



CLUB COMMUNICATION TIPS

The following information is taken from the [Play by the Rules](http://www.playbytherules.net.au) website.

Play by the Rules is all about fair, safe and inclusive sport and recreation. Many clubs have great practises in this area, with good leadership, policies and programs in place. But do you tell your members about it?

Clubs need to communicate in a simple way and often. Good communication can help create a welcoming club and positive culture, where members are informed, understand club values and expected behaviour and everyone feels safe, treated fairly and included.

A common mistake is to wait until something goes wrong and then react. For example, there is an incident of poor sideline behaviour on game day. You follow that up with an email to members about poor behaviour and codes of conduct. Planned and proactive communication is key, here are some tips on getting started:

TIP #1: BRING POLICIES TO LIFE

Policies, codes and procedures are important – but notoriously not understood and hardly read. Simply providing a copy to members is not enough. You need to bring them to life.

Take Codes of Conduct. You can give all members a copy at the start of the season – even ask them to sign it. Will that bring about the conduct and behaviour you'd like at the club? Probably not. Think outside the square, break the codes down and make them relevant.

For example, single out one code such as “Show respect and courtesy to all involved with our club” and bring it to life by:

- Posting to your club Instagram page of one of your teams shaking the hands of opponents. *Caption it: Post match handshakes. Showing respect and courtesy to everyone is one of our clubs most important Codes of Conduct #upholdourcodes*
- Profiling the code in your weekly newsletter and put an example of it in practise: *This week's Code of Conduct: Show respect and courtesy to all involved in our sport – pictured is the u14s thanking our hard working officials, who gave up their weekend to run our carnival*

Repeat this week in and week out for each of the codes. Do this all season, and you will go a long way to bringing policy to life and building better meaning and understanding.

TIP #2 – LISTEN AND GET INFORMED

Listen to members and get informed on the state of play at your club when it comes to safe, fair and inclusive sport:

- Talk to volunteers and listen carefully at meetings. Pick up on what people are regularly identify as issues. For example, volunteers might say “I've spent hours and hours talking to unhappy parents and players after team selections. It takes up so much time.” This signals an issue that might need better communication
- Talk to members, informally or maybe you have an end of season survey, where you can learn more
- Talk to children and young people. How do they feel about fairness and safety at your club?
- Review any complaints from last season

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Try to understand some of the positives and areas for improvement. Maybe it will be team selections, sideline behaviour, lack of respect for officials, issues on social media or minor complaints that get out of hand. Don't assume you know, spend some time getting to the heart of any issues.

TIP #3 – THINK ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE

To communicate effectively, think about the different groups of members within your club. This might be potential, new or existing members or players, coaches, officials, parents or spectators.

Consider potential members and new members for example. Potential members need clear, easy to access information on your website and make sure you are creating the right impression. For example, your Facebook page full of posts about game results doesn't say much. Regular posts acknowledging good sportsmanship and how your club values its officials paints a different picture of club culture and values.

With new members, don't miss the chance to welcome and engage them. Develop communications to discuss club values, codes of conduct, member and child protection, how to raise concerns and other topics. This could be via a welcome handbook or email, or an information session at the start of the season.

When it comes to important topics, it also pays to target groups. Consider codes of conduct again. It's important everyone is aware of them at your club. While you could just hand them out, tailoring communication will work better. For example, young players will need a chat at the beginning of season to explain the codes in a child-friendly way, adult players may need to sign codes at rego and be reminded of them in newsletters and coaches may be briefed at ongoing coaching meetings, to both adhere to the codes themselves and educate players. Targeting communication will get your message through more effectively.

TIP #4: FOCUS ON A FEW KEY MESSAGES EACH SEASON

Focussing on a few key safe, fair and inclusive messages each season is a great idea.

For example:

- Lack of respect for officials is a concern at your club – try reinforcing a message of “Respect our Officials” for the season. Use the words over and over, profiling officials on your website, in emails and on social media. Use the hashtags #respectofficials repeatedly. Perhaps have some banners made up for grounds/venues
- Members aren't clear how to raise concerns – focus on a “We Listen to You” message for the season and make sure key club contacts for complaints and issues are clearly listed (eg. clubhouse, website, emails)..
- Social media is being used by members to often for unsporting behaviour – try “We are good sports on and off the field” throughout the season, making sure members understand codes of conduct aren't just for what happens 'on field'

Alternatively, focus on a known 'problem' area. Grading and team selections is a good example. It often causes complaints and takes up a lot of time. The key is getting on the front foot – draft and distribute selection guidelines to members well before trials. Brief members in person before trials and provide updates throughout.

For many clubs, selections is a big job, not a perfect science and most likely to disappoint some. Tell your members exactly this. Outline the realities in a positive way. Don't just react to the flack afterwards

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TIP #5: USE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS WISELY

Make use of all the communications channels you have.

They could include:

- E-communication: website, newsletter, email, SMS, Apps, online rego and social media
- Printed material – newsletter, annual report, pre-season pack or induction kits
- Face to face - meetings (eg. pre-season, coaching) info sessions, rego days, grading days or event days
- Physical environments - facility noticeboards, audio system at venue
- Formal - committee meetings, circulars, memos

And use your communication channels wisely. Used thoughtfully you can send positive messages and really influence club culture. Consider these examples.

A club Facebook post that says:

“u9’s and over35s are on canteen this weekend. Check roster for details”

OR

“Respect in action – u12’s showing their support to new umpire Casey, officiating her very first match” (picture of u12 team with the new umpire)

A club Instagram post that pictures:

Image of a team post-match, captioned “u12s undefeated so far this year. Well done guys”

OR

Image of u12 players laughing and embracing, captioned “Friendships and fun – the best part of our club”

A final word of advice - get some help to do all of this. Like you need a treasurer to manage club finances, and a qualified coach to be your head coach – think about finding a suitable volunteer to lead and manage club communications. This will prevent it being an after-thought, but rather proactive and planned and help you achieve a safe, fair and inclusive club.

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