

Child Safe Standards

GUIDELINES FOR PHYSICAL CONTACT WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN

The following guidelines have been developed to assist both paid and volunteer personnel within your sport to create a child safe environment when interacting with children, especially in relation to physical contact. It is recommended that sporting organisations tailor the strategies outlined to the needs and context of their sport to reduce the risk of inappropriate physical contact occurring. This is not an exhaustive list, but offers sporting organisations with a framework of good practice guidelines.

There will be times when physical contact with children is necessary, and such contact should always be made in an appropriate manner. An example of this may be when a coach supports a child to ensure no physical harm or injuries are incurred (i.e. spotting in gymnastics). It is important to ensure that organisational policies and practices are clearly understood and followed to create a child safe environment at your organisation. This includes outlining acceptable physical contact situations and practices, as well as strategies and techniques to limit unnecessary or inappropriate physical contact.

What physical contact is appropriate?

Creating a child safe environment does not mean ceasing all physical contact with children, however strategies should be put in place to ensure that all physical contact that occurs is appropriate, related to the sport and only occurs where necessary. The requirements of sports can vary significantly which means that contact which is appropriate in one sport may not be appropriate for another; however, it is widely recognised that in some situations appropriate physical contact is required to support an athlete. These include:

- To provide guidance to develop a particular skill; or
- To prevent an injury.

Communication of policies and codes of conduct are key tools to aid the development of a child safe culture. Your organisation should consider and identify the type(s) of situations in which physical contact may be necessary and appropriate in your sport. Once those situations have been identified, remember to update relevant policies, procedures and role descriptions accordingly and ensure that everyone is aware of their responsibilities in relation to physical contact with children. Be sure to communicate this information through as many means possible including:

- Club meetings;
- Social media channels;
- Newsletters;
- Website;
- Mobile based Apps; and
- Coach/Official updates.

When physical contact is appropriate and required:

If physical contact is appropriate and required in a particular situation, wherever possible, that physical contact should take place in view of the public by utilising an open space in clear sight of other adults. Clear guidelines should be developed addressing:

- Transport situations;
- Overnight/Away trips; and
- Social Events.

For everyone's safety, avoid conditions where adults and children are left alone or placed in a 1:1 situation.

How should physical contact be undertaken?

- Always seek permission from the child to touch them prior to any contact occurring- for example, “Can I move your forearm to adjust your technique?”
- Be aware of and respect signs indicating the child is uncomfortable with physical contact. This may include limited eye contact or a step away from you. This [video from Play by the Rules](#) provides helpful advice on physical contact.
- Use words to accompany physical contact, explaining what you are doing and why.
- Congratulate children using non-intrusive contact such as a pat on the upper arm, back, high-five or hand shake.
- Provide skill-teaching support to acceptable body regions such as the shoulders or back, providing it is in context for the sport and the skill or technique being demonstrated.
- Massage and first aid services should only be provided by qualified personnel.
- Congratulating and comforting children should take place in a public setting, in view of other adults.
- Physical restraint and intervention should only occur if there is a serious and imminent risk to an individual's safety. This may include reaching out to grab a child by the arm to move them away from a dangerous situation or holding a child so they don't fall to the floor and injure themselves.

Avoid:

- The use of hugs, cuddles, tickling, initiating or permitting kissing exchanges or other intimate contact.

When could physical contact be required?

Physical contact may also be required to:

- Provide first aid to treat an injury;
- Comfort a distressed child; or
- Assist a child with a disability.

Avoid:

- Assisting children with uniform fit-out or changing of their clothes;
- Attending to injuries in isolated first-aid rooms without the presence of at least one other adult;
- Physical contact with private body parts; and
- Sitting a child on your knee.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A CHILD SAFE CULTURE

Never assume that physical contact with a child is acceptable.

- Unless not practical or possible to do so (e.g. in an emergency) always ask permission before making contact with a child.
- Use words to accompany and explain the reason for any physical contact with a child.
- Have a polite and respectful conversation with parents and children (especially teenagers) to ensure you are aware of any sensitivities specific to:
 - Children from diverse cultures; or
 - Children with a disability or medical condition.

The following practical strategies may be used to assist your organisation in developing a child safe environment.

1. Transport

The child safe standards do not seek to prevent shared transport, but to ensure that sporting organisations put practical strategies in place to provide a safe environment for children. Sporting organisations should develop policies and strategies for transport. Strategies may include:

- Ensuring that pick-up is from a specified location that can be utilised in all weather conditions, preferably in view of the public.
- If an adult is remaining to ensure all children are collected, to do so at the specified location in public view.
- Inform parents on a regular basis as to the collection of their children – when, where and what to do if they are delayed.
- Signed permission at the start of the term/season by the child's parent agreeing to the organisations transport policy.

