



SAFEGUARDING YOUNG ATHLETES

in Open-age Sport

Some young athletes under the age of 18 may show the physical stature and technical ability to participate in open-age sport with adults, but they are still developing physically and mentally.

It's important, therefore, to continue applying your sport's Child Safeguarding Policy for the ongoing safety and protection of these young athletes.

As young athletes enter an adult sporting environment, they can also face safeguarding risks such as:

- Increased chances of exposure to adult-related content, like bad language or alcohol-use.
- Greater travel and training commitments, where young athletes may not get the same level of parent/carer supervision.
- More online and physical communication with adults, including officials and teammates, where conversations could become more difficult to monitor.
- Environmental factors, like changerooms and social functions, where young athletes may feel pressure to fit in with adult behaviours.

One of the first, and best, steps you can take is to communicate early and often with these young athletes and their parents/carers to ensure they feel safe and supported at all times.





Key actions you can take

Here are some steps to support young athletes under the age of 18 who are making the transition to open-age sport. There are also some best practice tips for you to help these young athletes thrive.

Steps to help young athletes

Before selecting a young athlete for open-age competition, discuss it with them and their parents/carers. Outline how you will provide support during their transition, including any modified training and the child safe practices you'll implement. Seek their input too.

Inform the young athlete and their parents/carers about how to report any complaints or issues, including who specifically within the organisation they can report concerns to.

Help young athletes understand child safe practices and their rights to participate in a safe environment. [Sport Integrity Australia has safeguarding education resources](#) to help. Some are also listed at the end of this guide.

Remind team officials and adult teammates of responsibilities when it comes to online communication with young people. This includes avoiding one-on-one conversations with children online.

Check with your state or territory to ensure you're meeting legal obligations around Working with Children Checks, and equivalent screening. A young athlete participating in open-age sport may have additional requirements for some team officials.

Remind senior players to role model positive encouragement and behaviours for young athletes. Set standards for behaviour and have reporting processes for how inappropriate behaviour is called out and reported.

Best practice tips

Get written informed consent from the parents/carers prior to selection. Invite parents/carers to be involved as much as possible, such as attending training, competition and club social events.

Appoint delegates to provide additional support to young athletes. Set up regular check-ins with the athlete and their parents/carers to seek ongoing feedback.

Consider a youth advisory committee to gain broader feedback and information from junior participants. Seek feedback through surveys or forms, including parents/carers in this communication.

Consider secure communication methods for the team and members. Remind everyone to think before they post online or in group communication apps, with consideration that a young athlete is involved.

Take a risk management approach and look at additional ways to screen officials for working with young people, such as checking references. Also consider further safeguarding induction and training for team officials.

Encourage adult teammates and officials to complete [Sport Integrity Australia's eLearning course on safeguarding](#). These are free and accessible.

Organise a face-to-face information session on Child Safeguarding and the sport's code of conduct, focusing on leaders within your teams.



Steps to help young athletes

Consider arrangements for higher-risk environments, like change rooms, travel and overnight stays. Discuss with the young athlete and their parents/carers in advance what they might prefer so they feel welcomed, comfortable and safe. Put them at ease by giving them the opportunity to shower and change privately, if that's their preference.

Remind adult teammates before any sport function of appropriate behaviour and to be considerate of younger teammates.

Beyond group team meetings, there may be times you want to provide more personalised feedback to a young athlete. Have at least two adults present and hold these meetings in visible areas if possible.

If a young athlete requires medical treatment, support them with appropriate supervision. Invite their parents/carers to be present if possible, or have at least one other team official in attendance.

Get informed consent from a parent/carer if any ongoing medical treatment is required.

Best practice tips

Like all situations with children, avoid one-on-one situations between an adult and young athlete.

Sport Integrity Australia has a specific guides on:

- Keeping Change Room Facilities Safe for Children and Young People (factsheet)
- Transporting Children and Young People (factsheet)
- Events Involving Overnight Stays (booklet)

These guides are available on the [Sport Integrity Australia website's resources page](#).

If alcohol is present, consider designated supervisors, who should refrain from drinking alcohol.

Invite the young athlete's parents/carers to attend too, so they are included and can actively supervise.

Even better, schedule these meetings in advance and invite the young athlete's parents/carers to join.

Before any meeting, ask the young athlete if they're comfortable with the supervising people in attendance.

In all situations where it is possible, ask the young athlete if they are comfortable with the adults nominated to support them with medical treatments.



What young people in open-age events should be saying in our sport

"My club gives me the opportunity, confidence and support to progress and be my best."

"My older teammates respect me, mentor me and look out for me."

"I feel comfortable speaking to people at my club about any challenges or concerns I have."

"I don't feel like I have to do anything I'm not comfortable with."

Reflective questions for your sporting organisation

- Have we identified athletes under 18 who may be ready for over-age competition soon? Do we have a plan for their transition?
- Do we have a contact register of parents and carers of all young people participating in open-age sport?
- Are coaches and officials in our open-age teams appropriately qualified, screened and trained to be working with children and young people?
- Do we have a Risk Assessment that identifies and mitigates risks for younger athletes in open-age sport environments?

Find out more

Below listed resources are located on the [Sport Integrity Australia Resources page, Safeguarding section](#):

- Children and Young People Safe Practices Do's and Don'ts (booklet)
- Guide for Managing High-risk Activities: Child Safeguarding Practices in Sport (booklet)
- Transporting Children & Young People in Sport (factsheet)
- Keeping Change Room Facilities Safe for Children and Young People (factsheet)
- Communicating Online/Electronically with Children & Young People (booklet)
- Events Involving Overnight Stays (booklet)

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