

Referees are often at the forefront of handling aggression in sport, how do we prepare them? In our previous article, we discussed the hostility and aggression in sporting leagues that is resulting in decreased retention of umpires, officials and volunteers across the country. Preparing sports officials with adequate training to deal with the mental strain of their job and combat any poor behaviour is crucial.

If your club's officials are properly prepared to deal with aggression, it can have a flow on effect to players, staff and supporters.

There are some important considerations for all officials involved in sport to minimise aggression and understand how best to deal with it. These are:

1. Have a thorough knowledge of the rules of the game
2. Encourage fair play
3. Have a code of conduct
4. Clearly communicate

### **Have a thorough knowledge of the rules of the game**

The first of these points may seem self explanatory but volunteers and referees often get thrown into their positions without adequate training. This was touched on briefly in our previous article, it's common for clubs who are short on volunteers to get parents to help out on game day. Putting in place a volunteer roster can provide more structure and make sure all people are sufficiently trained in their roles.

It is the officials job to ensure the game is played according to the rules and to regulate that. If the referee has a sound understanding of the rules, they can properly justify their decisions and maximise the enjoyment of the game for both sides.

If parents who are scheduled to referee or officiate games don't understand their role, encourage them to arrange a time with a club member or come along to the game early to make sure they have the minimum understanding required. The club can also hold training days and social events where parents have the opportunity to make sure their skills are up to speed in a less pressured environment.

### **Encourage Fair Play**

The next step to minimising aggression in sport is to encourage fair play. Referees and officials should always be trained to be fair and consistent in their decisions. For children, sport is often a massive learning opportunity. An official is in the prime position during a game to reinforce good behaviour and sportsmanship, instilling what is and isn't appropriate in sport.

Encouraging and rewarding positive behaviour by acknowledging it during the game and afterwards can improve the overall atmosphere on game day and break down hostile environments.

### **Have a Code of Conduct**

Most clubs or leagues will have a code of conduct, making sure that all players, staff and supporters have access to this document is important. By having a code, it sets a guide for how incidents should be handled and also provides details on what is, and isn't, appropriate during a sporting match.

This code can also outline the repercussions of different inappropriate behaviours so each instance is handled fairly and reasonably.

Clearly Communicate

When things get heated in a game, being able to properly communicate with players, coaches and other staff is a vital skill for a referee to have. Many parents and supporters hold a passion for the game that can often cloud the enjoyment of players and children. Clearly express your decisions and provide any necessary rationale if questioned.

Try to always respond calmly and take the heat away from conversations. By maintaining a calm and controlled way of responding to staff, supporters and players, referees are often able to reduce the aggression in communications. By reducing the hostility and tension, referees will gain the support and cooperation of those involved in sport and improve the way incidents are handled.

If the above steps are followed by referees and officials in sport, the tense atmosphere that often surrounds grassroots sport can be broken down. Respect will be improved between everyone involved in sport and incidents will be handled appropriately. Are your clubs referees properly prepared to deal with aggression?