



Strategies for coaches

People working with children in sport, particularly coaches, need to be aware that not all children will understand an action or request in the same manner. One child may see an action as usual or acceptable behaviour while another may find it unacceptable. A child's interpretation of an action may also be influenced by cultural and religious differences, gender and prior experiences. It is important therefore to be aware of your communication style.

The following principles or actions may help coaches provide a safe environment.

- Ensure your actions are at all times unambiguously professional. Give a verbal explanation, in front of all athletes (and preferably parents as well) of how, where, when and why you may need to touch athletes.
- Remember that the welfare of the child or children is always of paramount importance.
- Know what policies, complaint processes and codes of behaviour your sport has in place (at state and/or national level) and how this applies to you.
- Understand and have signed onto your sport's code of behaviour.
- Understand how the child protection legislation in your state/territory may affect you.
- Ensure that any physical contact with children is appropriate to the development of the skills required for the sport. (e.g. it would be appropriate to teach a child to float in the water by touching their back, or to hold their arms or feet to demonstrate a movement. However, it wouldn't be appropriate to hold the child suggestively, such as on the breasts or around the groin area, as this is not essential to the development of the skills.)
- Be careful about which part of your body and how much of it is in contact with a child's body.
- Avoid unaccompanied and unobserved activities with children. Try not to separate yourself and a child from the line of sight of other people. If you need to have a private talk to a child about their ability or behaviour, do this in an open place near others. Invite another coach or support person to join the conversation or talk to more than one child at a time.
- Use positive and age-appropriate language when talking to and in the presence of children.

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- Before entering change rooms knock or announce that you will be coming in and try to have at least one other adult with you. Do not isolate yourself and a child from others in the change room.
- Introduce a club policy that the second to last child and their parent or guardian will wait with you and the child (this will also enable you to concentrate on making contact with the parent if they are late).
- Avoid the risk of being left alone with a child by having a parent, guardian or support person assist you with the training. Require that person to wait with you until all children have left.
- Do not engage in or let others engage in any of the following:
 - abusive initiation or team bonding activities;
 - forcing children into ‘macho type’ activities;
 - rough, physically hurtful or sexually provocative games; and
 - regular scapegoating, ridiculing, rejecting, isolating or taking the ‘mickey’ out of a child.

The above strategies can also apply to older athletes, as there is still likely to be a disparity between you and your athlete in terms of authority, maturity, status and dependence, even if the athlete has reached the legal age of consent.