

Child Safe Standards

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION 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 communicating with children. 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.

There will be times when communication with children is necessary, and such communication should always be done in an appropriate manner. An example of this may be advising children of training and competition times. It is important to ensure that organisation policies and practices are clearly understood and followed to create a child safe environment for everyone involved in your sport.

For the purpose of this document, communication includes face-to-face, telephone and web/internet based electronic communication (including social media).

What communication is needed?

Sporting organisations need to communicate with members, participants and stakeholders from time to time. 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. 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:

- What communication channels are used;
- Who needs to communicate externally with whom;
- How often communication is reasonably required; and
- Through what channels the communication takes place.

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 and role descriptions and ensure that everyone is aware of their responsibilities.

When undertaking communication:

- 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 still has a 'public' visual connection¹ (i.e. holding it in sight but out of earshot from others (rather than in a room with the door shut).
- While not always possible at club level, utilise club/organisation devices for communication as much as you can, 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 organisation².

- 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).

Try to avoid:

- Communicating using personal computers, devices and other services;
- 'Friending' (or otherwise communicating with) juniors via social media channels;
- Having 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
- Correspondence of a personal nature via any medium that is unrelated to your role within your organisation.

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.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A CHILD SAFE CULTURE

To contribute to a culture of child safety, sporting organisations should ensure that rules, along with practical strategies for communication are clearly outlined and distributed. These can be a component of the policies or codes of conduct.

1. Face-to-Face Private Communication

From time-to-time a 'private' conversation may be required between an adult and a child. Wherever possible, advise someone else in your organisation if you require or have been requested to have a private meeting with a child. Enact some strategies to ensure it is a safe conversation.

Practical strategies for use include:

- Hold meetings in public places and not isolated from others.
- Ensure meetings take place in designated premises at, connected to or nearby the organisation's activities (i.e. club rooms, beside the field of play, offices).
- Utilise a designated meeting room that has windows or doors to provide a visual aspect to the meeting (i.e. windows, or glass insets in the door).
- If the room has no windows, leave the door open.
- Blinds, curtains and other window coverings should remain open.
- 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.

Try to avoid:

- Meetings in car parks or sitting in cars;
- Meetings that no one else knows about; or
- Meetings that are not visible to anyone else.

2. Telephone or Other Electronic Device Communication

The prevalence of mobile and electronic communication can offer greater flexibility and quick communication within sporting organisations. Following clear policies and procedure will continue to develop a child safe culture within your organisation, as well as ensure that everyone stays informed.

Practical strategies for use include:

- If possible, only use organisation devices for electronic communication.
- 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.
- If personal mobile phones are authorised for use, ensure that they are used to meet the requirements for the sport. This can be done by including organisation personnel and parents in emails and messages or by utilising an app that multiple people can view.
- 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.

Try to avoid:

- Accepting 'friend' invitations for social media sites from a parent/guardian/carers or child within your organisation;
- Giving out personal contact details; and
- Leaving a personal device unattended at your sporting organisation so that it can be accessed by others.

Further Information:

P +61 3 9698 8100 E admin@vicsport.com.au W www.vicsport.com.au/child-safe-standards

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 (date unknown), 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*