



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/umpiring community. This is a message that you can consistently communicate to them but is also driven through your behaviour, the culture of a football/umpiring program, club, events, and activities.



Involve them

Encourage children and young people to provide feedback on 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.



Use respectful strategies to manage behaviour

At no point in time should an umpire or official ever use harsh, derogatory or disrespectful language while officiating or engaging with young persons/umpires. 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 league, club or association) and involve parents wherever possible.

DEFINITIONS

A Child: someone involved in footy who is 12 years old or younger- usually a player but may also be a sibling of a player or child of an adult at the club.

A Young Person: someone involved in footy who is between the ages of 13 and 18 years old – 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, player, 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 that 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
- 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

Using social media to communicate with children and young people has both benefits and risks. Although direct contact is uncommon for an umpire or official, if it is required it is good practice to use a secure app or program to facilitate communication where possible.

Safe online communication includes:

- Limiting contact to football/umpiring related content such as sharing information relating to events.
- Avoiding connecting with young people on online social media platforms through personal profiles.
- Allowing young people to navigate their online world without judgement, prejudice or unsolicited comments from their football/umpiring connections.
- Where possible, always including a parent/carer or at least one other adult in group communication.
- Always seeking permission to share or upload video or photos of a child or young person, from them and their families.
- Reporting or addressing any online abuse or harassment that you may observe when it involves young people in sport through their parents and / 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:

- Liking, sharing, or commenting on personal photos or posts from a young person that is not related to umpiring or football, or if related to the sport, without their consent and a justified reason to like/share/comment. If you are unsure, don't like, share, or comment.
- 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 or umpiring.
- Asking the child or young person to keep secrets including in relation to communication.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Using social media to communicate with young people in football or umpiring has both benefits and risks, just consider the *intent* and the *content*.

INTENT

- What are my intentions?
- Are they appropriate?
- Can I justify contacting someone?
- Is it necessary?
- Would another adult have any reason to question my intentions?

CONTENT

- Is the content of my communication relevant to football/umpiring?
- Is it personal?
- Would I be comfortable if their parents read this?
- Would I be happy to read this if it were between my own child and their coach?



STRATEGIES - It is good practice to introduce a secure app or program to facilitate communication where possible. Remember, parents and carers should be included in all communications, where possible. Stick to mainstream apps like TeamApp where your communication can be intercepted if necessary. Remember, transparency is everything.

Ensure your league, club or association is only sharing or posting with permission, respectful and appropriate content for the intended audience to social media accounts/pages. It is a great platform to promote positive messages. Keep an eye on the useful resources available including this:

www.playbytherules.net.au/got-an-issue/social-media/social-media-issues

SAY SOMETHING

If you have concerns about the safety of a child or young person or have just seen or heard something that doesn't feel right, it is important you say something:



You can:

Speak directly with someone you trust in football like a coach, team manager, umpire, official or club representative.



Write down your concerns and pass them onto your club or association via email or a letter.



Use this QR code to raise a concern with the AFL



For any safeguarding queries email childsafety@afl.com.au

As always if anyone is in immediate danger contact the police on 000

We want all children and young people in football to *be safe, feel safe, play safe.*