

SAFE CLUBS, SAFE KIDS: FLAG

NZR knows that as a coach or team manager, you work hard to deliver the fun and enjoyment that 1000's of Kiwi kids have each year playing rugby, and we would like to support you by providing helpful tips on creating a safe environment for your teams.

Safe Clubs Safe Kids is designed to help you to set up a great environment for everyone to prevent harm from happening to kids in rugby's care and what to do if you see signs a child might be experiencing abuse.

As a coach or manager there is an easy way to help remember all these things - just remember FLAG:

Follow the safe clubs/safe kid's guidelines to prevent harm from happening in the first place

Look out for unsafe practices or signs of abuse

Act on all concerns

Get support

F – FOLLOW THE SAFE KIDS SAFE CLUBS' GUIDELINES TO PREVENT HARM FROM HAPPENING

Preventing harm starts with creating a great culture

Bring your team (players, their caregivers and team management) together at the start of the season to make sure everyone has a say on how to create the best possible and safest environment for your team. This is important because:

- Your team will feel valued and will more likely support you as a coach and manager.
- It reinforces the idea everyone will be treated with respect and that it is ok to talk to you if something doesn't feel right or someone isn't following the rules.
- If issues arise during the season, you have something to go back on.

Simple introductions

Simple introductions from everyone and is a great way to learn names as well as start to build healthy relationships within the team. This is important because:

- As humans (kids and adults), we feel more valued when someone remembers our name and are more likely to help or reach out when something isn't right

Ask questions

Find out directly from your team what they would like to see. For example:

- What sort of encouragement would you as players, like to hear from the sideline? Make sure words like 'positive', 'encouraging' are included and ask for examples of what that sounds like.
- What would you as players and caregivers like from the team management to make you feel valued and have the best possible season?
- Is there anything about you as a person, that you would like your coach to know so they better understand you?

Have your own individual input and non-negotiables

Make statements like:

- "We are all responsible for the safety and well-being of our kids, whether that's in and around facilities, on the side-lines or on the field".
- "We will try our best to role model respectful, positive and safe behaviour and we would like the same from everyone else too".

- “Bullying, physical or verbal abuse and inappropriate touch or language from anyone in or out of our team won’t be tolerated. If anyone experiences or witnesses any of those, they need to let us know straight away please”.
- “From time to time, could we please have caregiver support to hold hit shields that would be great”
- “At their age, these kids are, the age and stage of development is ‘X’. Therefore we will be working on ‘Y’ for their physical and mental rugby development over the season”.
- “Caregivers can come to team management at any time with concerns”.
- “At times, we may need to help you (kids) with your technique to keep you safe, we will ask if it’s ok before touching you and if you don’t feel comfortable, please let us know or your caregivers can talk to us about it”.

Follow the ‘Rule of Two’

To keep everyone safe, being alone with children should be avoided. You can implement this by getting adults supervising in pairs in changing rooms, knocking before entering where kids are changing, keeping trainings group based and ensuring adults aren’t sleeping alone with kids other than their own on overnight trips.

There will be times when 1:1 time is unavoidable, for example if a child gets sick and must be taken home or have clothes changed, you can keep yourself safe by:

- Letting the child’s caregiver know what’s happening. If you can’t get hold of them let your team manager or another trusted adult know.
- If you must transport a child home by themselves, have them sit in the back seat and drop them off without detouring to other places.
- If you do need to help a child with something personal, have another adult go with you.
- Explain to the child and always get their permission for what you are doing.

Appropriate Physical Contact with Kids

Coaches can have a lot of questions about touch, especially in a contact sport where technique is important. It is fine to correct technique to keep kids safe.

To put your mind at ease you should know that false abuse allegations against coaches is highly unlikely, UK research shows false allegations were about 0.02% of all concerns reported.

The golden rules of appropriate physical contact with kids are:

- If it is being used to assist in skill development.
- Is required for the child’s safety.
- Occurs with the player’s understanding and permission.
- Is for the child’s benefit, not adult gratification.
- Occurs in an open environment.

The easiest ways to put this into practice is:

- Explain to the team how you will correct their technique, “To show you proper scrum technique I may need to touch you here and here, ill check with you before I show you”
- Ask before you do it and get their permission: ‘Johnny is it ok if I move your ‘X’ down, so you don’t hurt your ‘Y’ going into the scrum?’
- Touch can also be a good thing and helping a player up, giving them a high five, or putting an arm around someone who is hurt where everyone is comfortable with this is fine. It is also ok for you as the coach to let kids know if you are not a hugger.

L – LOOK OUT FOR SIGNS OF ABUSE OR UNSAFE PRACTICE

Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional or neglect There are three main ways we might become aware of child abuse.

We might see signs in the child:

- Some of the things you might see are bruising in the shape of objects, unexplained injuries, burns or cuts where the story about them seems suspicious.
- Sometimes kids tell us that something is wrong by their behaviour – they may be anxious, particularly aggressive, self-destructive, have sexual knowledge and play that seems beyond their years or there may be big changes in their behaviour (like not taking part in activities or flinching when touched) that worry you.

Sometimes kids will tell us directly they are being hurt. If this happens:

- Stay calm and listen to what you are being told.
- It is important you don't investigate the situation yourself.
- Ask 'who, where, when' questions if you need clarification.
- Write down word for word what has been said and pass this information on to your CPA.
- Assure the child they have done the right thing by telling you, but don't make any promises E.g. 'I will make this stop'.

You may also see behaviour in adults that is unsafe – for example:

- Making kids do things that are significantly beyond their skill.
- Being threatening towards or degrading kids.
- Being overly familiar with a child and seeking 1:1 time with them.
- Giving gifts or money for no reason, not respecting kids' privacy in toilets or showers or letting kids have access to alcohol or other adult material.

A – ACT ON ANY CONCERNS

We don't expect any of our coaches to find, investigate or fix abuse, we just ask that you don't walk past it or ignore concerns you might have.

- If you think a child is in immediate danger you can call the police just as you would in any emergency.
- You can intervene and remind adults in your club of the rules if you see them not following the Safe Club Safe Kids Guidelines.
- For anything else contact your Union level Safe Kids Advisor (Child Protection Advisor) within 48 hours. Your Safe Kids Advisor has been trained in child protection responses and will know what to do. Some clubs have appointed Safe Kids liaison people, you can talk to them too.
- At any point you can contact Oranga Tamariki 24/7 on 0508 FAMILY for advice – that is what these lines are here for.

G – GET SUPPORT

There is support at both Union level and NZR if you need advice, a debrief or want to know what happened with your concern.

You can find out who your Safe Kids (Child Protection) Advisor is by contacting your Provincial Union.

Child protection can be intimidating but together we can keep kids safe.