



Personal Protection and Intervention Policy

Policy Statement

ACT Little Athletics Association (LAACT) is firmly committed to a coordinated and comprehensive approach to promote the protection of children and adults. In accordance with the ACT Government principles for child protection and intervention, LAACT aims to promote a safe environment for all children and adults, and to recognise and notify suspected child abuse and neglect.

LAACT is committed to the belief that all children have a right to feel safe at all times.

Code of Conduct for Adults

1. Adult members of LAACT respect the dignity of themselves and others.
2. Adult members of LAACT demonstrate a high degree of individual responsibility, recognising that at all times their words and actions are an example to both adult and child members of LAACT.
3. Adult members of LAACT do not use LAACT to promote their own beliefs, behaviours or practices, where these are not compatible with LAACT policies.
4. Adult members of LAACT act with consideration and good judgement in all interpersonal relationships.
5. Adult members of LAACT avoid unaccompanied and unobserved activities with child members, wherever possible.
6. Adult members of LAACT, for their own protection, should avoid potentially compromising situations by ensuring, where reasonably possible, that at least two adults are in attendance whilst supervising and/or accompanying child members. It is recognised that in certain circumstances it may be necessary for an adult, whilst acting responsibly and exercising their "duty of care", to be alone with a child member.
7. Adult members of LAACT accept that bullying, physical or verbal abuse, neglect or any other type of abuse is unacceptable conduct by any adult within LAACT

Adult Member Rights

Adult members of LAACT have the right to:

- Ongoing training and information on all aspects of child protection
- Support in the reporting of suspicions of child abuse
- Access to support agencies
- Fair and equitable treatment from LAACT
- Be protected from abuse by child/young members
- Be protected from abuse by other adult members and parents

Adult Member Responsibilities

- Adult members of LAACT are responsible for:
- Working as a team to ensure the safety of child members in their care
- Using appropriate child behaviour management
- Believing and responding to child/young members' statements concerning alleged abuse
- Ensuring the rights and responsibilities of child/young members are enforced
- Reporting suspicions of child abuse to the Executive Officer of LAACT or his/her delegate
- Not abusing child members physically, emotionally or sexually
- Only disclosing sensitive information to appropriate authorities and/or designated officers of LAACT, on a 'need to know' basis

Child/Young Members Rights

Child/young members of LAACT have the right to:

- Be safe
- Be listened to
- Be respected
- Be protected from abuse, including by other child/young members
- Be referred to appropriate professional help if needed

Child/Young Members Responsibilities

- Child/young members of LAACT are responsible for:
- Showing respect to other child members
- Showing respect to adult members • Keeping themselves safe
- Accurately reporting inappropriate behaviour or at risk situations for child members
- Keep within the bounds of general community standards of community behaviour

ACT Little Athletics Association Rights

LAACT has the right to:

- Expect all adult members to comply with its Personal Protection and Intervention policy
- Expect all child/young members to keep within the bounds of accepted community standards of behaviour
- Take appropriate action if members contravene its Personal Protection and Intervention Policy
- Expect that adult members will not abuse child/young members physically, emotionally or sexually
- Take appropriate action in the event of malicious accusations
- Acquire police checks with convictions in relevant areas as required by current legislation

ACT Little Athletics Association Responsibilities

LAACT is responsible for:

- Providing maximum safety to all child/young members
- Widely promoting the Personal Protection and Intervention Policy to members and the wider community

- Designating an officer to coordinate and oversee all aspects of member protection within Little Athletics NSW
- Encouraging open discussion on child protection issues
- Providing support to members who report suspicions of child abuse
- Treating information of suspected child abuse with confidentiality and disclosing information only to those who need to know
- Making every effort to identify potential abusers via police
- Ensuring all staff whether paid, voluntary, permanent or casual are aware of the indicators of child abuse and neglect, their obligations to notify suspected child abuse and neglect and procedures for notification.

Child Abuse

Child abuse can be any of the following:

- Sexual Abuse is any sexual act or sexual threat imposed upon a child. Pressure, either physical or psychological, is always present in child sexual assault.
- Neglect occurs when a child is harmed because a parent/guardian or caregiver fails to provide the basic physical and emotional necessities of life.
- Physical Abuse refers to non-emotional injury to a child, generally caused by an adult who is responsible for that child.
- Emotional Abuse is behaviour by a parent or caregiver, which can destroy the confidence of the child causing significant emotional distress or hurt.

The Department of Community Services has the lead responsibility in child protection and is charged by law with the responsibility for the care and protection of children.

