

# Child Safe Standards

## GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN

Communication is at the core of club and sport connections, as well as ensuring that participants achieve what they want to achieve in being involved in your sport. When communicating with children, everyone involved in the sport must be aware of the organisation or sport's Code of Behaviour or Conduct, as well the broader child safe policies and procedures.

Best practice Codes of Behaviour or Conduct within sporting organisations specify that communication with kids should always be:

- (a) Age appropriate;
- (b) About the sport or club (ie, not personal);
- (c) Using encouraging language and tone of voice; and
- (d) At the very least, within sight of others, but preferably in the presence of others, including for online or virtual communication means (eg, copying in other adults/parents to text messages, emails or communications via apps such as Team App).

An example of this may be advising children of training and competition times. It is important to ensure that policies and practices are clearly understood and followed to create a child safe environment for everyone involved in your sport. It is recommended that sporting organisations tailor the strategies outlined to the needs and context of their sport to reduce the risk of inappropriate communication occurring. This is not an exhaustive list, but offers sporting organisations with a framework of good practice guidelines.

### What communication is needed?

Sporting organisations need to communicate with members, participants and stakeholders. Creating a child safe culture does not mean limiting your communication, but strategies should be put in place to ensure that all communication is appropriate and related to the sport, whilst in the sporting environment. This may include providing enrolment information, newsletters or competition information to participants.

To assist this process, your organisation may undertake a communication audit to identify:

- The types of communications necessary, such as verbal and written communication;
- What channels are used to communicate with children and parents/guardians;
- Who needs to communicate with children and parent/guardians;
- How often communication is reasonably required; and
- Acceptable standards for communication with children.

Communication policies and codes of conduct are key tools to aid the development of a child safe culture within sporting organisations. Once an audit of your communication is complete, your organisation should update its relevant policies, procedures, role descriptions and induction processes to ensure that everyone is aware of their responsibilities.

## **Pre-existing Personal Relationships between club/association adults and Children and Young People**

Vicsport recognises that – particularly in regional areas – pre-existing personal relationships between adults and children and young people may exist prior to - or develop during - a child's engagement with the club/association. This could be where an adult within the club/association is good friends with the child's parents through, for example, their kids going to school together or being neighbours.

Where such a personal relationship between parents/adults exists that extends to the children, we suggest that club/association adults clearly – and overtly - separate their sporting role from any personal friendship when in a club/association setting. If acting as a representative of a club/association and/or at club/association forums, events or functions, an adult should always act in accordance with the club/association Code of Conduct. Eg, if acting in a club/association coaching capacity, then be a coach only during that club/association time, rather than a friend and if required, have a conversation with the the parents or guardian of a child to explain the expectations on you as a coach Transport arrangements that exist allowing friends of parents who are also in club/association roles to drive kids to and/or from training or club/association events or functions, should be clearly set out in writing, authorised by parents and provided to appropriate club officials.

**NOTE – if there is no existing parental relationship with club/association adults who have “friendships” with children, this should be discussed with a senior person at the club/association. If there is a reasonable belief that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm from this relationship in future, the matter should be referred to authorities.**

**ALWAYS PUT THE INTERESTS OF THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON FIRST.**

## **Practical Strategies for communicating with Children & Young People:**

- Wherever possible, ensure that all face-to-face communication is in a public space, where you are visible to others.
- If a 'private' conversation is required:
  - take steps to ensure that the meeting is within designated club or organisation premises and still has a 'public' visual connection (ie. holding it in sight but out of earshot from others (rather than in a room with the door shut);
  - where possible, ensure that the conversation is scheduled ahead of time; and
  - advise someone else in your club or organisation that you are scheduled to have the conversation as well.
  - If there is a need for additional privacy (i.e. First-Aid room), and/or the window covering to be closed or partially closed, then it is recommended that a second organisation representative also participates in the meeting.
- While not always possible at club level, utilise club/organisation devices for communication rather than personal devices (i.e. organisation computer, mobile phone, social media accounts).
- Have a communication policy in place to ensure protocols are followed and approved by the organisation.
- If you must utilise personal devices to communicate with children within your organisation, ensure that your communication is open and transparent (i.e. if emailing a team of junior athletes about an upcoming fixture, CC the club and parents too).
- Set-up organisation or role specific emails addresses that more than 1 adult has access to.
- When using emails, include (by use of cc) other administrators or key personnel in any communication you send to children within your organisation.
- Utilise an app or set-up a file sharing location to store any electronic communication sent within your organisation.
- Limit social media communication to organisation approved pages or sites (i.e. club Facebook page)
- Establish a culture where the personnel 'get organised early' limiting last minute arrangements, and thereby limiting the need for personal device use.



- Establish a central point of communication or 'go-to' person if communication is required by other personnel with a parent/carer and/or child.
- Only utilise organisation devices for the distribution of any electronic communication which incorporates images or video of children (i.e. do not use personal devices to send images or videos of this nature).
- Imagery and videos of children must be approved for use by their parent/guardian/carers and only used for the purposes approved.

**Do not:**

- 'Friend' (or otherwise communicate with) juniors via social media channels or other electronic means;
- Have content on personal social media sites that is inappropriate or offensive, particularly if you are in contact with children (either within or outside the organisation); and
- Correspond of a personal nature via any medium that is unrelated to your role within your organisation.
- Give out personal contact details.
- Leave a personal device unattended at your sporting organisation so that it can be accessed by others.
- Have meetings in car parks, sitting in cars or meetings that others don't know about.

Inappropriate sharing of personal contact details beyond what is reasonable for the management of an injury/illness or other emergency incident may be a breach of privacy legislation. Refer to the Australian Privacy Principles (link [here](#)), particularly Part 3 for more information.