

# SAFETY IN SPORT

## GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATING YOUNG ATHLETES



Also available at [www.clubhelp.org.au](http://www.clubhelp.org.au)

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We, Leisure Networks Association Inc, acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land, the Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to the Elders both past, present and emerging.

#### **About Leisure Networks:**

For three decades, Leisure Networks has pursued a vision of capable, healthy people and inclusive communities. We believe in a world that fosters inclusion, and where all people belong. Our guiding mission – connecting people with community – concentrates our efforts in all we do, everyday.

#### **About Sports Integrity & Governance Partners:**

Sports Integrity & Governance Partners are the sports integrity and governance experts

They are a curated group of some of Australia's leading experts in sports integrity and governance supported by a range of strong, highly regarded integrity service providers. Each of their experts has deep experience working within and for sports and government bodies, and as directors of sport organisation boards and advisory boards.



# welcome!

We hope you will find these guidelines really useful in your sport. Here is a brief introduction to set the scene.

There are millions of children and young people participating in sport across Australia every week. For many, it is a source of physical exercise, connection and fun in a safe and inclusive environment.

Unfortunately, our young athletes are not always safe while playing sport. There are risks from their peers, and risks from the adults in sport – the people they are supposed to trust.

Additionally, many of our young athletes are not safe at home, and sport is the one place they can go for a break. Sometimes, a coach, manager, or another trusting person within their sport may pick up that things aren't great at home, and they might need to step in.

There are National Principles and laws that all sports in Australia need to comply with to ensure they are doing what they can to keep our young athletes safe while playing the game they love. This includes having good policies that everyone can follow, having a culture where young athletes can speak up if something is wrong, and education at all levels, including for the children and young people from our elite teams right down to our grassroots clubs.

These guidelines are designed to help you, the adults in your sport, whether you are an executive in a state or national association, or a volunteer in your local club. These guidelines have been co-designed with young people, drawing from their lived experience and expertise to help improve the way in which we work together to keep our young athletes safe in sport.

***“We want them to be safe, and if they don't feel safe, know that there's a support system there for them.”***

young athlete





## meet the co-design team . . .

**These Guidelines were created through a co-design process involving the following four key stakeholder groups:**

- A Safeguarding in Sport Specialist
- A Community Sport Development Specialist
- A group of 17 SEDA College students each with lived experience as a young athlete
- 40 additional young athletes from a range of grassroots sporting clubs

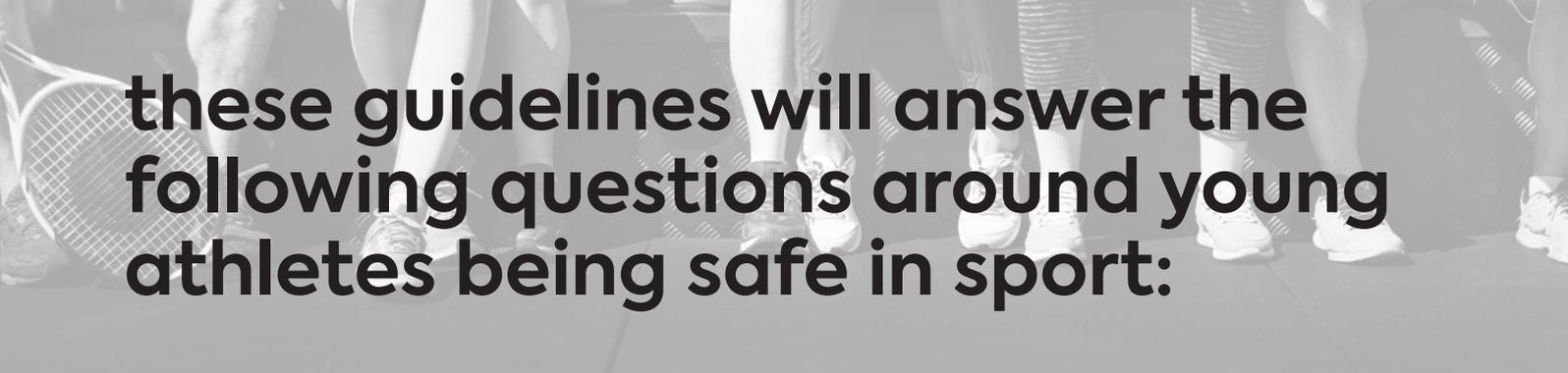
**The Guidelines development process was underpinned by the following principles:**

- The VicHealth Principles of co-design
- The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- The Victorian Child Safe Standards
- The International Safeguards for Children in Sport
- The Safe Sport International Principles
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

**The Guidelines are accompanied by a short video to assist in promoting the key messages it aims to provide to adults in sport across Australia.**

- <https://youtu.be/KFroKptEEkY>





these guidelines will answer the following questions around young athletes being safe in sport:

01

**why** is it important?

02

**what** do they need to know?

03

**who** should tell them?

04

**how** should they tell them?

05

how can they **show** them?

06

what else do we need to **consider**?

