

Coaches & Officials: Safe Practices: Communication

This resource provides references to and examples of Prohibited Behaviour as addressed in [BBNZ's Safeguarding Policy](#).

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.

Communicating with young athletes in basketball.

When communicating with young athletes in basketball it is important to remember that **what** you say, **how** you say it, and **when and where** you say it, matters.

Good communication is the most important aspect of coaching or officiating in any sport.

How well you know the game, your technical ability, or how long you have been playing yourself is irrelevant if you cannot adequately communicate with a young athlete.

Communication may include:

- Arranging details for training or games
- Giving instructions
- Facilitating a group of young athletes
- Providing post-game feedback
- Discussing logistics and plans for an upcoming competition or trip
- Addressing behaviours that are impacting the learning environment or others
- Sharing disappointing news (team selection / results)

Encouraging autonomy

Autonomy is the term used to describe a person's right to have a voice and make decisions for themselves. Coaches and officials should not just accept but actively encourage autonomy amongst young athletes.

Autonomy leads to more confident, successful athletes who perform better under pressure and develop important life skills.

Speaking up should be encouraged as communication is essential for growth. When coaches listen and value feedback, they build stronger, more trusting relationships with young athletes, leading to better outcomes both in and out of competition. Encouraging athletes to find their voice is essential to their growth.



Barriers to communicating with young athletes in basketball.

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There are many things that make it difficult to communicate with young athletes in basketball. Some of these are out of your control, but many you can control, and this resource will help you communicate effectively and overcome these barriers.

What you cannot control

Many different things can impact a child or young person's ability to focus, listen and retain information. Some of these are things a young athlete will experience outside of basketball (e.g. at home, at school, online, in the car before they arrive at training) and are therefore 'outside of your control'. These include:

- Have they eaten enough today, or this week?
- Did they get enough sleep last night?
- Did they get in trouble at school?
- Are they being harassed by another student?
- Have they just broken up with their partner?
- Is someone in their house ill and need them to care for them?
- Are they living in a violent home, that is unsafe, unpredictable or stressful?

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, something might be happening to them that is impacting their developing brain, making it harder for them to pay attention and focus on a task like basketball drills.

They may find it hard to

- Concentrate
- Listen and hear what you are saying
- Remember and follow instructions
- Sit or stand still
- Answer your questions clearly
- Ask for assistance
- Recall previous training sessions or games
- Find the energy or motivation you are expecting from them

They may also react to small things in disproportionate ways. On top of this, they may find it hard to tell you that this happening or they may not even realise it is happening.



What you can control

Luckily, we have lots of control over what happens within the basketball environment. Regardless of what happens outside of basketball, when a young athlete is in your presence and under your supervision, you can ensure your communication is effective and safe in that moment, and this can help to overcome the barriers that are out of your control.

- Think about your **approach** – making sure your manner and approach to communication is contributing to a safe and calm environment for them, especially for those who play to escape an unsafe environment at home.
- Think about the **content** – making sure that what you are saying / writing / sharing is appropriate and clear for them to understand. Do the preparation so you are confident in the delivery and you can build trust.
- Think about the **intent** – making sure that your intention for the communication (for example why you are saying / writing / sharing) is also both appropriate and clear.

Clear and precise instructions that can be measured and followed clearly will get a better response.

“you’ve got to be tougher”, “calm down” or “you’re getting too stressed” are not helpful.

Remember – one size NEVER fits all – especially with young, developing brains!

