

Coaches & Officials: Safe Practices: Boundaries

This resource provides references to and examples of Prohibited Behaviours as addressed in the 'Key Definitions' section of the [Code of Conduct](#)

For the purpose of this resource, the term Young Athletes refers to children and young people under the age of 18 who are involved in our sport.



Professional boundaries in basketball.

Professional boundaries is the term we use to describe the invisible line between 'personal' and 'professional'. They are what separate the things we do with friends from the things we do with the people we work with.

They apply in basketball too, especially when we are working with young athletes or when there are children and young people in the basketball environment.

They include things like:

- **Physical Contact** – is there any reason why physical contact would be required? If so, have you sought consent? Are you mindful of how it might be received or perceived?
- **Deciding who to connect with on social media** – do you want the young athletes from your team seeing videos of you at your friends' party?
- **Sharing personal information** – are you happy for the young athletes in your team dropping by your house to say hi after school?
- **Giving gifts or financial support** – if you pay for one young athlete's ticket to a Sal's NBL or G.J. Gardner Tauhihi Basketball Aotearoa game out of your own money, are you willing to pay for everyone's ticket? Is there another more transparent way to support someone to attend?
- **Providing transport** – how might another parent, or official from your club perceive seeing a young person getting in your car at the end of an awards night?
- **Drinking alcohol** – alcohol itself can make boundaries blurry, so is it a good idea to engage in alcohol during an event where children and young people are in attendance, even if it is not your responsibility to supervise them?
- **Taking photos on your phone** – using your own device to take photos that include athletes in them can lead to a range of issues, including policy breaches. There is always another way!

There are many strategies and measures we can put in place to demonstrate when we are in a professional role (even as volunteers!).

Sometimes there are clear rules or policies (like here, in the [BBNZ Safeguarding Policy](#)) that help us set those boundaries, and other times it is up to us to decide where we draw the invisible line.

Professional boundaries are not just about what we as adults in professional roles are comfortable with. They play an important role in protecting the young athletes involved in our basketball too.

Poor boundaries may indicate that a person does not understand the rules and needs some additional training, and in other cases poor boundaries are the first noticeable signs of grooming.

Grooming is the actions someone takes with the intention of committing an offence against a child. Grooming is Prohibited Behaviours in basketball, and a criminal offence.

If the adults in basketball can consistently demonstrate good professional boundaries, it makes it much clearer to young athletes when someone has crossed that line. Remember, there is always a power imbalance between an adult in basketball (coach, manager, team official, referee) and a child or young person.

It is easy for adults to take advantage of this power imbalance and use it in a way that is harmful. Having good professional boundaries demonstrates to young athletes, their families and your colleagues that you don't intend to use your power in a harmful way.

Tips for having clear professional boundaries:

- Be friendly, not a friend.
- Wear a uniform or lanyard to clearly define when you are in 'professional' mode
- Avoid physical contact, but if it is necessary (demonstrating an activity, presenting an award or having photos taken) take a moment to say, 'are you ok if I put my hand on your arm here?' or 'where would you be more comfortable for me to stand for the photo?'
- Keep your interactions and conversations about basketball, whether that is in person, or via texts or emails. When conversations start to get personal (weekend plans, relationships – yours or theirs) it can be confusing for children and young people and be difficult to retract from.
- Two deep communications. Always include a third person in your communication with a young athlete. It could be a parent or another team official.



- If you have nothing to hide don't hide it. Wherever possible it is important to ensure any engagement including necessary physical contact with a child or young person happens in an open space where other people can see it.
- Consuming alcohol when engaging with young athletes is prohibited, but sometimes there are club or association social events where you are not necessarily responsible for the young athletes, but they are around. Making a choice about it and when you consume alcohol at an event can play a big factor in the ability to build trusting and professional relationships with young athletes. How you behave when engaging in social activities will cross over into your work and their experience of you.
- Making a call about when you drink alcohol, how much you drink, and when you choose not to at all will help set those boundaries.
- Gift giving should be fair and proportionate e.g. buying ice creams for everyone at the end of a program is both fair and proportionate. Taking one child or young person to a Sal's NBL or G.J. Gardner Tauhihi Basketball Aotearoa game is neither fair nor proportionate.
- When accepting gifts from young athletes always ensure a supervisor, a manager or someone in the organisation is aware, transparency is key and again, consider if the gift is proportionate to the circumstances.
- Think about your intention – what are you trying to achieve? Do I need to cross the invisible line to achieve it? If so, what are my other options?
- Consider what it might look like to someone else?



Let's revisit some of those examples again. You may do some of these and not think they are a big deal, maybe you don't, or maybe you do but you're starting to think you shouldn't.

Example 1: Deciding who to connect with on social media

If you are up front from the beginning that you don't connect with the young athletes you coach or their families on social media, your young athletes will probably never bother to send you a friend request and you won't have to turn them down.

However, if you connect with their dad, and then their 18yo brother, what are you going to do when the 12yr old wants you to follow them?

- Are you going to say no and explain why it is 'different' that you follow their family members? or
- Are you going to say yes, so you don't hurt their feelings, and then have to explain to your housemate or partner why you have videos and photos of a 12 and 13 yr olds filling up your feed?
- Does the young athlete now think it's normal for adults in professional roles to connect with them on social media? Would they happily accept a request from a teacher?

Easier to draw the line right back at the beginning and avoid it all together!

It is also important to assist young athletes to implement good personal boundaries when they are on social media, especially when they are using social media to promote themselves to potential opportunities (scouts, sponsorship etc).

