



# COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## POSITIVE GUIDANCE – HOW CAN WE ACTIVELY ENGAGE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

### STRATEGIES



#### Make it fun

Children and young people have told us that when adults are so focused on winning, they forget that it is supposed to be fun. Australian Football (football) is a place to connect with friends, engage in physical exercise and enjoy the company of their peers and football community. This is a message that you can consistently communicate with them but is also driven through your behaviour, the culture of a football program, club, events, and activities.

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#### Involve them

Encourage children and young people to provide feedback on training, clinics, game days, trips, or social activities. Involving them in decision making increases their sense of belonging, is more likely to keep them engaged and takes some pressure off you.

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#### Use respectful strategies to manage behaviour

At no point in time should a coach ever use physical punishment or derogatory and disrespectful language as a form of discipline. Children and young people are not motivated by fear; in fact, the logical part of their brain that helps them follow instructions shuts down completely when they are experiencing fear or high levels of stress. If you are experiencing significant challenges with behaviour, seek support from management, a supervisor (or your club) and involve parents wherever possible.

## DEFINITIONS

### A Child or Young Person:

someone involved in footy under the age of 18 – usually a player but could also be an umpire or in another role at the club, or a sibling or child of a player.

**Adult:** someone involved in footy who is over the age of 18 – this could be a coach, manager, umpire, club official, AFL staff member, volunteer, and/or a parent.



## COMMUNICATING IN PERSON – USE OF LANGUAGE AND TONE OF VOICE

When communicating with children and young people it is important to remember what you say and how you say it matters.

### Appropriate Communication includes:

- Using tone and language that is:
  - empowering and encouraging
  - simple and clear
  - highlights strengths.

### Inappropriate Communication includes:

- derogatory language, including reference to body image, talking about players to other players
  - Disrespectful or degrading language about children,
  - including but not limited to performance or skill discriminatory, racist, or sexist comments
  - language that is belittling, negative, threatening or intimidating
- any language or comment that is sexual in nature.



## USE OF ELECTRONIC AND ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS

Coaches should not communicate with children one-on-one or with a group of children via any electronic means, which includes but is not limited to text messages, WhatsApp, phone calls, social media or email.

If a coach needs to communicate with a child outside training or a game, they must do this via the child's parent, guardian or carer. It is acceptable for a parent-only chat group or similar group to be set up where messages for children can be posted for parents to pass onto their children.

### Safe Online Communication includes:

- Clubs should consider if they need public social media accounts and, if they do, limiting content to football-related content such as sharing information relating to events.
- Adults must not communicate with or be connected with a child online such as through social media platforms and personal profiles.
- Allowing young people to navigate their online world without judgement, prejudice or unsolicited comments from their football connections.

- If clubs upload photos of participants to social media accounts, they must seek informed consent from the child and their parents, guardian or carer before sharing or uploading video or photos of a child.
- Reporting or addressing any online abuse or harassment that you may observe when it involves young people in sport through their parents and/or the club.
- Checking in on a young person's wellbeing if you have any reason to suspect that they are experiencing abuse or harassment online.

### Unsafe Online Communication includes:

- Sharing, liking, or commenting on personal photos or posts from a young person.
- Communication that takes place outside of the hours reasonable to the program, service, activity, or event.
- Requesting to meet in person for reasons not related to football.
- Asking the child or young person to keep secrets including in relation to communication.