In the Australian Capital Territory the main objectives of the “Children and Young People Act 2008” states:

(a) providing for, and promoting, the wellbeing, care and protection of children and young people in a way that—

- (i) recognises their right to grow in a safe and stable environment; and
- (ii) takes into account the responsibilities of parents, families, the community and the whole of government for them; and

(b) ensuring that children and young people are provided with a safe and nurturing environment by organisations and people who, directly or indirectly, provide for their wellbeing, care and protection; and

(c) preventing abuse and neglect of children and young people by providing whole of government assistance to children and young people, their parents and families, the community, and others who have responsibility for them; and

(d) ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are included and participate in—

- (i) providing for, and promoting, the wellbeing, care and protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people; and
- (ii) preventing the abuse and neglect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people; and
- (iii) rehabilitating and reintegrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young offenders; and

- (e) ensuring that services provided by, or for, government for the wellbeing, care and protection of children and young people—
 - (i) are centred on the needs of children and young people; and
 - (ii) take into account the views and wishes of children and young people; and
 - (iii) foster and promote the health, education, developmental needs, spirituality, self-respect, self-reliance and dignity of children and young people; and
 - (iv) respect the individual race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality and culture of children and young people; and
- (f) ensuring that young offenders—
 - (i) receive positive support and opportunities to become rehabilitated and reintegrated community members; and
 - (ii) share responsibility for rehabilitation and reintegration with their parents and families, the community and the government in partnership; and
- (g) imposing standards that must be complied with for the delivery of services to children and young people; and
- (h) ensuring the protection of children and young people in employment.

The copy of the ACT Govt and NSW Govt Act can be found at the following links:

ACT Government - "Children and Young People Act 2008"

http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/b/db_32042/default.asp

NSW Government – "CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS (CARE AND PROTECTION) ACT 1998"

http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/caypapa1998442/

For ACT Centre's requiring more detailed information and a copy of the publication "Keeping Children & Young People Safe" a shared community responsibility, 2009 document, can be found at the DHCS ACT website:

http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/services/care_and_protection#CIS

For NSW Centre's requiring more detailed information on "preventing child abuse & neglect" please visit the NSW Human Services Website:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/welcome_to_community_services.html

The Children's (Care and Protection) Act 1987 stated that:

Any person who forms the belief upon reasonable grounds that a child has been, or is in danger of being abused; or is a child in need of care may notify the Department of Community Services of his/her concern.

Persons who notify the Department of Community Services because they have REASONABLE GROUNDS to do so are protected by the Act from civil or criminal prosecution.

All LAACT staff whether paid, voluntary, permanent or casual, officers and centre personnel have a duty of care and responsibility to ensure the safety, welfare and wellbeing of child members is maintained. Failure to notify when there are concerns about child abuse and/or neglect means that the child's safety needs cannot be properly addressed and they may be left vulnerable to further abuse.

LAACT is of the belief that by taking simple preventative measures during the conduct of any Little Athletics activity then the opportunity for any form of child abuse can be minimised.

Definitions and Indicators of Child Abuse

The term Physical Abuse refers to non-accidental injury to a child by a parent/caregiver/other person. It includes injuries caused by excessive discipline, severe beating or shaking. Some signs and symptoms may include:

- Bruising
- Lacerations or welts
- Burns or scalds
- Fractures, sprains or dislocations

The term Sexual Abuse refers to allegations of sexual behaviour towards a child by someone known or unknown to the child and who is in a position of power over the child. Some signs and symptoms may include:

- Age inappropriate behaviour and/or persistent sexual behaviour, promiscuity
- Marked changes in behaviour or mood, tantrums, aggressiveness, withdrawal self-destructive behaviour
- Allusions to problems at home, not wanting to return home
- Fear and loss of trust
- Physical symptoms including bruising or bleeding in the vaginal or anal area

The term Emotional Abuse refers to harm caused to the child by excessive or unreasonable demands as well as failing to provide the psychological nurturing necessary for development. Some signs and symptoms may include:

- Severe verbal abuse or threats of abuse
- Being physically or socially isolated as punishment
- Feelings of worthlessness about life and self
- Extreme attention seeking behaviour
- Behavioural disorders such as disruptiveness, bullying, aggressiveness

The term Neglect refers to the failure to provide the basic necessities of life including food, clothing, shelter, emotional security, medical care and adequate supervision of the child's growth and development. Some signs and symptoms may include:

- Poor standards of hygiene, inadequate clothing for weather conditions
- Malnutrition, complaints of hunger, hiding food
- Untreated medical or dental problems
- Lack of appropriate supervision – either unsupervised or under supervised when engaging in certain activities
- Extreme longing for adult affection

Recognition of Abuse or Neglect

When considering the likelihood that an injury, behaviour or disclosure of a child may be related to or caused by abuse or neglect, it is very important to remember that one sign in isolation may not necessarily indicate abuse or neglect.

Recognising the signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect means forming a genuine concern or well-founded suspicion that abuse or neglect has occurred or may occur in the future.

