



Working with children

Guidelines for coaches and others

Clubs should provide guidelines for coaches and other personnel to protect them from risk and to keep children safe. This publication is intended as a general guide and is not to be taken as professional advice. It is recommended that sporting organisations develop guidelines tailored to the needs and context of their sport.

Maintain appropriate boundaries

Coaches and other personnel in positions of authority should maintain clear:

Physical boundaries

- Use drills to develop fitness, not as a punishment.
- Only use physical contact that is appropriate for the development of a particular skill.
- Work within sight of others at all times.

Emotional/verbal boundaries

- Use positive feedback on performance, not negative feedback about the person.
- Be encouraging and avoid put-downs.

Social boundaries

- Attend sport-related events such as sponsorship and fund-raising events, celebrations and annual meetings but don't socialise with athletes outside sporting functions.

Sexual boundaries

- Don't have sexual relationships with athletes you're coaching.
- Don't touch athletes in ways likely to make them feel uncomfortable.

In particular:

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Minimise physical contact

Generally physical contact with players/athletes should be to:

- develop sport skills
- give sports massage
- treat an injury
- prevent or respond to an injury
- meet the specific requirements of the sport.

All physical contact by personnel should fulfil the following criteria:

- physical contact should be appropriate for the development of a sport skill/s
- permission from the player/participant should always be sought
- player/athletes be congratulated or comforted in public not in an isolated setting.

Avoid being alone with a child

To protect both yourself and a child from risk:

- Do not isolate yourself and a child and avoid being alone with any particular child.
- If a child approaches you and wants to talk to you privately about a matter, do so in an open area and in the sight of other adults (e.g., other coaches, officials or parents/guardians).
- Before going into change rooms knock or announce that you will be coming in. Try to have at least one adult with you in a change room with children.

Maintain control – avoid losing your temper

Adopt positive language and behaviour (e.g., avoid bad or aggressive language that could intimidate a child or set a poor example).

- If you find that you regularly lose your temper with children, you should seek support in learning how to manage children's behaviour so that you don't lose your temper or consider whether you have the patience to work with children.

Some ideas to assist with maintaining control include:

- Set up some basic rules at the beginning of the season such as be nice but firm, be fair, follow instructions, have a go, no put downs. Make sure children are aware of these rules. "Nice but firm" avoids creating problems of ambiguity as it makes it clear where an adult stands in relation to the child. I think being "fair" is also important because of the strong message it sends to young, impressionable children.
- Give positive messages
- Have a time out area for children and young people that are not behaving. This should be simple such as an agreed T sign with the hands that children know means to go to time out for two minutes.
- Adopt a card system to express concerns with a child's behaviour rather than becoming verbally agitated. For example a yellow card is a warning, two yellow cards

means time out for two minutes and a red card could mean the child misses out of next week's game.

Make sure parents are clear about collection of their children

Parents need to be responsible for the collection of their children from practise and games. A list of actions that could help include:

- Have a register of parent/guardian emergency contact numbers and make sure coaches/officials have access to a phone.
- Letting children, parents/guardians know practise and game times, when they can expect to collect their children and that it is not your responsibility to transport children home if parents are delayed.
- Asking the second to last child and their parent/guardian to wait with the coach/official and the child.
- Getting parents to collect their children from the club room (e.g., if you have a club room where there will be other people).
- If there are other people at the ground or facility, wait for the parent/guardian closer to those people. In the meantime try to make contact with the parent/guardian.
- Avoid the risk of being alone with a child by having a parent/guardian or support person assist you with the training. Require that person to wait until all children have left.

Avoid transporting players/athletes

Ideally all players/participants should have their own transportation to and from sporting events. You should only provide transportation when:

- the driver is properly licensed to carry passengers; **and**
- other players/ participants/parents/guardians are in the vehicle; **and**
- the ride has been approved in writing by parents/guardians; **and**
- the ride is directly to/from sports or recreational activities.

Signed authorisation by the parents should be sought at the commencement of the season saying that they agree to their child being transported by the relevant person if they are unavailable to provide transport.

You should also call someone and tell them what you are doing, and the exact time you are leaving so that you are accountable for your time.

Plan for overnight and away trips

Make sure you have appropriate levels of supervision. The general rule of thumb is a minimum of two staff with a ratio of 1:8 although this can vary between 1: 12 and 1:4 and depends on a number of other factors. Other considerations include:

- If you're taking a mixed team or all girls' group away, there must be at least one woman accompanying the group.

- If there's only going to be one adult accompanying you, the person must not be a relation or a partner.
- At least one adult on the trip should have a current First Aid Certificate.
- Adults should not share rooms with children.
- Ensure emergency procedures are in place to enable supervising adults to be able to respond to any alarm raised by a child. If an alarm is raised by a child, more than one adult should respond.

Adults attending overnight or away trips should have a police or *Working With Children Check* (or in Queensland be holders of a current Blue Card).

Qualified personnel should attend to injuries

Only personnel who are qualified in administering first aid or treating sports injuries should attempt to treat an injury. Personnel should avoid treating injuries out of sight of others. Other considerations include:

- The comfort level and dignity of the player/participant should always be the priority.
- Only uncover the injured area, or drape private parts of the player/participants body.
- Always report injuries and any treatment provided to parents and document an incident. Clubs should keep an injuries register that will contain basic information about the time and date of the injury, where it occurred, what it was, the treatment provided and by whom, and whether further medical attention was required or recommended.
- If necessary, seek medical attention as soon as possible or recommend that parents seek medical attention.

It important to have a "blood rules" policy and ensure coaches and officials know to remove any child that is bleeding from a game and to stop the flow of blood before being allowed to again join in the activity.

Support participants with disabilities

It is important that participants with disabilities have the same opportunities to be involved in sport and recreation activities as able bodied participants. This may require, where reasonable, the modification of games, equipment and rules. Provision of specialist support, appropriate transport and training for those assisting with matters such as lifting and toileting may also be required.

Because participants with disabilities may be more vulnerable to abuse or neglect, clubs and organisation may need to take additional steps to ensure their safety. Advice can be obtained from the relevant disabled sporting association.

Have clear guidelines for photographing children

It's important that clubs and coaches understand current advice around acquiring and using images of children. Some key points include:

- Do not allow photographers (professional photographers, spectators, fans, coaches or members of the media) unsupervised or individual access to children.

- Ensure you inform the team/athlete and parent(s) if you want to photograph or video the athlete(s) as a tool to analyse and improve performance. (This practice would need to consider any photographing policy in existence for the sport and if on private property)
- Obtain the written consent of parent /guardian and their agreement to be present before approving photo/video sessions outside the event venue or at the home of a child. Where possible, have the photo taken at the event venue.
- If the photographs/videos are to be used generally, e.g., as teaching tools or for some other purpose such as for promotional reasons, obtain the written consent of the parents that the photographs/videos can be used for those purposes.
- Provide details of who to contact within the club or organisation if concerns or complaints of inappropriate photographic behaviour or content are raised.

There are some people who visit sporting events to take inappropriate photographs or video footage of children. You need to be alert to this possibility and report any concerns to a responsible person in your club (e.g., the President, Secretary, a committee person).

These guidelines have been adapted from information from the:

Child Protection in Sport Unit UK - www.thecpsu.org.uk

Australian Sports Commission - www.ausport.gov.au

New South Wales Department for Tourism Sport and Recreation - www.dsr.nsw.gov.au/children