



OPERATIONAL MANUAL



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for our **kids**

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WHAT IS AFL KIDS FIRST?

Today’s parents have an important role in the delivery and support of sporting activities for their own and other children. With it comes a clear responsibility to act in a constructive and encouraging manner at all times.

Barracking and wanting your child to perform well is human nature, but it is critical that this should be done in a responsible manner, avoiding the ugly parent syndrome at all times.

The AFL invests more than \$40 million annually in strategies that support the participation of over 550,000 players throughout Australia. AFL Kids First is a program that has been designed for leagues and associations to guide parents so that both they and their children obtain the maximum benefit and enjoyment from their participation in junior programs and matches.

AFL Kids First includes recommendations for leagues, associations and their clubs to manage situations where parents become over-enthusiastic and risk having a negative impact on their children’s activities.

The basic principles of AFL Kids First are to remind parents that:

- Sport for children is a vital part of their growing up.
- Children like to win but, more importantly, they want to have fun.
- Parents need to set the right example at the sports ground, not just at home.
- Parents should be proud of their child’s efforts, irrespective of the result.
- Sport is important to children’s self-esteem.

This operational manual is designed to provide a format for leagues, associations and clubs to remind parents of these vital responsibilities and to provide recommended procedures where problems may arise. Each of these bodies will need to ensure that the procedures they adopt comply with their own constitutions and the principles of natural justice.



The AFL conducts the highest profile and most successful professional national competition in Australia. For this to continue, it requires the game to be healthy at all levels and for youngsters to aspire to play the game.

This can only occur if junior programs and matches are conducted in a positive, encouraging and fun environment. AFL Kids First provides the guidance for achieving this objective. I commend it to you.

Andrew Demetriou
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Football League



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THE OBJECTIVES OF THE AFL KIDS FIRST PROGRAM

1. Provide a formal framework in which leagues, associations and clubs can encourage constructive parent behaviour.
2. Develop parental understanding of the importance of setting the right example in junior sport.
3. Increase parent/guardian ownership in providing a quality sporting environment.
4. Promote good social behaviour in junior sport.
5. Promote appreciation and foster increased respect for the role of the umpire.
6. Promote encouragement of all children in both teams.
7. Decrease the number of conflict situations at junior matches.

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The process outlined

1 CONDUCT AN INFORMATION SESSION

An important part of the program is an information session for parents to be conducted at each club before the start of each season. The session should run for a maximum of one hour.

As with the appointment of an AFL Kids First coordinator, the information session may be conducted by an independent league official or an appointed club official. It is important the club president and senior officials are in attendance and clearly in support of the program.

COMPONENTS OF THE INFORMATION SESSION:

1. Introduction by club president strongly endorsing the program and calling for parental support.
2. Introduction of the session facilitator.
3. Detailed elaboration of each of the 10 points of the Parent Code of Conduct and the need for them to be strictly observed.
4. Distribution of the program pamphlets.
5. Outline of why children play sport:
 - To play games and have fun.
 - To mix with and socialise with their mates.
 - For the feeling of self-development and fulfilment.
 - For the challenge of the contest.
6. Explanation of the benefits of children playing sport to develop:
 - Communication and social skills.
 - Character, commitment and self-esteem.
 - Discipline and sense of achievement.
 - Sportsmanship, respect for officials and opposition players and an understanding of winning and losing.
 - Physical wellbeing and fitness.
7. Overview of the key points for reinforcement with parents:
 - Children like to win, but participation and enjoyment come first.
 - Children are not little adults; let them play their game as a positive experience that will encourage them to a life-time involvement in sport.

- Support and applaud effort, discuss the game but never criticise.
- Display self control – don't embarrass your children or yourself.
- Support umpires and encourage players to accept their decisions.
- Above all, support an atmosphere of fun and enjoyment.
- After the game, speak briefly and rationally.

