

Awareness of physical, emotional and sexual harm to children is part of the public trust expected with sports coaching. The coach has in the nature of the coach-athlete relationship the responsibility to protect the child from all risk of harm. The coach also has the responsibility to report any observation of harm to the appropriate municipal administrator.



Child Protection

1. 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
2. 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.
3. National 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 behavior management style
- make any physical contact with children (or adults for that matter) 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 the participant's permission to do that
- 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', recognize 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 on the Australian Sports Commission web site at www.ausport.gov.au/ethics/legischild.asp and the Play by the Rules web site at www.playbytherules.net.au

Note: Child-protection requirements vary for different states and territories. Coaches should seek out information about the child protection requirements in their state or territory.