion, belonging, and recognition. In addition, our study highlighted that coaches are often held singularly responsible for ensuring that athletes are cared for. Our findings highlight that more support for coaches are needed. These can include additional resources from the sport organization, as well as training to help coaches navigate caring as the absence of harm to fostering experiences of inclusion for athletes in a competitive context. Lastly, our findings highlight that care for coaches (whether coaches' self-care or care for coaches as provided by other sport participants) is needed in sport; we cannot expect coaches to care for athletes in fulsome ways if coaches are suffering from a lack of care and support.

**Original publication:** McCulloch, E., & Safai, P. (2022). Translating care from policy to practice: limits and lessons from an institutional ethnographic study examining Ontario youth volleyball. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 14(3), 529-544.  
doi:10.1080/19406940.2022.2090994.

[Access to publication](#)  
[Access to dissertation](#)

---