



What is acceptable behaviour by adults towards children and young people in light of the NSW Child Protection Legislation?

Adult Behaviour as it Relates to the Child Protection Legislation.

It is most probably very timely that an overview be done so that adults appreciate the impact of the new legislative requirements as they relate to the running of our sport. For several years now we have consistently issued codes of behaviour and in some instances such as in case of coaches, we have also issued an etiquette document. This has had some success in limiting inappropriate behaviour but we now need to take the next step.

The following definition is a very important concept to understand. It is no longer appropriate, nor acceptable for adults to exhibit behaviour that places a child in harm.

Definition of HARM

Harm: Where a child feels that any action is either physically, sexually or emotionally abusing or that an action places a child or young person in a position of neglect.

Coach - Player Interaction

Where the coach is an adult then they have to appreciate that the days when they could rant, rave, denigrate, swear and/or abuse or do things that places a child or young person in a position of harm are gone.

A coach places themselves in a position where they may be reported under the Child Protection Legislation if a player under their control can claim that an action by that coach made them feel demeaned. An example might be that, during a time out a coach rips into a particular player and embarrasses him in front of their peer group. That player then goes home and states to his parents that he felt really down and it was due to the comments made by the coach.

Coaches just need to be aware of the effect that their statements can have and if they are not sure about a particular behaviour then seek assistance from their Association Child Protection Officer. It is usually only a small modification in behaviour that is required but an understanding of the above position can initiate this change in the first instance. Where the problem is deeper, then maybe some external assistance may be required.

Player – Official Interaction

This is probably the most unexplored area to date in relation to the effect of the children and young persons' legislation. As yet the ramifications of behaviour in this area have not been fully understood nor have they been fully explained.

Example: Where senior players are being refereed by a junior official. An adult player places themselves at risk if they abuse a junior official in such a manner that it causes that child or young person to feel that they have been placed in a position of harm (see definition). The degree of abuse might be something that for some time has been neglected as having an effect or has just been simply disregarded by those that feel that abusive behaviour is OK. Codes of behaviour have gone some way to limiting abusive behaviour but it is time that those who continue to abuse younger officials, in particular, should be aware that they are exposing themselves to action under the legislation.

Players quite often comment/complain about the lack of suitably qualified officials but don't like to accept any responsibility for their actions in causing or contributing to officials making a decision to leave the game.

It is becoming abundantly clear that "abuse" is most probably the single most important cause of officials leaving our sport. Whilst this is not only a basketball phenomenon we have to address the issue across all age groups whilst trying to develop an understanding of the special circumstances that now exist for children and younger persons.

On the other hand we could have situations where an adult official is refereeing junior players and their actions by singling out a player for special treatment, or a coach where that action has a ramification on the coach's players and on a team where the officials inappropriate behaviour belittles, demeans or causes a player to believe that they are being bullied.

Parent/Spectator – Official/Player Interactions

This is a hard one to control. Pamphlets Issued by the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation have been widely used to educate parents and spectators. The standard parent/spectator codes of behaviour are also utilised but their effect seems to be declining. The Department of Sport and Recreation is developing a particular pamphlet

for parents on child protection issues that will be circulated through their local schools shortly.

It is obvious that inappropriate behaviour can result in very bad publicity coming out of sporting fixtures where it occurs. The recent rugby league fixture that ended with parents/spectators invading the field and fighting with the players was an instance where very poor inappropriate behaviour has been highlighted by the media and remedial action considered imperative. This situation is bad for both the very young athletes involved and for the sport itself.

Parents/spectators need to be aware that like the two categories mentioned above their behaviour can be subject of the child protection legislation. Where a child or younger person believes that an action by a parent/spectator has placed them in a position of harm then a complaint can legitimately be lodged with the appropriate body and serious consequences could follow.

It is this latter stage that the sport of basketball is striving to avoid. Parents and spectators have to accept their responsibility in this regard. Local basketball administrators are becoming a lot more proactive in minimising inappropriate parent/spectator behaviour and where this group will not curb excessive poor behaviour then appropriate action will be put in place.

Player/Player Interactions

Another area of emerging concern which would be more prevalent in country and smaller associations is where junior players participate and play in senior competitions. This could also apply where association representative players play in the senior competition for development reasons. The younger players could be subjected to both emotional and physical abuse and these issues are quite distinct from playing hard within the rules.

The practice of sledging and player to player comment has to be avoided where that interaction occurs between a junior and senior player. There are many forms that emotional abuse may take and seniors have to accept that if a junior is playing then their behaviour has to change.

Additional physical contact to either initiate or dominate could lead to an allegation of physical abuse where this contact is obviously outside the rules.

Comments in justification, such as only allow juniors to play in a junior competition can not be supported when the conduct in question is outside the intention of the rules and the

reasons why juniors are participating in the first place. In many instances the success of many senior competitions rely on the participation of junior players.

This is a case where senior behaviour needs to be modified or if the behaviour is allowed to go unchecked over a period of time a very legitimate claim could be lodged under the legislation.

Game and association officials/members have to vigilant in helping to change this type of behaviour if it occurs.