

Making Sport Safe

Junior sport framework



A guide for sport and recreation clubs and associations in Western Australia.



Department of Sport and Recreation
Government of Western Australia



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

Overview

This booklet is part of a series which cover the nine guidelines outlined in the Junior Sport Framework (JSF) as developed by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC). The information in this booklet has been reproduced with permission from the Australian Sports Commission.

The guidelines cover topics to address the needs of young people in sport and include:

- 19 Long-term Involvement
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- 26 Making Sport Safe
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These booklets outline the main points of the guidelines to assist in the delivery of best practice in junior sport and to encourage young people to make a life-long commitment to sport.

A complete copy of the JSF is available in the Online Clubhouse section of the Department of Sport and Recreation (DSR) website.

Introduction

Sport providers have a legal duty of care (see 27 *The law and sport*) to protect the welfare of young people and to make sure they are not exposed to risk in any aspect of sports delivery.

This is best achieved through continually updating knowledge and skills for providing a safe and healthy environment.

Safety concerns for which advice, training and procedures (written where possible) should be in place include:

- facilities and equipment;
- the environment (e.g. weather);
- the conduct of training and competition to prevent injury, illness, negative psychological effects, and burnout;
- infectious diseases;
- medical conditions;
- drugs (e.g. alcohol, tobacco);
- weight control; and
- dealing with emergencies.

Note: The list of issues dealt with in this paper is not exhaustive. Organisations must do their own risk assessment to make sure they have covered all welfare-related issues.

Facilities and Equipment

Risk management procedures must be used to identify and control any risk of injury or illness related to the playing environment. (See 27 *The law and sport*.)

Facilities, sporting equipment and protective equipment should meet the standard requirements for safety for the particular sport.

The dimensions of playing areas and equipment must be suitable for the participant's size and physical ability so that young people:

- experience fun and success; and
- are less likely to be injured.

Protective equipment is also important in injury prevention. Items such as helmets, pads and mouth guards should be properly fitted, worn at all times, and regularly maintained.

8.1 Strategies for Facilities and Equipment

- Maintain facilities (e.g. field, change rooms, pool) according to required standards.
- Inspect venues for hazards and correct these prior to all training and competition.
- Use equipment suitable for the activities and the participant's size and development.
- Establish standards for protective equipment needed in your sport.
- Use protective equipment for training and competition (e.g. helmets, pads, mouth guards).
- Properly fit equipment.
- Use equipment in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions.
- Maintain equipment and replace when inadequate for doing its job.
- Enlist the support of role models in wearing safety equipment so young people follow by example.

The Environment

In managing risk, consideration must be given to environmental factors and their impact on participants.

Weather conditions

Sometimes extreme weather conditions (e.g. heat, cold, rain or wind) make it best to postpone training and/or competition.

Different regions of Australia vary in the weather conditions they consider extreme, due to their acclimatisation to the local environment.

To draw up guidelines for a region, sports providers should consult with each other and sports medicine practitioners to decide on conditions which warrant caution.

Fluid balance

Fluid balance is important at any time but needs more attention in some weather conditions. Young people do not instinctively drink enough to replace fluid lost during activity.

Young people must be reminded to drink before, during and after training and competition.

In adverse weather conditions follow specific fluid practices according to Sports Medicine Australia's most current guidelines.

Sun protection

Young people need to protect themselves from sun exposure by wearing sensible clothing and broad-brimmed hats and applying sun screen.

Sport providers must help young people take these precautions and assist in other ways to care for young people (e.g. erect artificial shades).

8.2 Strategies for the Environment

- Have written procedures via pamphlets, posters etc. disseminated for:
 - What to do in adverse weather;
 - Sun protection; and
 - Maintaining fluid balance.
- Have water available for fluid replacement.
- Make sure young people protect themselves against sun exposure.
- Enlist the help of parents/carers to send their children ready for safe sport (e.g. mouth guards, hats, water bottles).

Training and Competition

Training and competition are generally beneficial for the development of young people in sport. However, their health and well-being can be adversely affected.

The coach has an important role in preventing negative outcomes such as injury and illness through careful planning, conduct and evaluation of programs.

Intense training and competition are linked with frequent illness, mainly viral upper respiratory tract infection (URTI).

Immune function is suppressed for several hours immediately after a single intense session and for weeks or months during periods of very intense training.

Over-training and over-competing can result in serious outcomes such as injury, illness, negative psychological effects, and burnout (see *21 Physical Growth and Maturation*).

Causes include:

- high physical workloads with insufficient recovery;
- rapid increases in training frequency, intensity and duration;
- inconsistent training loads;
- competing too frequently;
- too much repetitive practice;
- emotional abuse/bullying; and
- no breaks between seasons.