Example 2: Sharing personal information

Sometimes it is hard to avoid sharing personal information. A young athlete and their family will probably have your phone number because you are regularly contacting them in relation to basketball. Maybe they know where you live already, because you're neighbours, or they go to school with your kids. Sharing your personal information is often hard to avoid, especially in small communities.

You can still demonstrate professional boundaries to make sure that young athletes in basketball always feel safe and comfortable.

- If you don't have any legitimate reason for a young athlete, you coach or know through your role at the club or association to know where you live, or for them to be at your house, good professional boundaries would mean that this would never happen.
- If they do visit your house for legitimate reasons (visiting with their family, hanging out with their friends) you can make sure that you never alone with them. This can make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe and can raise concerns with their family members too.

Example 3: Giving gifts or financial support

It is hard to see a child miss out on something because their family can't afford it, especially in sport and especially when they have real talent or are showing great progress. It seems simple to just upgrade their shoes or cover the travel costs so they can get to a game. It may seem like there is no harm as you are just helping, but in fact, it is actually a breach of policy as it blurs the line between professional and personal, creates unreasonable expectations, increases the power imbalance that already exists, sends mixed messages to everyone and can be interpreted as favoritism or an unfair advantage.

Instead, you can:

- Organise a fundraiser with the proceeds shared amongst all participating young athletes
- Purchase vouchers or discount cards for all young athletes to get financial benefit to help with the costs of shoes or gear
- Seek donations and offer them to all young athletes
- Buy a set of basketballs that young athletes can use when they don't have their own, but that remains yours
- Help families seek financial support through grants, scholarships and other publicly available opportunities.

Example 4: Providing transport to young athletes

To maintain strong professional boundaries, it is best to avoid transporting young athletes to and from training or games in your own car. However, if it is necessary in certain circumstances, such as a last-minute emergency or because you have arranged to travel together as the young athlete's only form of transport, you should ensure:

- Your vehicle has adequate insurance
- You are fully licensed
- The circumstances are directly related to basketball
- If possible, that you are not alone with the young athlete– another young athlete or an adult from the club or association is present with you
- You have prior authorisation in writing from a manager or club or association official, and from the young athlete's parent or carer.

It is best practice for young athlete's being transported in an approved circumstance to sit in the back of the vehicle.

Parents and carers, and a supervisor, should be advised of expected departure and arrival time.

Remember to check if the young athlete consents too!

Don't assume they are comfortable with the arrangement.



Example 5: Alcohol & Other Drugs

The [BBNZ Safeguarding Policy](#) clearly states that a participant responsible for the care of children (e.g., a coach, a Basketball New Zealand staff member, a manager or a volunteering parent) must not use, possess or be under the influence of an illicit drug, alcohol or impaired by any other legal drug while in the presence of a child.

It also clearly states that the same people must not supply alcohol or drugs including tobacco to a child or administer any medication unless it is prescribed, and parent are informed and have provided consent.

In a basketball environment, it is rare and extremely unlikely that a basketball coach or volunteer would have any reason to administer medicine to a young athlete, other than during an overnight trip or as a means of first aid.

However, where these expectations can become relevant to basketball is in relation to the use of alcohol.

It is easy to apply a hard rule of not consuming alcohol when you are coaching or running an event and have direct responsibility for a group of young athletes.

It gets a bit trickier when you are not technically 'working' or directly responsible for young athletes. This is where professional boundaries play an important role in determining what is and isn't ok, outside of those hard rules, especially when you are in an environment (for professional or personal reasons) where the consumption of alcohol is not only acceptable but often expected.

For you:

Your ability to adequately supervise a young athlete and provide a safe environment for them can be impaired by the consumption of alcohol. However, even if you are no longer responsible, your ability to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with a young athlete or their family can also be jeopardised.

Your behaviour under the influence of alcohol can have a long-term impact on a young athlete's ability to trust you, to take your role seriously and to consider you a professional (even if you are a volunteer!).

Also important to note: For those who have lived experience with alcoholism and / associated violence in their home, where consumption of alcohol can lead to unpredictable behaviour with a vast range of consequences and threat to their safety, seeing their trusted coach under the influence can make them feel cautious, uncomfortable and unsafe.

Time and a place

Consider the following questions. The sample responses are examples of poor, reasonable and strong **professional boundaries**. You may not have considered this before, so now is a good time to apply professional boundaries to where, when and with whom you consume alcohol at your club or association.

	<i>How do you determine when you drink alcohol at a basketball event and when you don't?</i>	<i>Who are you comfortable having a beer around, and who are you not?</i>	<i>Where do you think it is ok to have a beer at a basketball event, and where is it not?</i>
Poor	I don't really think about it. I just have one if I feel like it.	Anyone really, I don't really think about who is around.	Wherever I happen to be.
Reasonable	I usually just see where I am and who is around first.	I am mindful of where the young athletes are, and I don't drink with them.	I might have a few drinks at a presentation night or if we have an end of season BBQ.
Strong	I may have a beer at a social event only, but I am always mindful of only having one.	I don't drink at all when there are young athletes around.	Where there is no chance I will impact my relationship with the young athletes I coach or their families.

A couple of takeaways

The presence of alcohol in junior sport is clearly inappropriate and unnecessary, but consider how this differs when a young athlete (e.g. 15 yr old) is invited to play in the seniors? How does the environment continue to remain safe for them when they are in a space where alcohol is normalised? Or are they expected to just adapt?

Are you trying to create a high-performance environment – or simulate this for those young athletes striving for an opportunity to play at an elite level? Is alcohol conducive to a high-performance environment?

Behaving in a way that is in breach of the expectations of Professional Boundaries highlighted in the [BBNZ Safeguarding Policy](#) is considered Prohibited Behaviours and can have serious consequences.

