



Child protection for coaches

- Child protection is a complex subject with a number of strategies involved. It includes policies and practices put in place to keep children safe from harm — from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect.
- Child-protection legislation sets out how child abuse should be reported and investigated, and imposes obligations on people dealing with children. This includes a requirement in most states and territories for people working with children, such as coaches, to undergo a national criminal history check (in other words, be screened) to determine their suitability for working with children.
- Most state and territory legislation also requires specific persons to report reasonable suspicions of children being abused or neglected. Individuals working with children including teachers — and in some states and territories, coaches — are required by law to report any suspicions of child abuse or maltreatment, including neglect.

Tips for coaches to protect children

There are actions a coach can take to ensure children feel safe and protected when participating in sport. These good coaching practices include the following:

- use positive reinforcement and acceptable language when talking about or to a child
- develop a calm and non-confrontational behaviour management style
- make any physical contact with children (and adults) in a way that makes them feel comfortable, for example, shaking hands and a congratulatory pat on the back. If a coach must make physical contact with participants as part of an activity, then they should explain the activity and what they will do, and ask for the participant's permission
- avoid situations where an adult may be alone with a child, for example, dressing rooms or first aid rooms
- when children need to be transported, ensure there is more than one child (and, if possible, more than one adult) in the vehicle
- manage allegations (disclosures) of child abuse through established processes and reporting lines to ensure there is due process and natural justice
- document all incidents involving physical restraint of children or violence involving children
- document all incidents that seem to be unusual or 'out of the ordinary'
- coach children to be a 'good sport', recognise that they have a right to feel safe, and know what they can do if they do not feel safe (if they are abused, harassed or discriminated against).

A summary of child-protection information relevant to the sport industry is available from the Australian Sports Commission's Sport Ethics unit and the Play by the Rules web site.