Prevention requires planning a training schedule that controls the amount of stress placed on the young person by:

- gradually increasing training loads;

- planning adequate recovery and variety;
- carefully monitoring the effect of training; and
- reducing work loads when warning signs emerge.

Young people must be carefully monitored because in comparison to adults, they do not have:

- good sensitivity to warning signs and symptoms (e.g. fatigue, muscle soreness, headaches, mood changes); and
- the opportunity or skills to interact with the people who could alter their training and recovery program (e.g. coaches, sports science and medicine specialists).

Monitoring to prevent negative outcomes requires an individual, sport-specific approach.

In general, the younger and less experienced the young person, the:

- less intense, less frequent, and shorter the duration of training/practice and competition; and
- more rest time is required within and between sessions.

Other issues affecting young people when training and competing include:

- returning to sport after absences (e.g. injury, illness or extended holiday);
- risks related to helping with setting and packing up;
- travel concerns (e.g. comprehensive insurance, member protection, appropriate drivers); and
- staying away from home.

8.3 Strategies for Training and Competition

- Prepare young people for their sport through quality, safe training methods with a focus on fun and enjoyment.
- Educate sport providers on safe training practices.
- Set guidelines for workloads in accordance with the principles of training (i.e. progression, overload, specificity, variation, individual differences, adaptation, reversibility).
- Require sport providers to monitor for early warning signs of body stress and when a case arises, investigate cause and alter workloads until resolved.
- Make available and encourage the use of simple tools to prevent negative outcomes (e.g. athlete training logs, charts to plan periodised schedules, feedback mechanisms for athletes to tell coaches how they're coping).
- Formally discourage unsafe practices (e.g. training camps with significantly increased workloads, lack of warm up and cool down).
- Recommend junior sport providers undertake SMA sport trainer training.

Infectious Diseases

The risk of contracting illness such as hepatitis, skin infections, and upper respiratory tract infections (URTI) increases under some sports conditions.

The risk of infection increases when young people:

- live and train in close contact with others increasing cross-infection;
- train in environments where germs breed (e.g. change rooms);
- share contaminated items (e.g. drink bottles);
- are exposed to new environments when travelling to compete;
- damage the skin allowing transfer of germs; and
- come in contact with other people's blood.

8.4 Strategies for Infectious Diseases

- Reduce risk of infection by warning young people not to share personal items (e.g. drink bottles, towels).
- Adopt sport specific rules for dealing with incidents involving blood.
- Provide sport providers with update information on practices related to HIV and check for understanding and implementation of practices required.

Medical Conditions

Some young people have chronic medical conditions which affect their participation in sport. Particular care needs to be taken in the case of long-term conditions such as:

- asthma
- diabetes
- epilepsy
- heart or lung disease
- hepatitis
- HIV
- attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Sport providers must be aware of each child's specific needs and know how to prevent and deal with problems.

Parents/carers should complete a pre-participation screening questionnaire dealing with any special needs and implications for sports participation.

The questionnaire should also advise parents why it is needed, how it will be used, and that all information is subject to privacy requirements (see *27 The Law and Sport*).

8.5 Strategies for Medical Conditions

- Require young people complete a pre-involvement questionnaire about their disabilities, medical conditions and specific needs, and circulate to those working with the young person.
- Require sport providers to have current first aid qualifications.
- Require sport providers include and plan for young people with special needs.
- Provide update information to sport providers on practices related to medical conditions such as asthma and ADHD.

Drugs

Social drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and cannabis are commonly available in the sport environment and social settings.

Their use should be banned at any activity connected with sport, and young people should be encouraged to carry this through to their personal life.

Note: Performance enhancing drugs are covered in *27 The Law and Sport*.

8.6 Strategies for Preventing Drug Use

- Provide education for young people so they understand that drugs can harm performance and their health.
- Ban tobacco and alcohol use as part of socialising after junior sport training or competition.

Weight Control

In sports where light weight and low levels of fat are desirable, young people often control their weight through dangerous practices such as fasting, bulimia, diet pills and laxatives and diuretics.

A coach or other sport provider should not directly suggest to a young person they lose weight. This might trigger an undesirable response with severe under-eating.

Positive messages must be provided to young people about healthy eating as an aid to performing well. Act promptly if you notice a young person is losing weight.

Also of concern are young people using quick methods of weight reduction relying on dehydration to make a weight division for competition. This practice is extremely dangerous.

8.7 Strategies for Weight Control

- Provide young people with education on healthy practices for weight and fat control.
- Discourage young people from using laxatives and diuretics to reduce weight for weigh-ins.
- Seek expert assistance when concerns arise.