8. Explanation of possible sanctions. While reinforcing that the aims of the program are raising awareness and encouragement, explain the administrative processes of the program in your league and club in match-day monitoring and dealing with any reports of unacceptable behaviour.
9. Summary of the main components of the information session, including questions and answers.
 - In addition to questions that would have been asked during the session, invite further questions and discussion in order to clear up any lingering misunderstandings.
 - Advise parents who they should contact at your club if they have any queries or wish to raise any matters during the year.
 - Provide a concise, positive overview. Call for parental support and stress that the aim of the program is to provide the best environment for their children.

2 APPOINT A COORDINATOR

The appointment and role of an AFL Kids First coordinator are critical elements of the program.

1. APPOINTMENT

Depending on availability of personnel, leagues/associations will need to decide whether to appoint independent league officials or delegate the responsibility to their affiliated clubs. The coordinator needs to meet the following profile:

 - Personal – be mature and have a high level of commonsense and an ability to identify situations without overreacting.
 - Knowledge – have an awareness of the Code of Conduct philosophy and AFL Kids First procedures.

- People skills – have good communication with adults and children, be co-operative, positive and friendly and be able to manage a variety of situations.
- Conflict resolution – be able to deal with difficult people and manage a possibly difficult situation.

2. ROLE & DUTIES

- Encouragement – at all times encourage parents and spectators to observe the Code of Conduct and display positive behaviour.
- Public relations – assume a public relations role with parents and supporters, explaining and reinforcing the philosophy of AFL Kids First and sensitively explaining the importance of parental role models.
- Observance and presence – maintain a clear but calm presence and profile at all times. Monitor and communicate with the appropriate club personnel and parents as required.
- Reports – where necessary, report serious and/or continued breaches of the Code of Conduct in accordance with the system adopted by the club and league/association.
- Meetings – attend meetings of the club and league/association executive as required in relation to reports.
- Identification – club-appointed coordinators should adopt a low profile without specific identification to avoid exacerbating already difficult situations. It may be appropriate, however, for league/association-appointed

coordinators to have an armband or some other identification, noting their appointment as an independent official.

3 EDUCATION PROCESS

Reminding and encouraging parents to support their children and team in a positive and constructive manner is the major aim of this program.

The recommended components of the parent education process are for junior leagues and associations to:

1. Issue a copy of the Code of Conduct to all parents and the prominent display of the Code at all junior football venues (e.g. an A-frame sign or fence).
2. Include players and parents' Code of Conduct on junior players' registration forms with a requirement for a parent's signature acknowledging that they have read and agree to observe the Code.
3. Distribute pamphlets and display wall posters promoting the program.
4. Determine the extent to which they can implement the recommended components of this program and to hold a Special General Meeting of their constituent clubs to explain these arrangements, before the start of each season.
5. Arrange for each of their constituent clubs to schedule an AFL Kids First information session at which the club seeks the support of parents/guardians for the program.

CLUB AWARDS

As positive reinforcement of the education process, leagues/associations may wish to consider presentation of Well Conducted Club Certificates to clubs that successfully implement the program. While specifics would be defined by the particular league/association concerned, points (out of five) could be awarded by league/association executives for:

1. Prominent display of parents' Code of Conduct.
2. Scheduling of an AFL Kids First information session.

3. Nil or low number of adverse reports against parents and club officials.
4. Compliance with various controlling body general requirements.
5. Maintaining a clean, safe venue with well-marked playing areas.

A club receiving 20 or more points could be presented with a Well Conducted Club Award by the relevant league/association.

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THE AFL ASKS PARENTS TO OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING CODE OF CONDUCT:



- 1 Remember that children play sport for their enjoyment, not yours.
- 2 Encourage children to participate – do not force participation upon them.
- 3 Focus on the child's efforts and self-esteem rather than whether they win or lose.
- 4 Encourage children to always participate according to the rules.
- 5 Never ridicule or yell at a child for making a mistake or for the team losing a game.
- 6 Remember that children learn best by example – applaud the efforts of all players in both teams.
- 7 Support all efforts to remove verbal and physical abuse from sporting activities.
- 8 Show appreciation of volunteer coaches, officials and administrators, without whom your child could not participate.
- 9 Respect umpires' decisions and teach children to do likewise.
- 10 Remember that smoking and the consumption of alcohol is unacceptable at junior sport.

