

Communicating with QAS Supported Athletes

Communicating in person

When communicating with QAS supported athletes it is important to remember that what you say and how you say it, matters.

Appropriate Communication includes:

- ✓ Using tone and language that is:
 - calm and constructive
 - simple and clear
 - empowering and encouraging
 - highlights strengths.

Inappropriate Communication includes:

- ✗ derogatory language, including in reference to an athlete's physical appearance, body shape or size
- ✗ discriminatory, racist, or sexist comments
- ✗ language that is belittling, negative, threatening or intimidating
- ✗ any language or comment that is sexual in nature.

DEFINITIONS

-  **Child:** a person under the age of 12
-  **Young Person:** a person aged between 13-18
-  **Athlete:** any QAS supported athlete (any age / any category)
-  **Safeguarding:** having active measures in place to *prevent* institutional harm and abuse of athletes and *respond* to any safety concerns, disclosures, allegations or suspicions of harm and abuse of any athlete.
-  **QAS Staff or Contractor:** any person engaged by the QAS

Communicating online

Online communication with QAS supported athletes has both benefits and risks. Benefits can include the ability to easily contact athletes and staff, utilising platforms that can be accessible by young athletes / athletes, easy communication when travelling, and the ability for QAS staff and contractors to send notes and programs from sessions with athletes. Risks of online communication can however include information being misinterpreted, lack of boundaries around when staff and athletes communicate eg. time of day, frequency, and information becoming personal.

Safe Online Communication includes:

- ✓ where possible, always including a coach, QAS colleague, parent/carer or at least one other adult in group communication
- ✓ using clear language that is difficult to misinterpret, remembering it is how the message is 'heard' that matters.
- ✓ keeping content professional and avoiding sharing personal information
- ✓ communicating inside of the hours reasonable to the service and your role (eg. Business hours).



Unsafe Online Communication includes:

- ❌ liking, sharing, or commenting on personal photos or posts from an athlete that are not related to their sport, or if related to the sport, without their consent and a justified reason to like/share/comment. If you are unsure, don't like, share, or comment
- ❌ requesting to meet in person for reasons not related to treatments, consultations or training sessions
- ❌ asking the athlete to keep secrets, including in relation to communication.



Safe use of Social Media includes:

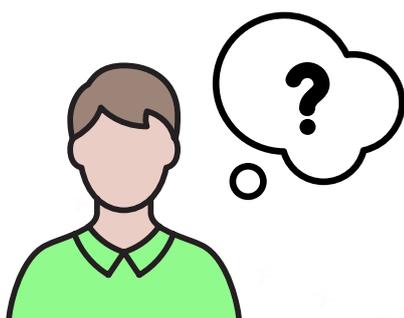
- ✔ limiting contact to sport related content such as sharing information about athletes
- ✔ avoiding connecting with athletes on online social media platforms through personal profiles
- ✔ allowing athletes to navigate their online world without judgement, prejudice or unsolicited comments from staff or contractors
- ✔ reporting or addressing any online abuse or harassment that you may observe when it involves athletes through the academy and/or parents
- ✔ checking in on an athlete's wellbeing if you have any reason to suspect that they are experiencing abuse or harassment online
- ✔ always seeking permission to share or upload video or photos of an athlete, from them and/or their families.

Communicating with purpose

When communicating with QAS supported athletes, consider the **intent** and **content** and how it will be received.

INTENT

- What are my intentions?
- Are they appropriate?
- Can I justify contacting someone?
- Is it necessary?
- Would another adult have any reason to question my intentions?



CONTENT

- Is the content of my communication relevant to the athletes' sport?
- Is it personal?
- Would I be comfortable if their parents read this?
- Would I be happy to read this if it were between my own child and a QAS support staff?



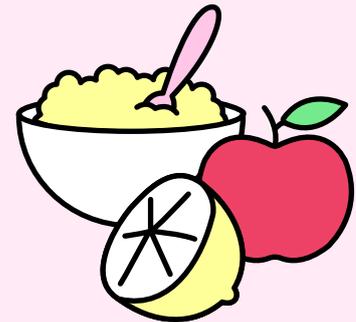
How do I safely talk to young athletes about their physical health and bodies?

Communication and the language used to discuss body image and varying physiques relating to body weight, shape or size with QAS supported athletes is important to think about as a QAS staff or contractor.

Gymnastics Australia have created a Body Care Framework and Values. Even though these are specific to gymnastics, these can be applied across all sports.

BODY CARE VALUES

1. Everybody is unique
2. Our bodies deserve to experience the joy of movement
3. Our bodies deserve nourishment and nurturing
4. Our bodies change and develop as a part of growing up
5. Our bodies hear what we think and say.



www.gymnastics.org.au/Ga/Child_Safety/Body_Care.aspx

Recognising abusive communication

QAS supported athletes can experience abuse via verbal and non-verbal communication with a QAS staff or contractor, an external person (e.g. NSO or Club), a family member, or another athlete. Watch out for signs of:

- Inappropriate language
- Body shaming
- Sharing of explicit photos
- Racist or discriminative comments

STRATEGIES

It is good practice to introduce a secure app or program to facilitate communication where possible. Remember, parents and carers should be included in all communications with athletes under 18, where possible. Stick to mainstream apps like TeamApp where your communication can be intercepted if necessary. Remember, transparency is everything.