07

**where** to from here?

# 01

## Why is it important for young athletes to know about being safe in sport?

**It is the right thing to do, and, in most cases, it is the law.**

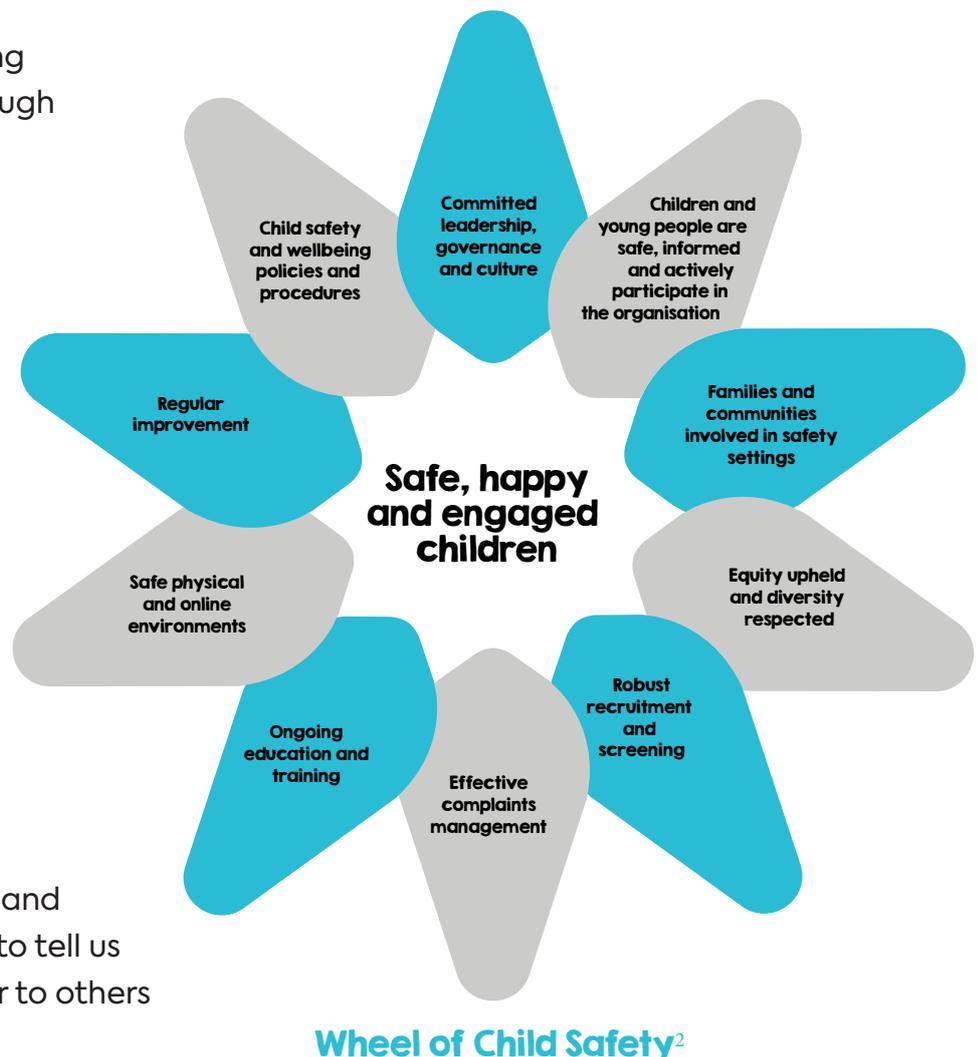
Across Australia, there is an obligation to protect the rights of children and young people. This is spelt out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Australia agreed to back in 1989. In sport, young athletes have rights, like the right to privacy, the right to be safe, and the right to have a voice and be taken seriously.

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations require all states and territories (some by law, others in principle) to put things in place to prevent abuse of children and young people in institutions such as schools, churches and sporting clubs. Principle 2 requires that “Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.”<sup>1</sup>

**It helps to prevent harm and abuse.**

We also know that when young athletes are empowered through knowledge, information and education, they can better recognise risks and inappropriate behaviours, and are more likely to speak up. We need them to speak up so we can make sport safer.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that it could take survivors between 20 and 30 years to report their experience. This is not good enough. We need to educate and empower our young athletes to tell us what is happening to them, or to others around them, now!



1. National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, Australian Human Rights Commission, <https://childsafes.humanrights.gov.au/national-principles/about-national-principles>.  
2. Ibid.



# 02

## What do young athletes need to know about being safe in sport?

**Young athletes need to know that their safety matters, and is a priority to adults in their sport. They need to know what to expect of adults, and that it is always safe to speak up. They need to know that if they experience abuse, it is never their fault.**

### **Young athletes need to know:**

- That they have rights, like the right to be safe in sport and that there are laws in place to keep them safe.
- Which behaviours are okay and what is not okay.
- The different types of abuse they may experience or see someone else experience.
- That there are people and systems in place to help.
- What to do if they are unsafe or are worried about something.
- That it is safe to speak up and that they will be taken seriously.
- That their voices and opinions matter.
- And most importantly, that sport is supposed to be safe and fun, so don't take it too seriously, and don't forget to enjoy it.