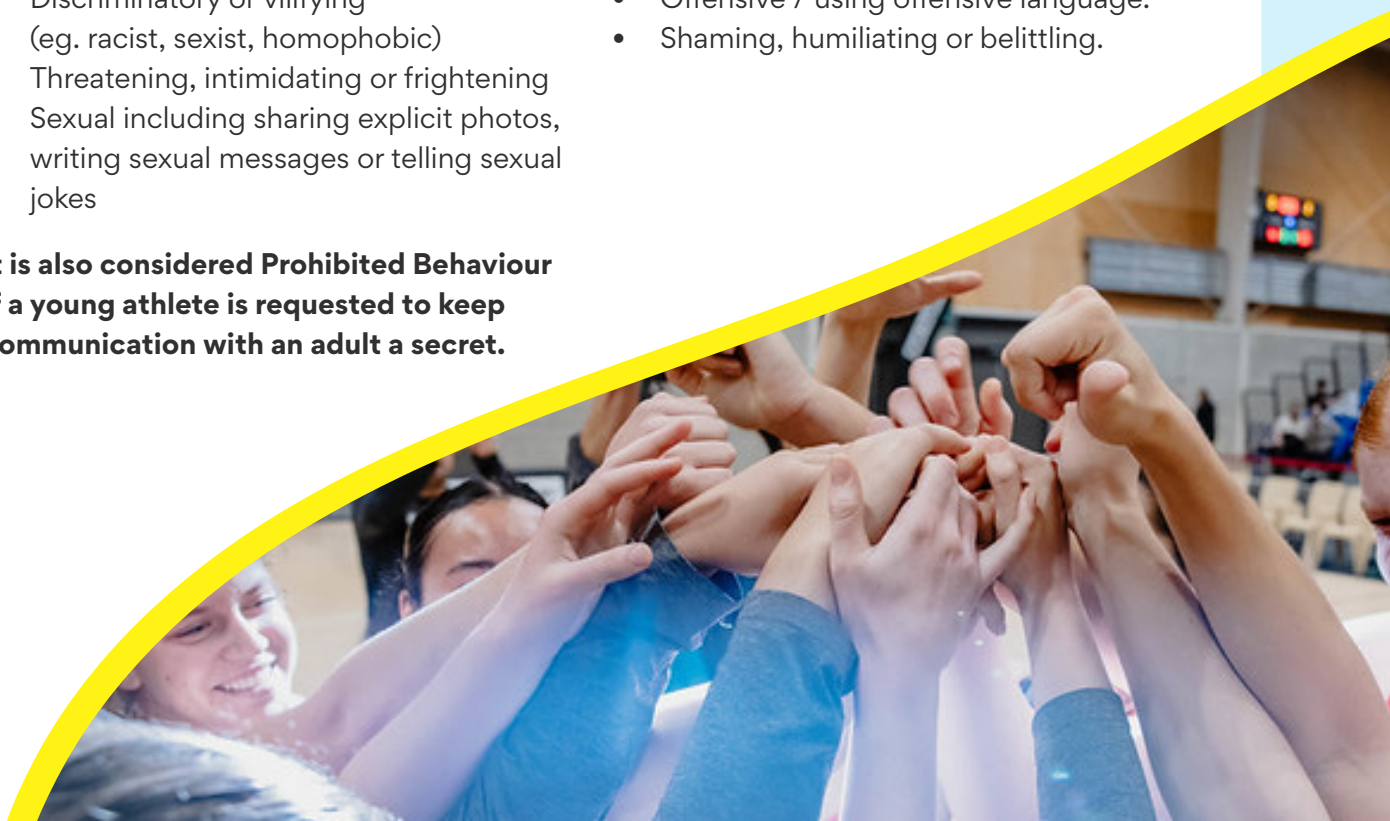
There are some types of communication that are never ok.

Some abuse of children and young people can take place through communication, in person and online.

Examples of communication that is considered abusive, or a breach of the Safe Practices and Procedures under the BBNZ Safeguarding Policy includes any communication (verbal, non-verbal, written or online) that is:

- Discriminatory or vilifying (eg. racist, sexist, homophobic)
- Threatening, intimidating or frightening
- Sexual including sharing explicit photos, writing sexual messages or telling sexual jokes
- Offensive / using offensive language.
- Shaming, humiliating or belittling.

It is also considered Prohibited Behaviour if a young athlete is requested to keep communication with an adult a secret.



Tips for safe communication with young athletes in basketball.

The table below provides some examples of WHAT, HOW, WHEN & WHERE certain types of communication are ok or not ok.

These are examples only; every individual person will adapt their communication to suit their approach to coaching and their personality.

Equally, every young athlete will interpret communication differently based on the relationship they have with the person they are communicating with, their previous experiences and their state of mind at the time.

Use this as a guide to help you reflect on whether your approach to communication, the content you are communicating and the intent of your communication is considered safe and appropriate, or whether you may not to make some changes.

It may also be helpful to discuss it with a colleague or another coach, manager or team official, or better yet! Discuss it with the young athletes you are working with. You may be surprised to see what they have to say and how much you can learn from them.

WHAT YOU SAY MATTERS	
OK SAFE & APPROPRIATE	NOT OK UNSAFE & INAPPROPRIATE
ENCOURAGING “You did a great job following through with that new technique today!”	DEROGATORY “Wow that was awful, you are as bad as your old man!”
SPECIFIC and CLEAR “Can you repeat this drill 3 times” “We will do this first before we move on to the next bit.”	SHAMING “Did everyone see what they just did? Haha, don’t copy them!” “Looks like Sam didn’t even show up today”
CONSTRUCTIVE “I can see you have been practicing your free throws. Great work. Perhaps we can tackle jump shots today. I have some ideas that may really help.”	COMPLICATED “Go and do a few laps then go straight into drill 1 and 2 then do this 5 times then run a few laps again and repeat it and then tell me three things you did wrong”
RELEVANT “How is everyone feeling? I know there was a party last night, how are your energy levels today?”	IRRELEVANT “Hey! How was the party last night? Any goss? Who made an idiot of themselves?”

