



FOR ALL

CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IN FOOTBALL

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Remember!

These are just some of the actions football takes. There's lots more information on [TheFA.com](https://www.thefa.com) and available from the professional game.



A safer environment

Football needs everyone to take action to keep children safe. Whether it's a referee's academy, a professional club or a grassroots tournament, everyone needs to know what's expected of them and to act in the best interests of children – all the time!

A safer environment has:

- safer working practices which everyone knows and follows
- codes of conduct known to all
- actively finding ways to listen to children
- ensuring everyone knows how to report concerns
- engaging parents so they know how to support their child and when to raise a concern.

A safer environment requires everyone to take responsibility for their own behaviour. This means:

- remembering the relationship of trust
- maintaining appropriate boundaries
- following codes of conduct
- keeping a child-centred approach.

Did you know?

The FA has a film for parents on its website, and there's also a free online course called 'Safeguarding for All', which anyone over 14 can take.

If parents and young people know what to expect of football and how to report concerns, children will be safer.





All of the following help make football safer for children:

- A safer recruitment process with DBS checks and references
- Codes of conduct for all
- Guidance on ratios of adults to children
- Guidance on photography and film
- Processes to ensure children are not directly messaged
- Monitoring of social media
- A commitment to listening to children
- Clarity on how to report concerns
- A designated safeguarding person known to everyone and who's clear about their role

Your own work

Think about where you work or volunteer in football. Are all those safer practices in place? If not:

- Take action!
- Talk to your designated safeguarding person or club committee
- Escalate any concerns to your County FA or, in the professional game, to the safeguarding lead



Physical and digital contact

When working with children, it's important to understand the idea of 'boundaries'. Keeping relationships with others appropriate helps everyone recognise acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

It's much easier to spot poor practice, grooming or abuse on and offline when everyone knows and follows the same guidance.

Football may be a physical game, but it's hard to imagine it without a digital presence. From player registration to communicating about games, celebratory photos on social media to online coaching sessions, football is digital as well as physical.

Digital communications provide great opportunities for connecting, communicating and celebrating. But they can also create safeguarding risks. Remember to think of safeguarding as being about online as well as offline behaviour.



Physical contact

Government guidance on infection control overrides all other guidance. Health and safety is essential, always follow government guidance. It's essential for all adults to know when it's appropriate to make physical contact with a child.

So, what exactly is physical contact? Well, it refers to the action of person-to-person touching or using an object to touch another person. In football, you should only make physical contact with a child to:

- develop their sports skills or techniques
- meet the requirements of the sport
- celebrate their success.

That's the basics, but some of these could be open to interpretation. So, let's take a look at the key principles of physical contact you'll need to follow.

Key principles of physical contact

- It must be in their benefit, not yours.
- You must explain to them the reason for any contact.
- You should ask for their permission, unless it's an emergency.
- You must encourage them to say if anything makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.
- Contact must not involve touching genital areas, bottoms, breasts or any other parts of the body that might cause them to feel distress or embarrassment.
- You must never use it as a punishment.
- It should always take place in an open or public environment and not in secret or out of sight of others.



- You must make sure it's culturally sensitive.
- You must respect any government guidance on infection control.

So, before making physical contact with a child, make sure it's appropriate and only do so if you're confident your actions can't be misinterpreted.

You're probably thinking this is common sense – it is for most people. Follow the guidance to reduce the risk of:

- distressing a child
- parents worrying about your behaviour
- putting yourself in a position where someone could misinterpret your behaviour.

Club inductions and introductory information need to address physical contact.

Remember!

If you think something is a safeguarding concern, doing nothing is not an option. Report it. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Working together, we will keep football safe, fun and inclusive.



It affects everyone

Adults...

...need to understand when it's appropriate to touch a child and be confident their actions can't be misinterpreted. When working with a child, never touch them in a sexual way. This includes never touching bottoms, breasts or genitals.

Children...

...have a right to say what level of contact they're comfortable with and to have their views respected.

Some children with disabilities may find touch difficult whilst others may be very tactile. For their own safety, disabled children need to learn what is acceptable and unacceptable touch, and adults working with them must follow any guidance provided about that child.

Parents and carers...

...need to feel confident that contact between those running football activities with children is safe and appropriate for their child.

Parents and carers need to support safer practice by clearly communicating any particular behaviours required or unacceptable.

Everyone...

...needs to be aware that touch can be culturally sensitive.

In some cultures, shaking hands with or hugging a girl may be unacceptable and such actions might mean she can't return to football.



But what if...

...the child is deaf or disabled?

Check out the Resources in Module 8 for additional guidance on physical contact relating to deaf and disabled children.

...it's needed for football?

Generally, physical contact isn't required when coaching football. But there may be some circumstances when a practice does require coaches to come into physical contact with children. For example, teaching a player how to use a piece of equipment or demonstrating a skill during a session to reduce the risk of injury when playing.

Coaches must be aware of where the line is between appropriate and inappropriate contact. They also need to be aware that contact could be misinterpreted.

...it can help comfort, or celebrate success?

Maybe a child needs comfort and reassurance. A young person may also want to celebrate an achievement with a high-five or similar gesture.

Adults should use their discretion in such cases. They need to ensure that what appears to be normal and natural contact doesn't become unnecessary and unjustified contact, particularly with the same child over a period of time. An adult could feel contact is appropriate for the circumstance, but the child may not feel the same way.

...it's for sports science or medical reasons?