Dealing with Emergencies

Planning what to do when an emergency occurs is an essential part of risk management. Sport providers must be conversant with procedures and able to deal with emergencies so young people are well cared for.

Sport providers should have current first aid qualifications and seek medical opinion when:

- the health of a participant is questionable;
- recovery from illness/injury is uncertain; and
- a participant is injured during training/competition.

When medical advice cannot be obtained, the sport provider should not allow the young person to participate.

A first aid kit must be available at training and competition venues. Sport specific rescue equipment should also be accessible.

Emergencies should be formally reported, discussed, and changes made to procedures if needed.

8.8 Strategies for Dealing with Emergencies

- Have records available with details on how to contact parents/carers of young people.
- Provide written procedures for medical emergencies.
- Provide first aid training for sport providers.
- Provide first aid kit and rescue equipment suitable for the sport.
- Follow up emergencies and change procedures if needed.

Key Message

Best practice by sport providers means minimising risk to young people. This requires:

- providing training for sports providers working with young people;
- establishing and monitoring risk management procedures;
- following through with all the welfare related guidance offered, particularly by the ASC and Sports Medicine Australia; and
- working towards a national reporting system of emergencies and changing procedures to reduce these.

The goal is to make everyone involved with junior sport 'safety conscious'.

Key Points – Making Sport Safe

- Offering a sport experience places a legal obligation on sport providers to provide safe conditions.
- Facilities, sports equipment and protective equipment should be provided and inspected in line with standards set for the sport.
- Adverse weather conditions require decisions about whether to alter, cancel or postpone activities.
- Young people should be educated to make fluid replacement and sun protection a habit.
- Over-training and competing is preventable when sports leaders monitor for early warning signs and quickly adjust workloads.
- Some sporting conditions favour the spread of infectious diseases, and this can be avoided with preventive measures.

- Pre-involvement screening is required to indicate young people with special needs. This must be made available to sport providers who are required to know how to adjust activities and handle incidents.
- Young people should be discouraged from using social drugs.
- In sports requiring low weight and leanness, young people must be assisted with advice on healthy nutrition.
- Use of diuretics or laxatives for quick weight loss is harmful and should be discouraged.
- Emergency situations can arise and sport providers should have set procedures to follow.
- Sport providers should be qualified in the delivery of first aid.
- Protecting young people and providing a happy and well controlled sport environment will help to produce junior athletes who:
 - will want to move into senior levels of their sport; and/or
 - make a long term commitment to stay in sport.

Further Reading

Briefing Paper

- 6 Health and Welfare of Junior Sport Participants Guidelines
- 3 Physical Growth and Maturation
- 8 The Law and Sport

Case Study

Basketball's ITC Program which illustrates taking care of young people at an individual level.

Resources

Beginning Coaching 2000 Australian Sports Commission

Better Coaching 2001 Australian Sports Commission

National Sports Safety Framework 1997 Australian Sports Commission

Smart Play – Warm up. Drink up. Gear up
Sports Medicine Australia
Email: smartplay@vic.sma.org.au

Smart Play – Preventing injuries – Facts and Safety Tips
Sports Medicine Australia
Email: smartplay@vic.sma.org.au

Safety Guidelines for Children in Sport and Recreation.
Sports Medicine Australia

How to Become a Sport Safe Club: Guidelines for Developing and Implementing a Sport Safety Plan.
Sports Medicine Australia

Blood Rules, OK. (video [produced by ABC], booklet, and poster)
Sports Medicine Australia

Beat the Heat – Fact Sheet
Sports Medicine Australia

Websites

Sports Medicine Australia
www.sma.org.au, www.smartplay.net

Monash University Accident Research Centre
www.monash.edu.au

Basketball's ITC Program

Basketball Australia has approached the problem for young people of coping with the demands of their sport, school work, family and friends, and part-time jobs by providing individual assistance despite being a team sport.

These young people play simultaneously for their club, school, region and state. Close links among the athlete's coaches, the athlete, and parents are maintained through a communication network focused on monitoring the athlete's development.

In one case, a young athlete was undertaking 15 or 16 basketball activities a week and this was rationalised to 6 or 7 through the network approach.

A national training diary requires young people to report:

- their activities (e.g. training, sleep, study); and
- how they are communicating with parents, teachers, other players etc.

This is used to identify physical, academic and emotional concerns. The diary is also used for the coaches to give feedback to the athlete three times/year.

When possible, the athlete's academic progress is tracked by way of school reports and the ITC program is phased up or down depending on the athlete's particular needs.

Education in time management, goal setting, sports science and medicine is also provided as a base for international competition in the future.

