



HARASSMENT-FREE SPORT

Factsheet



Protecting Children From Abuse in Sport Fact Sheet

Australia is recognised as a leader in child abuse prevention. The Australian Sports Commission is providing further leadership in this area by producing these specific guidelines for the sport sector to protect children from abuse in sport. The child protection guidelines form part of an Active Australia initiative to address harassment in sport. They are a risk management tool aimed at protecting organisations and their members.

As in a range of other social environments, the issue of abuse of children is a complex problem that affects everyone, including those who participate in sporting and recreational activities. Children and young people have a right to be safe from abuse. All people looking after children and young people have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for them - including those in the sport and recreation industry. Abuse upon children can have long-term, harmful effects on personal development, self-esteem and relationships. Its initial and long term consequences impact on the individual, on their family and on the community.

Behaviours in sport that may constitute abuse include:

- Non-accidental injury, such as bruising or cuts
- Inappropriate training programs such as extra weight training sessions that push children beyond their physical capabilities
- Emotional abuse caused by such things as derogatory comments or negative feedback
- Inappropriate touching or uninvited physical contact
- Sexual abuse including engaging in sexual conversation, showing sexual pictures to a child or exposing one's genitals.
- And other sensitive areas such as cultural, racial or religious differences.

Sport is a particularly vulnerable area because it often involves close relationships between adults and children, and usually these adults are in positions of trust and authority. The information in the Harassment Free Sport strategy covers risk minimisation, the law and police records screening, and the handling of allegations of child abuse.

Not all sporting organisations understand the legal and ethical ramifications of ignoring harassment or abuse. There is an inclination by some organisations to disbelieve the fact that children may be subjected to abuse in their sport either because they don't know how to deal with it or they believe that if they openly address harassment it may create bad publicity for their sport. The guidelines and the support training courses help organisations address such sensitive and difficult issues.

By following the guidelines and participating in the Harassment-Free Sport strategy, organisations will be able to minimise the occurrences of child abuse and be able to respond effectively and appropriately should abuse occur. It is essential reading for all organisations wanting to ensure children have a positive, healthy and safe sporting environment.

Reinforcing the Commission's proactive approach to the issue is the introduction in Queensland and NSW of new child protection and intervention legislation that specifically applies to the sport and recreation industry. This legislation broadens the checking of those who want to work with children. The new laws will help prevent unsuitable people from working with children and young people.

As we know, sport can provide children with many positive things from sport. It's proven that young people who are physically active:

- Are healthier and fitter
- Are more coordinated and physically competent
- Often have good social and people skills
- Develop leadership and teamwork capabilities, and
- Work well and enjoy people's company

It is vitally important that we safeguard and enhance these values for kids.

The child protection guidelines are aimed at preventing harm and abuse of children in sport and assist with managing complaints appropriately for sporting organisations when abuse occurs. They have been developed and supported by a number of sport and community organisations, including the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) and End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT).

For further information contact:

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See also - [Child protection in sport – a national overview](#) (updated June 2003)

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