

What is meant by "child protection"?

Child protection in sport and recreation is about keeping children safe from abuse and protecting them from people who are unsuitable.

Child protection in sport and recreation enables children to participate in activities that are an integral part of the culture without being exposed to individuals who can damage their development and, in some circumstances, take away their ability to enjoy their future.

Creating safe environments, using risk management strategies, enables sporting clubs and groups to enjoy many advantages such as increasing interest and greater participation in their sport.

Risk management also helps clubs to avoid potential legal and other costs that may result from a complaint about discrimination, harassment and child abuse. Clubs need to be aware of the potential for something to go wrong and take the necessary steps to remove or minimise the risk or they could face...

Vicarious liability

Vicarious liability describes the principle in law which says that, depending on the circumstances, an organisation can be held responsible for the behaviour of its employees (including staff, volunteers and contractors – paid or unpaid), unless:

- it can be shown that all reasonable steps were taken to prevent the behaviour from happening in the first place; and
- there were appropriate policies, and procedures in place for dealing with the behaviour when it occurred.

It can be very hard for clubs to find the time and the resources to get information about child protection out to club members. It just seems a lower priority than keeping the club solvent, having enough coaches and keeping parents happy about which teams their kids are in. However providing a safe environment is an important legal and ethical responsibility.

Don't just file away policies and guidelines – attach codes of conduct to player registration forms, discuss expected standards of behaviour with coaches, encourage members to undertake training to increase their understanding about issues as well as their roles and responsibilities.

Creating a child-safe environment

- Action child protection policies and procedures
- Commit to a fair and safe culture
- Undertake training
- Implement background checking as per governing body and legislative requirements
- Respond to complaints

Governing bodies, sport and recreation clubs or associations, coaches, officials and parents all have a responsibility for creating a safe environment for children and young people to participate in sport and recreation. This environment also protects adults who behave appropriately and ethically.

Common steps for responding to an incident or allegation of child abuse

Step 1. Make available a trusted adult.

Make available a trusted adult that children and young people can talk to about their concerns and make sure they know who this person is. This could be a Member Protection Information or Child Protection Officer. It is important to empower everyone to receive and manage concerns or disclosures as well.

Step 2. Be prepared to receive a disclosure.

There is no one set of rules to follow but it is important to remain calm and in control; ask some minimal questions to enquire into the child or young person's distress such as, 'Tell me what happened...', '...and then what happened?'. Avoid questions that only have a yes/no answer

Step 3. Consult and report to your child protection agency.

Consultation with the governing body and state child protection authority can clarify if the matter needs to be reported to them or referred on to the police. If you are a mandatory reporter these matters must be reported to the relevant authorities.

Step 4. Cooperate in any investigation.

Cooperate in any investigation that is undertaken by an external agency/governing body. Your role is to provide information and assist in the investigation process as appropriate.

Step 5. If required, deal with the complaint internally.

Deal with the complaint if the police or child protection agencies decide not to proceed. Depending on your relationship with your governing body and the nature of the complaint either the governing body or your club may deal with the matter. If it is determined that the matter be dealt with internally through the club, follow the club's policies and procedures, allowing due process, ensuring confidentiality and natural justice.

Step 6: Manage the situation within the club.

Manage the situation within the club while the investigation is underway. While an investigation is underway the club should consider its course of action - how to support the child; the person whom the complaint is against; and other staff and parents, and avoid any victimisation and harassment of them.

Step 7: Implement disciplinary action.

Implement any disciplinary action recommended by a governing body if they are conducting the inquiry, or implement disciplinary action as determined by the club's processes. Make sure any disciplinary action is fair and that the punishment fits the crime.

Step 8: Record all information.

Record all information according to the State/Territory requirements and club policy. Appropriate record keeping can be very important in these matters, and requirements may vary across Australia.

Step 9. Review and evaluate.

After a disclosure of harm it is important for the club to review and evaluate their policies and procedures.