

Practical guidelines for officials working with children and young people

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for athletics officials and other volunteers working with children and young people. Reading and understanding this material is a requirement for becoming an Athletics New Zealand Vetted Official.

Why is this important?

Athletics officials have a key role in the experience of children and young people. Officials have a vital role to play in their future and can have an impact that lasts a lifetime.

Childhood sporting experiences should be positive, and it is our responsibility to provide an environment that is safe, positive and enables children to flourish.

While we aim to provide a safe environment and have the necessary preventative measures in place, we acknowledge that concerns about a child or young person's wellbeing may still arise. These guidelines are part of a collaborative approach to creating safe environments for both children or young people and athletics officials and other volunteers.

Our guidelines around safeguarding children and young people in athletics is based on core principles which align with Sport NZ's Safe Sport for Children policy and Athletics NZ's Member protection regulation:

- Children and young people have the right to have fun and be safe in their activities
- Children and young people should feel respected, valued, and encouraged to enjoy their participation in athletics and to reach their full potential
- Athletics New Zealand, Centres, member clubs, officials, coaches, and team club managers, as leaders, organisers and deliverers of athletics, have a duty of care when it comes to children and young people and should take steps to ensure that children and young people can participate safely in the activities we provide

When working with children and young people in sport, we need to be aware of the position of trust we are in. We are role models, and we need to acknowledge this and have clear guidelines with personal and professional boundaries.

Good practice guidelines

As an adult, it is your responsibility to establish and maintain clear professional boundaries with children and young people in sport. The following outlines good practice and how to establish boundaries in a range of situations. Please read and understand these guidelines, and if you have any questions, feel free to contact the [Athletics NZ Child Protection Officer](#).

1. Always act, and be seen to act, in the child's or young person's best interests within the framework of the rules
2. Do not intimidate, harass, bully, humiliate, threaten, pressure, or undermine a child or young person
3. Ensure that language is age appropriate when talking to children and young people

4. Create a safe and open environment for children and young people that also reduces the risk to officials and other volunteers
5. Avoid situations that may lead to questions being raised over your motivations and intentions
6. Avoid private or unobserved situations with a child or young person. Always have another adult present when working with children or young people
7. Ensure that all physical contact with children or young people is relevant and appropriate to the activity being undertaken
8. Do not engage in communication with a child or young person on a one-on-one basis through social media, texting or other forms of communication
9. Recognise that as an official you hold a position of trust and authority. Never abuse that trust to establish an unsafe emotional connection with a child or young person. It is particularly important to avoid any activity that could be considered grooming a child or young person.
10. Do not drink alcohol or take recreational drugs in the presence of children or young people and never offer alcohol or drugs to children or young people

Responding to disclosed or suspected child abuse and/or neglect

As a volunteer within our sport, it is your responsibility to act on any concerns. Where abuse is suspected or reported, the welfare and interests of the child are the first and paramount considerations.

- Ensure the child is safe from immediate harm
- Consult immediately with the nominated person-in-charge (e.g. Event Manager)
- As soon as possible, record accurately and appropriately the information received

Key Definitions

Bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person or a group of people that can have a significant impact on them. It may create a risk to their physical and/or mental health and safety. The person or people acting in this way may not intend to cause harm or may not see their behaviour as bullying.

Child A child is a person under the age of 14.

Child abuse is the harming (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), ill-treatment, abuse, neglect, or deprivation of any child or young person.

Grooming is befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, and sometimes the family, to lower the child's inhibition with the objective of sexual abuse.

Vulnerability is situational. An adult may be vulnerable to abuse for a number of reasons.

Young person A person of or over the age of 14 years but under 18 years.

Athletics NZ Child Protection Officer

Athletics NZ has a Child Protection Officer, who is the person of contact for any concerns related to child safety.

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