



Guidelines for working with children

These guidelines are for coaches and other personnel to protect them from risk and to keep children safe. It is recommended that 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 sports related events such as sponsorship and fundraising events, celebrations and annual meetings but do not socialise with athletes outside of sporting functions

Sexual boundaries

- Do not have sexual relationships with athletes you are coaching
- Do not touch athletes in ways likely to make them feel uncomfortable

Minimise physical contact

Generally physical contact with players/participants should be to:

- Develop sports skill
- 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 a player/participant should always be sought
- Player/participants should 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 sight of other adults (e.g. other coaches, officials or parents/guardians)
- Before going into changing rooms knock or announce that you are coming in. Try to have at least one adult with you in a changing 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, 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, and 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. 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 the children know means 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 the 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 practice and games.

A list of actions that could help includes:

- Have a register of emergency contact numbers and make sure coaches/officials have phone access
- Letting children and guardians know practice and game times, when guardians 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 guardian to wait with the coach/official and the child
- Getting the parents to collect their children from the club room (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 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 guardian or support person assist you with the training. Require that person to wait until all children have left

Avoid transporting players/participants

Ideally all players/participants should have their own transportation to and from their 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 the parents/guardians, and
- The ride is directly to/from sports or recreational activities
- The vehicle is legal and meets all regulatory and safety laws

Signed authorisation by guardians 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 unable to provide transport.

Plan for overnight and away trips

Make sure you have the 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 factors.

Other considerations include:

- If you are taking a mixed team or all girls group away, there must be at least one woman accompanying the group
- If there is only going to be one other 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 respond to any alarm raised by a child (more than one adult should respond)

Adults attending overnight or away trips should be police checked.

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 something over the private parts or the player/participant
- Always report to guardians any injury incurred and any treatment provided, and document the incident. Clubs should keep an injury register that will contain basic information about the time and date of the injury, where it occurred, the nature of the injury, 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 the guardians seek medical attention

It is important to have a blood rules policy and ensure coaches and officials know to remove from the game any child who is bleeding, and to stop the flow of blood before allowing the child to re-join 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 abled 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 organisations 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 is important that clubs and coaches understand current advice about 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 guardians if you want to photograph or video the athlete/s as a tool to analyse and improve performance. (This practise would need to consider any photographing policy in existence for the sport and if on private property)
- Obtain the written consent of the 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/video are to be used generally (e.g., as teaching tools or for other purposes 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., President, Secretary or Committee Person)

It's all our responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children. By following these common sense guidelines it not only enhances the child's experiences but may also lead to a lifelong participation in sport.

Working in most cases within purely volunteer environments, levels of understanding and acceptableness may differ from person to person. With the production of these guidelines is not a reflection of any specific issues but to provide clarity and understanding to clubs values.

These simple steps reduce the confusion for coaches and parents as to what are deemed acceptable practises, thus protecting all within the organisation, especially those placed in positions of responsibility.

The following agencies can be used for further information and support:

- Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children www.cyf.govt.nz www.orangatamariki.govt.nz
- Barnardos www.barnardos.org.nz