



# CONTACT WITH CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

## CAN I USE PHYSICAL CONTACT WHEN COACHING?

Yes. It is acknowledged that physical contact is an important part of football. Physical contact is also important for building rapport and connection, such as a pat on the back or a high five, as long as it is appropriate.

Appropriate physical contact with children and young people includes contact that is relevant to football and within the confines of your role. This may seem subjective, and the boundaries around physical contact may differ from person to person, however these guidelines provide direction to ensure your own behaviour is appropriate and the behaviours and actions you observe in others are too.

**Play by the Rules** define appropriate and inappropriate physical contact as:

Physical contact is **appropriate** if it:

- is used to assist in skill development
- is required for the child or young person's safety
- occurs with the player's understanding and permission
- is for the child or young person's benefit, not adult gratification
- occurs in an open environment where any person present can easily observe the interactions.

Physical contact is **inappropriate** if it:

- is aggressive, dangerous or causes physical harm or injury
- involves wrestling, sparring, pushing and shoving, even if intended as fun
- is sexual in nature, including touching the groin, genital area, buttocks, breasts or any part of the body that may cause distress or embarrassment
- frightens, distresses or embarrasses a child
- destroys a child's or young person's trust
- occurs in a private place.

## DEFINITIONS

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

**A Young Person:** someone involved in a footy program who is between the ages of 13 and 18 years old - usually a participant/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, player, umpire, club or match official, AFL staff member, volunteer, and/or a parent.



**Child safeguarding policies, procedures and codes of conduct relevant to your role should provide further detail on what appropriate and inappropriate physical contact looks like in Australian football.**



## HOW DO I KNOW WHAT IS OK AND WHAT IS NOT OK?

The **What Does Abuse in Footy Look Like** resource provides examples of types of abuse and what abusive behaviours might look like in football. Make sure you are familiar with this.

If you are still unsure, ask yourself the following questions to help navigate you in good practice when interacting with children and young people. If you answer no to any of the following questions you must reassess your actions.

- Is it **relevant** to the football program and my **role**?
- Is the child or young person **aware** of what I am doing, and why? Do I have their consent? Could they explain it clearly to someone else?

- Is the child or young person showing any signs of **distress** or **discomfort**? If so, stop.
- Would I do this if **another adult** was watching?
- Would I be **comfortable** with someone using the same contact with my own child?
- Is there someone else who would be more appropriate to make this contact? E.g. The first aid officer / a physio or the child or young person's parent/guardian or carer.

## WHAT IS PHYSICAL HARM?

Physical harm includes harm to a child or young person's body such as welts, bruises or other physical injury caused by actions such as hitting, shoving, pushing, punching, or slapping.

Not all physical harm is the result of physical abuse, it may be the result of actions intended to be fun or playful. However, these behaviours are not appropriate in the context of football. They are considered unprofessional when between an adult and a child or young person (eg. AFL staff member to player), and unsafe behaviour when between two or more young people (eg. participants).

Additionally, a child or young person does not need to be physically hurt for these behaviours to be harmful. These behaviours have the potential to cause harm and can be interpreted by those involved or even those observing, as aggressive, controlling, and an unreasonable exertion of power. Even when no physical harm is caused, they can result in feelings of shame, humiliation, embarrassment, and fear and are not acceptable.



**STRATEGIES** - Whenever you have physical contact with a child or young person ask yourself, would I be ok if someone else interacted this way with a child?

## WHAT IS SEXUAL MISCONDUCT?

*Sexual misconduct* refers to behaviours of a sexual nature towards a child or young person and is always inappropriate, illegal and a breach of child safeguarding policies, procedures and codes of conduct.

You must not under any circumstances, engage in behaviour of a sexual nature with or in the presence of a child or young person.

Sexual misconduct includes contact (including touching, caressing holding) and non-contact behaviour (including verbal or online communication, exposure to pornography).

**Inappropriate contact behaviours of a sexual nature include, but are not limited to:**

- sexual intercourse
  - sexual penetration
  - kissing
  - touching of the genital, buttocks or breast areas
- or
- inappropriate and unnecessary physical touching of any kind.

**Inappropriate non-contact behaviours of a sexual nature include but are not limited to;**

- flirting
- sexual innuendo
- inappropriate communication online or in person
- nudity
- exposure to pornography or
- requests to observe sexual acts.

## WHAT IS THE AGE OF CONSENT?

It is acknowledged that you hold a position of authority over children and young people under the age of 18. Under no circumstances are you, as a person in a position of authority, to engage in behaviour of a sexual nature with a child or young person.

## WHAT IS GROOMING?

Grooming is the actions an adult takes to position themselves to commit a sexual offence against a child or young person. It does not always involve behaviours of a sexual nature. The imbalance of power in coach-athlete relationships, reduced supervision and/or presence of parents provides an environment where grooming can occur.

**Grooming is a criminal offence in some states and strictly prohibited within the AFL.**

## SAY SOMETHING

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



**You can:**

Speak with your manager, your program leader or the People Team.



Use this QR code to raise a concern with the AFL.



For any safeguarding queries email [childsafety@afl.com.au](mailto:childsafety@afl.com.au)

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

*Please refer to the AFL Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and Code of Conduct for further details on AFL workforce safeguarding behaviour requirements.*

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