



PROBITY (CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS PROTECTION) POLICY

Policy Statement

The Victorian Little Athletics Association Inc. ("VLAA") is firmly committed to a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to promote the protection of children, young persons and adults. In accordance with the Victorian Government principles for children and young person's protection, the VLAA aims to promote a safe environment for all persons, be they children, young persons or adults and to recognize and notify suspected child or young person abuse and neglect.

The VLAA is at all times committed to the belief that all people have a right to feel safe.

Acknowledgments

The VLAA would like to acknowledge and thank the following organizations for their assistance and feedback in the production of the VLAA Probity (Children and Young Persons Protection) Policy ("the Probity Policy"):

- The Department of Human Services
- The Department of Sport and Recreation
- The Victorian Police Service
- SWA Consultants
- Clayton Utz, Solicitors

The Governments Role

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

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and, thereafter, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal are responsible for the compliance mechanisms associated with equal opportunity and the prohibition of unlawful discrimination and sexual harassment.

The Victorian Police have the capacity to bring prosecutions under the criminal law in cases where children or young people may be abused, exposed to harm or ill-treatment.

All VLAA personnel, no matter whether such personnel are officers, employees, whether permanent or casual, or volunteers, and Region/Division/Centre/Club personnel have a statutory duty of care and responsibility to ensure that the safety, welfare and well being of all members, be they adult, young person or child, is maintained. Failure to notify when there are concerns about child or young person abuse and/or neglect means that the child or young person's safety needs cannot be properly addressed and they may be left vulnerable to further abuse.

VLAA Rights

The VLAA shall have the right to:

- Expect all adult members to comply with its Probity Policy
- Expect all child and young person members to keep within the bounds of accepted community standards of behaviour
- Take appropriate action if any member contravenes its Probity Policy
- Expect that adult members will not abuse other members, be they child, young person or adult, physically, emotionally or sexually
- Take appropriate action in the event of malicious accusations
- Require police checks to ascertain convictions in relevant areas
- **Require Working with Children Checks for all adult members / supervising adults**

VLAA Responsibilities

The VLAA shall be responsible for:

- Providing maximum safety to all members
- Widely promoting the Probity Policy to all members and the wider community
- Designating an Officer to co-ordinate and oversee all aspects of member protection and Codes of Conduct within the Association
- Encouraging open discussion on child and young person protection issues
- Providing support to members who report suspicions of child or young person abuse
- Treating information of suspected child or young person 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 or young person abuse and neglect, their obligations to notify suspected child or young person abuse and neglect and procedures for notification.

Code of Conduct for Adults

Adults in the VLAA shall:

- Treat all persons, irrespective of gender, age, disability, race or religious beliefs with respect and dignity.
- Demonstrate a high degree of individual responsibility, recognizing that at all times their words and actions are an example to other members of the Association.
- Not use the Association to promote their own beliefs, behaviours or practices should these not be compatible with Association policies.
- Act with consideration and good judgement in all interpersonal relationships.
- Avoid unaccompanied and unobserved activities with child or young person members, wherever possible.
- For their own protection, avoid potentially compromising situations by ensuring, where reasonably possible, that at least two adults are in attendance whilst supervising and/or accompanying child or young person members. The VLAA, also recognizes that in certain circumstances it may be necessary for an adult, whilst acting responsibly and duly exercising a "duty of care", to be alone with a child or young person member.
- Accept that bullying, abuse (whether physical or verbal), neglect or any other type of abuse is unacceptable conduct by any adult within the Association.

Adult Member Rights

Adult members of the VLAA shall have the right to:

- Ongoing training and information in all aspects of child or young person protection
- Support in the reporting of suspicions of child or young person abuse
- Access to support agencies
- Fair and equitable treatment from the Association
- Be protected from abuse by members, be they adult, child or young person

Adult Member Responsibilities

Adult members of the VLAA shall be responsible for:

- Working as a team to ensure the safety of members, be they adult, young person or child, in their care
- Using appropriate child or young person behaviour management
- Believing and responding to child or young person members' statements concerning alleged abuse
- Ensuring the rights and responsibilities of all members, be they adult, young person or child, are enforced
- Reporting suspicions of child or young person abuse to the General Manager of the Association or an Association designated Officer
- Avoiding the abuse of members, be they adult, young person or child, physically, emotionally or sexually
- Only disclosing sensitive information to appropriate authorities and/or designated Officers of the Association, on a 'need to know' basis

Officers, Staff, Manager, Coaches, Supervisors and Officials Responsibilities

Officers, Staff, Managers, Coaches, Supervisors, and Officials of the VLAA shall be responsible for:

- Observing
- Communicating and modelling expected community standards of behaviour
- Monitoring activities in their area of responsibility
- Preventing offensive, bullying or exploitative behaviour
- Intervening when offensive, bullying or exploitative behaviour happens
- Protecting vulnerable persons, be they adult, young person or child, without waiting for complaints

Children and Young Persons (Competitive) Members Rights

Competitive members of the VLAA shall have the right to:

- Be safe
- Be listened to
- Be respected
- Be protected from abuse by other members, be they adult, young person or child
- Be referred to appropriate professional help as necessary

Children and Young Persons (Competitive) Members Responsibilities

Competitive members of the VLAA shall be responsible for:

- Showing respect to other members, be they adult, young person or child
- Keeping themselves safe
- Accurately reporting inappropriate behaviour or "at risk" situations for themselves or others.
- Keeping within the bounds of general standards of community behaviour

Child and Young Person Abuse

Child and young person abuse can be any of the following:

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

The VLAA is of the belief that by taking simple preventative measures during the conduct of any Little Athletics activity the opportunity for any form of member abuse can be minimized.