Try to avoid:

- Transporting a child unaccompanied; or
- Transporting a single child with adults who are related or in a relationship

2. Social events

Sporting organisations have social events for all sorts of reasons and as such, should develop appropriate strategies to ensure the environment at social events is child safe. Through the nature of sport many long lasting friendships are made. Both situations often lead to people attending birthday parties and celebrations outside of the environment of the sporting organisation. The child safe standards seek to ensure that reasonable and practical steps are put in place to maintain a child safe environment at all times.

Practical strategies your organisation may utilise include:

- Develop expectations around attendance and behaviour at the sporting organisation's social events (i.e. trivia nights, awards functions, weekly dinners).
- Include behavioural expectations in your organisations Code-of-Conduct.
- Request that adults (i.e. coaches, officials, managers) only participate in club organised events (where practical) and refrain from socialising with the child participants in any capacity outside of events sanctioned by the sporting organisation.
- Where possible and reasonable, discourage personnel (i.e. staff, coaches, officials) from attending the home of children and their families for non-club related social gatherings¹.

Try to avoid:

- Being alone with a child outside club sport environments; or
- Children attending the private homes of any personnel from the sporting organisation.

¹ Limiting contact outside of the sporting environment can be especially difficult in regional settings or where family friendships exist beyond the sporting context. As per the Child Safe Standards, be guided by action that is reasonable, practical and responsible for the setting you are in.

3. Overnight or away trips

Overnight and away trips frequently happen within sport. For example, this may be necessary to attend a training camp, regional, state or national competition. It is important for sporting organisations to have rules for such situations and clearly outline expectations and acceptable behaviour. These can be a component of existing codes of conduct, or a separate document.

Sporting organisations should attempt to ensure that:

- Appropriate levels of supervision are adhered to at ALL times (i.e. ratio of children per adult).
- The gender mix of supervising adults is appropriate for the children participating.
- If staying overnight, practical options are explored so that adults and children do not sleep in the same room overnight (i.e. school camps).
- At least one of the supervising adults should have a current first aid qualification.

Try to avoid:

- Adults sharing rooms with children; and
- Where possible, supervising adults that are related or partners (if only two are present).

4. Discipline:

From time-to-time there may be a child taking part in a sporting activity who does not behave. Setting clear rules and expectations for everyone's behaviour will assist with the management of this, but not completely prevent it from happening. Strategies your organisation may use include:

- Engage children in the development of codes of conduct or session expectations.
- Utilise a time-out area for children who are not behaving, in view of the public (i.e. designated area on the sidelines).
- Adopt positive methods for managing challenging behaviour such as directing other children to move away from the situation and/or talking one on one to the child concerned.

Do not:

- Physically restrain a child for poor behaviour i.e. by grabbing them by the arm; or
- Respond to poor behaviour from a child with poor or aggressive language.

5. First Aid:

Many sporting organisations already have first-aid policies and strategies in place. To ensure these policies comply with the Child Safe Standards, a review is strongly encouraged. Injuries, while not pleasant and sometimes severe, can occur when children participate in sport. In line with the development of a child safe environment, an organisation's first-aid plan should document:

- Who will be responsible for the provision of first-aid and where it will be undertaken in the normal course of events (i.e. at a regular facility or at a 'home' event); and
- Who will be responsible for the provision of first-aid and where it will be undertaken when the club event is 'away.'

Other strategies that sporting organisations can utilise include:

- Having a male and female qualified first-aid responder in attendance (both home and away).
- Ensuring that the first-aid kit includes a blanket, sheet or similar to provide draping if required.
- Only exposing the injured part of a child's body (i.e. only remove a shoe and sock for an ankle injury) and using draping if needed.
- Utilising a first-aid room which is not isolated and is easily accessible (i.e. open door, visual access into the room via windows).

6. Supporting Children with a Disability:

Most children with a disability will have a 'plan' for managing toileting and other personal care needs. It is not likely that this assistance will be required from organisation personnel however, should the situation arise it is important to manage this with consideration to the child's dignity and safety for the child and organisation personnel. An individual plan should be discussed with the parents of the child and documented.

Try to avoid:

- Offering to assist with toileting or other personal care needs when there is a carer or parent present or where the assistance is not necessary.
- Over assisting and touching when providing assistance, particularly when assisting a child with a disability.

Further Information:

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DISCLAIMER:

The information contained within these guidelines is general in nature. It should not be considered as a substitute for seeking advice. For specific advice, Vicsport recommends sporting organisations seek professional advice regarding appropriate physical contact within their organisation.

This resource is supported by the Victorian Government.

This document was developed utilising and adapting content from:

- *Play By The Rules (2016), Guidelines for Working With Children*
 - *Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children's Services (2011), Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people : guidelines for staff working or volunteering in education and care settings*
 - *Network of Community Activities (2014), Appropriate Physical Contact in OOSH*
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