Physical contact is often required of sports scientists and medics. Certain tasks should only be undertaken by properly trained or qualified practitioners.

This guidance doesn't seek to replace the specific guidance and codes of practice developed for those professionals, and reference should be made to the appropriate body for that discipline.



Adult-child ratio

There must always be at least two DBS-checked adults with any group of children. Larger groups, younger children and disabled children may need more. Remember, under-18s are still children and don't count in the ratios.

If one-to-one sessions are considered essential, these should be in sight of other adults. You can help keep children safe by not working on your own with them and having the right ratio of adults to children.

Remember!

- One-to-one sessions should be avoided whenever possible.
- Some groups of children, such as those with disabilities, may need more helpers.
- If you need support, ask parents to stay and speak to the designated safeguarding person to see what can be done. It might be time to recruit a new volunteer or start a new team.



Parents or others may offer to help out with training sessions. Let's take a look at an example:

Jacob is a coach and his assistant has just left. A parent, Zac, offers to help out with the weekly training session.

What should Jacob do at this point?

He should contact the designated safeguarding person and give them Zac's contact details.

Everybody in football should know that if you work with children, you must have an in-date FA DBS check less than three years old. The designated safeguarding person is responsible for ensuring the DBS check is completed, and they'll usually ask for references as well. We're **all responsible** for keeping this safer working practice intact by **ensuring the designated person knows about all new starters**. But that's just the start.

Zac also needs to understand how the club keeps people safe. He should know about codes of conduct and guidance and have some support as he steps into his new role.



Trips and tournaments

Travelling adds to the fun of football and gives children the chance to see new places and meet new people. But because they'll be away from their normal environment, there are some important factors everyone needs to consider.

These are the sorts of questions you should be asking:

- Has consent been received for everyone travelling?
- Is all medical information available?
- Where are you travelling to?
- Who's accompanying? (Plan the travel to ensure it meets the ratio requirements.)
- What's expected?
- Will this include overnight stays?

Other important considerations include:

Medical provisions

There are increased risks when children travel for football. Those responsible will need to know the details of any local emergency services, such as the location of the nearest accident and emergency (A&E) unit.

Consent and expectations

Have parents given consent for their child to travel, and do they know what's involved? What's the journey time? The further away the child is from their home and the longer the absence, the greater the risks.

Adult-child ratios

If a child is injured and needs hospital treatment, or is taken ill, you could find that two adults isn't enough. Think about what might happen and have enough helpers.



Children may find themselves alone with other children. Let's take a look at an example:

Aaron is 16 and an assistant coach with the under-10s. Last week the coach didn't turn up and Aaron was on his own for the whole session.

Should he have been left alone?

Aaron is only a child himself and should not be working alone with children. The parents shouldn't have left their children alone with him.

The club must not allow this to happen again. Aaron should have had at least two adults with DBS checks with him.

Consider the following situation:

Roisin is a referee mentor and needs to give a young referee some feedback. It's cold, raining and the club house is busy, so Roisin decides they'll sit in her car.

Was this the right choice?

The young referee could feel awkward being given feedback in a private place. It could also put them at risk of inappropriate behaviours or abuse. Therefore, this was not the right choice.

Roisin's behaviour could be misinterpreted as grooming. She should have asked for a quiet place in the club house, in sight of others. Being in sight of others keeps the mentor's reputation safe and helps safeguard the child.

Digital contact

Safeguarding is just as important when there's an electronic device involved. Maintaining appropriate behaviours and clear boundaries is just as important in the digital world as it is in the physical world.

It's easy for social media and messaging to blur boundaries and for children to misunderstand the nature of a relationship.



Remember grooming?

Earlier we talked about grooming. Grooming often happens online, so it's essential your behaviour in the digital environment cannot in any way put you at risk of allegations of grooming or make a child feel uncomfortable, scared or awkward.

One-to-one contact can be seen by children as you being 'their special friend', but by a parent or other adults as grooming, and this would be taken very seriously.

Let's start to think about the dos and don'ts of social media, messaging and other forms of digital communications with children.

Do:

- use group communications
- use the parent or carer's contact details
- copy parents and carers into any communications regarding children
- make sure all digital communications are only about football.

Don't:

- use digital communications for personal conversation, sending pictures, jokes or other items of a personal nature
- respond directly to digital communications from children
- use language that's discriminatory, threatening or sexual
- accept friend requests from players or referees under the age of 18
- share your personal social network profiles with children.



Digital coaching sessions

If you're going to run one of your own, you'll need to follow The FA's guidance in the same way you would for a face-to-face session.

Here's what you'll need to do:

- Work in groups.
- Involve another adult.
- Send the invite to the parent, not the child.
- Be open to parents observing.
- Work from a suitable environment.
- Dress appropriately. For example, in your club kit.

Lasting memories, instant risk

Celebrating achievement

Parents, children and clubs use photos and films to celebrate achievement and publicise football, which can be positive for everyone involved.

Memories and mentoring

Parents record their child's development and create lasting memories. Some coaches and mentors use film to give feedback.

Selfies and stories

Children like taking selfies and team photos, and sharing their stories instantly on their favourite social media platforms.

Inappropriate use

Never take photos of children changing, never ask for personal pictures of children and never share personal pictures of your own.

Photos like this can be used to blackmail children or persuade them into an inappropriate relationship. Photos with names and details can lead children to be targeted by groomers.

Enjoy photography, but keep clear boundaries in place and follow the guidance provided.