Child and Young Person Abuse & Neglect Definitions

Child or young person abuse is the act by parent/guardian/carer or any other person, be they adult, young person or child, which endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development. Child or young person abuse is not necessarily a single incident; it may take place over a prolonged period and includes:

Sexual Abuse: occurs when a person older than the victim uses their power or authority over the victim to involve the victim in sexual activity which may involve physical force or some other inducement. Sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity which may include the fondling of genitals; oral sex; vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object, or exposure of the child or young person to pornographic material.

Sexual abuse can be perpetrated by males on males, females on females, males on females and females on males.

Some indicators 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

Neglect: occurs when parents/guardians/carers fail to provide the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter and supervision, to the extent that the victim's health and development are placed at risk.

Some indicators and symptoms may include:

- Poor standards of hygiene, inadequate clothing for weather conditions
- Malnutrition, complaints of hunger, hiding food
- Untreated medical or dental problems

Physical Abuse: involves any non-accidental injury to a child or young person by a parent/guardian/carer or any other person, be they adult, young person or child. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, scratches, welts, lacerations, burns, scolds or fractures.

Emotional Abuse: occurs when a child or young person is repeatedly rejected or frightened by threats. This may involve name calling, being put down, or continued coldness from a parent/guardian/carer to the extent that it effects the victim's physical and emotional growth and development.

Some indicators 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

Recognition of Abuse or Neglect

When considering the likelihood that an injury, behaviour or disclosure of a child or young person 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 or young person 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 or young person, 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 or young person's physical appearance or condition, their behaviour or family circumstances may arouse suspicion
- Observations in the interactions between an adult (parent/guardian/carer or other adult) and a child or young person may raise concerns
- Observations in the interactions between two children or young persons 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 or young person 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 General Manager.

Listen & Clarify

If a child or young person tells you about abuse listen attentively and later record the child or young person'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 or young person for further details or ask questions as this may lead to contamination of evidence

As the child or young person talks to you:

- Observe the demeanour of the child or young person
- React calmly to the information the child or young person provides
- Listen actively and be non-judgmental
- Do not ask leading questions, for example, "*did they/she/he/you ... do this or that etc*"
- Reassure the child or young person 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 or young person, recognise that they may be fearful about the consequences of their action and confused about the situation
- Reassure the child or young person that this is not their fault and they have not done anything wrong
- Not confront the parents/guardians/carers or other family members

Child & Young Person Abuse Notification Procedures

Verbal notification must be made to the General Manager on **9676-3600** or **0410 511 848**

The following information is to be reported:

- Name and description of child or young person.
- Address or descriptions of his/her whereabouts.
- When child or young person 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 Ethnic group agency should be involved.
- All available information relevant for safety and welfare of child or young person.
- Details of events, conversations or observations, which led to the report.
- Your contact name and phone number.

Guide to Protective Practices

All VLAA personnel, no matter whether such personnel are officers, employees, whether permanent or casual, or volunteers and Region/Division/Centre/Club personnel are encouraged to adopt protective practices to maximise their protection from a misconstrued act. The following is only a guide and Region/Division/Centre personnel should initiate protective measures they deem warranted to suit their situation, eg, a Region/Division/Centre conducting competition at night may feel it necessary to implement more stringent measures or a Region/Division/Centre with an enclosed ground may utilise a gate attendant.

- No athlete up to the U10 age group be permitted to leave the venue without a parent/guardian/carer.
- Incorporate a 'buddy' system when athletes require to leave the competition area (eg, go to the toilet).
- Enforce the parent/guardian/carer be present at the ground at all times, emphasising during the registration process the Association policy on child and young person 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/carer 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 or young person abuse issues.
- Do not let children or young persons 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 may not fit into the definition of "sexual abuse", but is certainly within the realms of "sexual harassment". 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 person's body, be it adult, young person or child.
- Requests/demands for sexual activity.
- General inappropriate behaviour when children or young persons are present. **NOTE:** Improper conduct may be unintentional, i.e., an individual may not be aware that such behaviour or action 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 Association's General Manager immediately.

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 Association 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 Association office.

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

Policy Guidelines for VLAA Appointments

Coaching Personnel

All personnel involved in the conduct of VLAA coaching clinics or camps, no matter whether such personnel are officers, employees, whether permanent or casual, or volunteers, must supply, at the time of application on the VLAA Registration Form, at least two referees. All personnel shall also be required to sign the appropriate "code of conduct" acknowledgment, and undergo a Working with Children check.

Managers of Representative Team(s)

All personnel involved in positions of managing VLAA representative teams, no matter whether such personnel are officers, employees, whether permanent or casual, or volunteers, must supply, at the time of application on the VLAA Registration Form at least two referees. All personnel shall also be required to sign the appropriate "code of conduct" acknowledgment, and undergo a Working with Children check.

Overnight Supervisory Roles

All personnel involved in overnight supervision including billeting families/individuals and camp "parents", no matter whether such personnel are officers, employees, whether permanent or casual, or volunteers, must supply, at the time of application on the VLAA Registration Form at least two referees. All personnel shall also be required to sign the appropriate "code of conduct" acknowledgment, and undergo a Working with Children check.

Financial Roles

All personnel involved in financial roles at Association, Region, Centre or Club level, may be required to supply, at the time of appointment/election at least two referees and agree to the conduct of a police search for any convictions, charges laid or current investigations, by signing the VLAA Authorisation Release Form.

NOTE: At all times the results of any such checks shall remain confidential.

Any person with prior convictions relating to child or young person abuse shall not be permitted to fill any VLAA positions.