“ key messages from young athletes to young athletes ”

***“To stay safe while playing sport, try to always tell people the issues. Don’t hold them in if you’re being abused from the sidelines or anything – just tell people so it can be fixed.”***

***“Make sure you all have each other’s back, and stand up for what is right.”***

***“Treat others like you’d want to be treated whilst playing the game. If you are not happy at any stage, tell someone or ask for help.”***

***“To stay safe, understand what is going on around you, be yourself, and enjoy the game for what it is. Just go out and have fun. The opinions of others don’t matter.”***

***“Be yourself, and don’t try to be someone else. Look out for each other.”***

# 03

## Who should educate young athletes about being safe in sport?

***“Someone who is well known and still young (so kids can relate, and they’ll listen more to someone they know)”***

young athlete

**The best way for young athletes to learn about safety and their rights to be safe in sport is from the people they trust.**

**This can include:**

- Everyone, formally, from the club, and informally, from parents, siblings or friends.
- People in their sport, like coaches, managers, senior players or other people in leadership roles in their club.
- Past club champions or high profile athletes from their community.
- Designated safety or wellbeing officers within their clubs.
- Their sporting heroes, being high profile athletes that they look up to.

**Or better yet, a combination of all of these!**

# 04

## How should young athletes be educated about being safe in sport?

**There is never only one way to educate young athletes, so it is important that adults in sport consider multiple methods - and not just once, but over and over again.**

### **Methods may include:**

- Face to face presentations at training, club events or clinics.
- Videos featuring other young athletes or high profile athletes.
- Videos followed by a workshop with team mates.
- Posters and other visuals around the facilities.
- Key messages promoted on social media – by clubs and by high profile athletes.
- Hearing real life stories of other athletes or sporting heroes.
- By continuing the conversation with young athletes regularly but informally, over the whole season, just in case they weren't listening the first time!
- By educating parents and families so they can continue the conversation at home, and answer any questions

**Or better yet, a combination of all of these!**



***“Make sure each session has activities so kids can't zone out and get bored and where you can, do it face to face”***

young athlete



***“It is not just about what they hear you say, but what they see you do. Show them as well as tell them”***

young athlete

## 05 How can adults show young athletes what they need to know about being safe in sport?

**It may feel like the best way for young athletes to understand key messages about safety is to tell them directly, or through many of the methods listed - but it is not. In fact, it is just as effective to show them. You can do this by:**

- Listening – listen to the small stuff they tell you so they are more likely to tell you the big stuff. Show you are listening by putting away your phone, stopping what you are doing, using body language that shows you are interested, and not cutting them off.
- Answering questions – even if you don’t know the answer! Don’t dismiss them, answer what you can honestly and tell them you will find out the answers and come back to them if you need to.
- Be easy-going, open, honest and make an effort to get to know them and connect with them.
- Check in with them regularly - don’t wait for them to come to you with their problems.
- Follow through with actions - don’t make promises you can’t keep.
- Create a safe and comfortable environment where young athletes feel a sense of belonging.
- Let them know there is nothing they can tell you that you can’t handle.

# 06

## What else must adults **consider** before, during and after educating young athletes about being safe in sport?

**There are many things to consider when delivering important messages about safety to young athletes. such as:**

- Make the message clear so there is no confusion.
- Adapt the message to the audience – simplify it for younger ages.
- Make sure it is accessible for people with disabilities, cultural differences or language barriers (e.g. using visual images and subtitles where required).
- Always provide information about the session to young athletes and their families upfront so they have time to request to opt out confidentially if they need to.
- Always provide a sensitive content warning when talking about child abuse at the beginning of any session so people know what to expect.
- Always assume there is someone in the room with lived experience of abuse, so keep an eye on body language, always follow up and make sure they know to seek help if they need to afterwards.
- Educating parents and families is crucial. but should be done separately. That way, if there is a young athlete experiencing abuse at home, they are not put in danger or made to feel uncomfortable listening to the message with their abusive parent in the room.
- Be mindful that this may still occur if a coach or manager is abusive, so again, keep an eye on body language of young athletes, follow up with support and ensure the message is delivered via a variety of methods.
- Have someone of both genders available to offer support to young athletes at all times. Don't assume boys want to talk to men, and girls want to only talk to women.



***“Have the kids by themselves when being presented the video, so parents don’t influence their choices and try and change their opinions.”***

young athlete

## **sport:**

- Invest in education and safeguarding – a change in culture must be lead from the top down.
- Have an education strategy that includes the education of young athletes.
- Reach out to your high profile players and ask them to take on an ambassador role for videos and promotional messages.
- Use your platforms to promote messages to clubs, associations and young athletes.

## **association:**

- Bring clubs together for an information night, to watch the education video, and discuss strategies to start the conversation.
- Share resources and collaborate.
- Create a network of representatives from clubs that meet regularly.
- Lobby the state and national bodies for support, investment and leadership on safety education for young athletes.

## **clubs:**

- Educate your coaches, managers and parents first.
- Create a position to lead this work, and seek interest from senior players, club members and parents with backgrounds in education, working with children or children and youth services.
- Talk to your young athletes. Engage them in the process.
- Be brave and take the first step.





Where can we get more information?