HOW YOU SAY IT MATTERS	
CALMLY You need to be calm. Take a moment to regulate yourself. You will find it easier to give clear and helpful instructions if you are able to manage your own emotions.	WHEN ANGRY You are the adult. If you are angry, have raised your voice or appear frustrated you create a stressful environment, and they are unlikely to really hear what you say or take anything in.
SENSITIVELY Remember you don't know what else is going on for them. If they are stressed, they can't retain information in the same way as they can if they are feeling calm and in control.	WITHOUT EXPLANATION It is important you provide context otherwise they may not be able to connect the dots and if they can't connect the dots, nothing will change. They deserve to know why.
CONSTRUCTIVE "I can see you have been practicing your free throws. Great work. Perhaps we can tackle jump shots today. I have some ideas that may really help."	COMPLICATED "Go and do a few laps then go straight into drill 1 and 2 then do this 5 times then run a few laps again and repeat it and then tell me three things you did wrong"
RELEVANT "How is everyone feeling? I know there was a party last night, how are your energy levels today?"	IRRELEVANT "Hey! How was the party last night? Any goss? Who made an idiot of themselves?"
CONSIDERED Think about what you are going to say before you say it, especially if you are delivering disappointing news. Often, their brain shuts down when they hear "no" or 'unfortunately....' so anything you say after that might not sink in. It is a good idea to follow up with anything important at a time when they can retain it.	MAKING FUN OF THEM Jokes can be a fun way to lighten the mood, but if a young athlete feels mocked or humiliated, it can have a negative impact. It is possible that anything you say after will not sink in and trying to recall what you were explaining will only remind them of the feeling of humiliation.



WHEN AND WHERE YOU SAY IT MATTERS	
BEFORE OR AFTER A SESSION Try and give encouragement or constructive guidance at the beginning of the session, giving them a chance to improve or demonstrate the learning or at the end, as a reflection. Too much information during the training session or the game can overload them and distract them from the task. Avoid overcoaching and pick a time that they are most likely to engage.	UNSAFE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION Connecting with a young athlete on social media. Liking, sharing, or commenting on personal photos or posts from a young athlete that is not related to basketball, or if related to the basketball, without their consent and a justified reason to like/share/comment. If you are unsure if it is justified, don't. Communication that takes place outside of hours (that is not reasonable to running the team). Requesting to meet in person for reasons not related to basketball. Communicate privately with a young athlete via phone, email or social media. Use any device's (including a mobile phone's) recording capabilities, including voice recording, still cameras and video cameras in locker rooms, changing areas, or similar spaces.
IN PERSON Communicating in person allows you to emphasise your message using body language or support the message using a physical / visual demonstration. Young athletes will receive and retain information through many varying pathways so the more variety you use, the more likely they are to hear it and understand it!	
ELECTRONICALLY Some information (game times, lesson venues, etc) are best communicated in a written message (text / via an app / email) so it is accessible later. It also good to follow up on something you shared in person in writing, so they can take it away with them. Any electronic communication must be 'two deep' (include a parent, a colleague or a team official)	

Tips for talking about young athletes' bodies in basketball

Tip 1. Don't.

Tip 2. Unless! - it is directly relevant to YOUR role and THEIR ability to participate in basketball safely, with enjoyment and to the best of their ability.

You must ALWAYS take informed precautions when engaging in discussions relating to body weight, shape, size, or health with or about a young athlete of any gender.



Tips for taking photos and videos of young athletes in basketball

STRATEGY

Whenever you take or share a photo or video of a young athlete ask yourself: would I be ok with someone else taking and sharing this if it were my own child?

PHOTO AND VIDEO CHECKLIST

- Have you asked the young athlete if they are ok to have photo or video taken of them?
- Do you have consent from a parent?
- Is the context related to basketball?
- Is everyone appropriately dressed?
Is there another adult in basketball aware that photos or video are being taken?
- Is there a professional photographer taking photos?
- Do you have permission to share it publicly? From parents and from the young athlete.
- Do you have permission to share identifying information with the photo or video (name / club or association – never share personal contact details of any young athlete publicly)
- If you have taken photos or videos on your phone, have you forwarded them on to your club or association and/or stored them securely? (on a hard drive, not on your phone)
- Have you deleted all photos and video from your phone?
- Have you applied the 'my own child' rule?

