

Expert comment on keeping children safe in community sport

Leading child protection expert Professor Daryl Higgins is available for expert comment on how to keep children safe in community sport.

Professor Higgins, Director of the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) at the Australian Catholic University, has been instrumental in supporting the development of safeguarding strategies for sporting organisations.

He can talk about how parents and community sporting organisations can keep children and young people safe and offer detailed strategies that can strengthen a culture of child safety in sporting organisations - from grassroots clubs to elite sports.

Sexual abuse in sporting codes has come under the media spotlight following revelations about the sexual abuse of young athletes by their coaches in the US and UK.

“Leaders within an organisation like a sports club have the most capacity to bring about change in order to improve the vulnerability of a potential victim,” Professor Higgins said.

An ICPS large-scale study for the Royal Commission found that 16 per cent of females, and six per cent of males reported experiencing abuse in sports participation.

The end of the lockdown in Melbourne and return to community sport has added a new layer of child safety concerns.

“Vulnerable young people, and their families, put their faith and trust in sporting coaches in the quest for sporting glory,” he said.

“Children may be more vulnerable because of the lockdown. They may have been in family environments that are less than ideal, characterised by family violence or the use of physical punishment. They could be subject to abuse in other institutions as well and so we know that coming back to sport there may be an increased vulnerability.”

Professor Higgins can talk about:

- The importance of training adults involved in sports – particularly volunteers on what is not appropriate
- Ensuring young athletes and players are aware of their rights and processes to keep them safe
- How to report concerns, identify risk, and promote intervention and
- How community sport clubs can improve approaches to prevention and develop a child-safe action plan as well as tips for engaging and empowering children.

“There has been a lot of progress in helping ensure sport is a safe place for children and young people,” Professor Higgins said.

“National, state and local clubs have put in place policies and programs to protect children and young people on the back of Royal Commission recommendations and National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.”

Professor Higgins, who has researched child abuse impacts and prevention, family violence and family functioning for more than 25 years, is available for interview.

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