Being Alert to Abuse or Neglect

Concerns about abuse or neglect can be raised in a number of ways, such as:

- A child, a parent, a work colleague, a sibling or another adult may tell about something that has happened, their fears, or how they feel about being placed in certain situations
- Marked changes in a child's physical appearance or condition, their behaviour or family circumstances may arouse suspicion
- Observations in the interactions between an adult (parent/carer/other adult) and a child may raise concerns
- Observations in the interactions between two children may raise concerns

It is recommended that a record be kept of events which give rise to concern, including conversations and observations. A notebook or a diary, which is kept in a secure place, preferably under lock and key, is an appropriate place to record any concerns.

If a member has a genuine concern that a child in their care has been, or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, then the situation must be dealt with quickly, carefully and with an open mind. If there is uncertainty about whether to notify or not, concerns should be discussed with the LAACT Member Protection Information Officer (MPIO).

Listen and Clarify

If a child tells you about abuse listen attentively and later record the child's exact words (as well as you can recall), the time and place the allegation was made and who, if anyone, was present. Do not prompt the child for further details or ask questions as this may lead to contamination of evidence.

As the child talks to you:

- Observe the demeanour of the child
- React calmly to the information the child provides
- Listen actively and be non-judgmental
- Do not ask leading questions, for example, "did they/she/he do.....to you?"
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling you, for example, "I am pleased you told me about these worries....."
- Do not make promises you cannot keep, particularly about telling others (for example: Police, parents, etc.) about the information, or about what will happen next
- Reassure and support any colleagues who are present

You should:

- Provide comfort and care to the child, recognise that they may be fearful about the consequences of their action and confused about the situation

- Reassure the child that this is not their fault and they have not done anything wrong
- Not confront the parents or other family members

Child Abuse Notification Procedures

Verbal notification must be made to the LAACT MPIO on 02 6247 1296.

The following information is to be reported:

- Name and description of child.
- Address or descriptions of his/her whereabouts.
- When child was last seen.
- If known, approximate age, centre details/school and if any siblings.
- If known, whether a language or sign interpreter may be required or an Aboriginal agency should be involved.
- All available information relevant for safety and welfare of child.
- Details of events, conversations or observations, which led to the report.
- Your contact name and phone number.

Guide to Protective Practices

All LAACT staff whether paid, voluntary, permanent or casual, officers and centre personnel are encouraged to adopt protective practices to maximise their protection from a misconstrued act. The following is only a guide and centre personnel should initiate protective measures they deem warranted to suit their situation. eg. a centre conducting competition of a night may feel it necessary to implement more stringent measures or a centre with an enclosed ground may utilise a gate attendant:

- No athlete in the Tiny Tot to U10 age groups be permitted to leave the competition area without a parent/guardian.
- Incorporate a 'buddy' system when athletes require to leave the competition area (e.g. go to the toilet).
- Enforce the parent/guardian be present at the ground at all times, emphasising during the registration process LAACT policy on child protection and that at no time is Little Athletics a 'baby-sitting club'.
- One on one coaching activities should be avoided, unless a parent/guardian or other athletes/officials are in the near vicinity.
- Video viewing in one on one situations is totally banned.
- When conducting camps with both boys and girls participating it is important that adults of both genders accompany the group.
- Encourage, don't pressure.
- Be sensitive to an individual athlete's capacity for physical activity and protect them from any unwarranted pressure to participate.
- Discipline and manage behaviour – do not abuse.
- Don't exaggerate or trivialise child abuse issues.
- Do not let children involve you in excessive attention seeking behaviour that is overtly sexual or physical in nature.

Improper Adult Conduct of a Sexual Nature

This is misconduct, which does not fit into the definition of "sexual abuse". It is unwanted, unsolicited and unreciprocated behaviour such as:

- Sexual or smutty jokes.

- Personally offensive verbal comments, hand or body gestures.
- Physical contact such as patting, pinching or putting an arm around a child's body.
- Requests/demands for sexual activity.
- General inappropriate behaviour when children are present.

NOTE:

- Improper conduct may be unintentional i.e. individual may not be aware that behaviour is causing distress.
- Similar distress can be caused by either intentional or unintentional improper conduct.
- If not addressed may escalate to sexual assault.

Alleged Improper Conduct

If you suspect improper conduct inform the LAACT MPIO.

Media Contact Management

In the event of contact by the media as a result of any incident/activity other than competition/promotion being conducted by a centre, the media is to be referred to the LAACT office.

It needs to be clearly understood that if an adult member of Little Athletics is facing criminal proceedings for inappropriate behaviour and the case has not yet been heard or a judgement made, then opinions of such a person's character or actions should not be generally discussed. If such person is found to be not guilty by the legal system they could possibly seek damages for defamation.

When there is any doubt whatsoever concerning media contact in any particular situation then do not offer any comment without prior referral to the LAACT office.

Always remember that on the surface what may seem a perfectly positive promotion of Little Athletics can be turned around.

Acknowledgements

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- NSW Department of Community Services
- Scouts Australia, NSW Branch
- NSW Child Protection Council – Office of Children & Young People