



## **Child Safe Standards in Football**

The Child Safe Standards were developed after the Betrayal of Trust Inquiry into the handling of child abuse allegations. From 1 January 2017, the Child Safe Standards applied to all sporting organisations within Victoria. Clubs are required to:

- Nominate a Child Safety Officer (Belinda Attard)
- Create a Child Safety Policy
- Adopt a Code of Conduct
- Provide training to club on the Child Safe Standards
- Establish and communicate an Incident Reporting Procedure
- Conduct a risk assessment
- Empower kids and give them a voice in their team and at the club

## **Seven Standards for Child Safety**

1. Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements.
  2. A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety
  3. A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
  4. Screening, supervision, training, and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
  5. Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
  6. Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse; and
  7. Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children
- Each of the Standards must also be understood and applied in the context of:
- a. The cultural safety of Aboriginal children.
  - b. The cultural safety of children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background.
  - c. The safety of children with a disability

## **Defining Child Safety**

When considering the issue of child abuse, most will automatically think of the extreme cases –

sexual abuse or physical violence. While these are the worst cases, they are not the only actions that

are counted under the term. It is important to remember that child abuse can be present in other

ways, such as bullying, inappropriate behaviour, or inappropriate communication.

Negligence can

also be counted as child abuse. For example, leaving one child alone after training while they wait

for their parents, or poorly maintained facilities or equipment, can lead to the injury of a child under



your care. Do not limit your awareness of this issue to the extreme cases. Remember to consider ALL forms of child abuse as you seek to make your club safer.

#### Working with Children Checks – Who Needs One

The list of personnel requiring a WWC check includes:

Coaches

- Assistant Coaches
- Trainers
- Runners
- Team Managers
- Coaching Coordinator
- Club Volunteer
- Child Safety Officer
- President, Secretary, Board members and Committee members

#### When do I seek out the Child Safety Officer?

If a child comes to confide in you regarding an incident, it is vital you handle the situation appropriately. Make sure you:

DO:

- Remain calm. While hearing of an incident will likely invoke strong emotional reactions, getting angry or distressed will make this harder for the child.
- Listen carefully to what they tell you.
- Reassure the child you believe them.
- Reassure the child it was not their fault.
- Reassure them they did the right thing by speaking up.
- Let them know you will report their story to the right person.
- Contact the club Child Safety Officer - Belinda Attard 0416 218 832

DO NOT:

- Make promises you can't keep, such as that you will not tell anyone.
- Push the child for details – your job is to listen, not investigate.
- Ask leading questions – instead use phrases like “Then what happened?”
- Discuss what you have been told with others who are not directly involved with helping the child.
- Leave the child alone in a distressed state – if they are comfortable in your care, stay with them.

#### **Empowerment**

Empowerment is about the emotional reaction each child has due to their time at the club. It is about building belief, confidence, and identity through their sport, and much of this is reliant on how adult figures at the club interact with them.

Small gestures or comments can carry far more weight than intended, and this works in both



positive and negative ways. For example, an offhand comment from a frustrated coach about a players' inability to perform a skill may cause the child to lose confidence, enjoy their footy less and even want to stop playing. It lowers the child's sense of self-worth, despite the coach not meaning anything by it. On the other hand, praise for a child's progress builds their confidence and makes them feel valued. These are simple moments that we may not consider as adults, but they can make a difference to the kids.

Empowerment is also about helping the children to find their voice. By building a culture in which the players have opportunities to speak up, give input and be involved in decisions, it not only allows them to grow and build their confidence further, but it also means that should an incident ever occur, they are more willing to speak up because they know their voice will be heard and their grievance will be taken seriously.

It is recommended that as well as ensuring the kids know how to speak up if something is wrong, clubs should also seek other ways for them to have a say in their experience. A simple example could be having kids nominate stretches at the end of training, or in higher age groups, have a few players run a drill each night. Coaches are particularly important to this aspect of the standards and can even bring empowerment through their feedback to kids by helping them think their way through it rather than directly telling them what to do.