CODE OF CONDUCT BREACHES

While education, encouragement and parental support will reduce infringements, it is possible that breaches of the Code of Conduct will occur from time to time.

To provide for such incidents, it is recommended that leagues/associations should adopt the following administrative procedures:

1. The appointment of an AFL Kids First coordinator, whether an independent league official or club member sanctioned by the league executive. Refer Role & Duties on page 7.
2. Where a parent or spectator's behaviour is deemed inappropriate, the coordinator should report the matter to the club executive, which should adopt an educational approach. Serious or continued breaches should be reported to the league executive.
3. Provision of a reporting process where an AFL Kids First coordinator believes that a breach of the Code warrants referral to the league executive – refer Incident Report Form on page 10.
4. Provision within the league/association regulations or by-laws for dealing with reports referred by an AFL Kids First coordinator. This should include an obligation on clubs to require parents to attend a meeting with league executives if necessary.
5. Provision within the league/association regulations or by-laws that its clubs are ultimately responsible for the actions of officials and parents.

Where an AFL Kids First coordinator has lodged a report with the league/association executive notifying a breach of the Code, the following is recommended:

1. The league executive should discuss with the coordinator.
2. The league executive should notify the club and discuss with the club president or senior official.
3. The club should discuss with the parent or supporter concerned, reminding them of their obligation to the Code of Conduct.
4. If further action is considered necessary, the parent or supporter should be required to attend a meeting of the league executive or tribunal and be subject to the disciplinary procedures of the league/association concerned.
5. Sanctions may include:
 - A formal reprimand or warning.
 - Suspension from attendance at matches.
 - A suspended match suspension.
 - Other, as deemed appropriate.

It is essential at all times that natural justice and the privacy of the individual are respected and dealt with sensitively, irrespective of the alleged breach of the Code.

All processes must be in accordance with the provisions of the league/association regulations or by-laws.

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CONTACTS

For further information regarding the AFL Kids First program, please contact your state/territory-affiliated body.

NEW SOUTH WALES/ACT

AFL NSW/ACT

PO Box 333,
Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012
Phone: (02) 8333 8000
Fax: (02) 9360 2255
Website: aflnswact.com.au
Email: info@aflnswact.com.au



TASMANIA

AFL Tasmania

PO Box 520,
North Hobart, TAS 7002
Phone: (03) 6230 1800
Fax: (03) 6234 3577
Website: footballtas.com.au
Email: admin@footballtas.com.au



NORTHERN TERRITORY

AFL Northern Territory

PO Box 43196,
Casuarina, NT 0811
Phone: (08) 8945 2224
Fax: (08) 8945 0069
Website: aflnt.com.au
Email: aflnt@aflnt.com.au



VICTORIA

AFL Victoria

GPO Box 4337,
Melbourne, VIC 3001
Phone: (03) 8663 3000
Fax: (03) 9650 4194
Website: aflvic.com.au
Email: execoffice@aflvic.com.au



QUEENSLAND

AFL Queensland

PO Box 1211,
Coorparoo, QLD 4151
Phone: (07) 3394 2433
Fax: (07) 3394 4977
Website: aflq.com.au
Email: admin@aflq.com.au



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

West Australian Football Commission

PO Box 275,
Subiaco, WA 6904
Phone: (08) 9381 5599
Fax: (08) 9388 1764
Website: wafootball.com.au
Email: kidsfirst@wafc.com.au



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australian National Football League

PO Box 1,
West Lakes, SA 5021
Phone: (08) 8424 2220
Fax: (08) 8424 2270
Website: sanfl.com.au
Email: admin@sanfl.com.au



AFL

Australian Football League

GPO Box 1449,
Melbourne, VIC 3001
Phone: (03) 9643 1999
Website: afl.com.au
Email: general@afl.com.au



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The AFL acknowledges the AFL Queensland Parents for AFL Program, upon which AFL Kids First has been based, and the Australian Sports Commission for its continued support and guidance with Codes of Conduct.



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission