



Gymnastics
Australia

Gymnastics Australia
Body Positive Guidelines



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Body Positive Guidelines

The following guidelines have been developed and endorsed by Gymnastics Australia in consultation with Fiona Sutherland, APD, Sports Dietitian; and Director, the Mindful Dietitian and Body Positive Australia.

All gymnasts, coaches, families, judges and support staff should have a training and work environment where all bodies are spoken to, spoken about and treated with care and respect. The language we use about and towards our body, and the bodies of others can have a significant impact on self-esteem, performance and quality of life in both the short and long term.

These guidelines aim to set clear boundaries on what is acceptable language and behaviour for coaches, parents, judges, support staff and administrative staff when working with gymnasts of all ages, genders and training levels. These boundaries apply to environments that are inclusive of, but not limited to, the daily training environment, National Training Camps, team travel and whilst at competitions. These guidelines are an important tool to facilitate the creation of positive, inclusive and respectful environments for all gymnasts.

The aim of these guidelines is to address the risks of developing poor body image, disordered eating, eating disorders and mental health issues during a gymnast's time participating in gymnastics and in the years following their involvement in gymnastics. Encouragement for all gymnastics programs to involve a Sports Dietitian within their program to lead and educate their community on appropriate nutrition, planning and management around this subject is also a focus of the guidelines. Gymnastics Australia (GA) recognises that shifting the mindset and language of individuals can be challenging. It is common to face resistance when staff and stakeholders are asked to consider a new or different approach, particularly in communicating with others. GA is committed to further understanding and implementing practices that can improve training and competition environments for athletes of all ages and skill levels. Maintaining wellbeing, optimising performance and minimising harm to all gymnasts, staff and the organisation are at the core of these guidelines and any further work in Body Positive.

GA will continue to provide leadership, education and training for all members of our community, in an effort to align our values and principles with optimal care of our members.

The Guidelines have also been reviewed by a sub-group of Sports Dietitians, Psychologists, high-performance gymnastics coaches, GA's Athlete Commission and GA's Child Safe Manager.



Recommendation One

Communication and Language

All bodies are to be addressed with respect, care, and harmful language is to be avoided.

1. Every reasonable effort must be made to avoid directly critiquing or commenting on the physical form, shape, size or weight of a gymnast, regardless of whether it is believed to be "true" or "helpful." Consider ways you can communicate more functional, or supportive messages which encourage all gymnasts to care for and listen to their body.
2. The words "fat", "overweight", "large", "heavy", "skinny" or "stick-thin", can be hurtful and are not to be used to describe a gymnast's body. These terms are not to be used to communicate directly to the athlete, in front of the athlete, or about the athlete to others.
3. Both praise and criticism for body appearance, shape, size or weight may be harmful. Avoid commenting on bodies, and instead praise skill, function, effort, perseverance or other attributes that are not appearance-based.
4. Conversations about gymnasts' bodies (regardless of whether this is praise or criticism) in front of other gymnasts, are to be avoided. Comparisons are not constructive and can be harmful to the gymnasts in question as well as to any other gymnasts who hear the conversation.
5. Avoid conversations with coaches or staff about bodies or eating habits of gymnasts or staff, in front of others. These conversations, if necessary for performance and/or wellbeing, should be kept private.
6. Please consider that the delivery of a comment/message may be received differently to how it is intended. We request that individuals be thoughtful and considerate of the personal circumstances, characteristics and experiences of each individual, which may influence their ability to understand the intent of the message.
7. It is acknowledged that performance may be affected by changes in body shape, regardless of how this happens (eg. Puberty, illness, injury, etc) – a gymnast may experience reduction or change in power, strength, agility, rotation and other aspects of gymnastics performance. The responses of coaches and support networks are crucial in supporting gymnasts to navigate through body changes. It is recommended that education about this being a normal result of body changes is had well before pubertal/maximal growth years, with coaches, gymnasts and families.



Recommendation Two

Food, Eating and Nutrition

Conversations about food and eating should be kept to a reasonable minimum.

1. Comments regarding food intake (i.e. quantity or quality of food) should be minimised or avoided by coaches and staff members who do not have specific training or qualifications in nutrition. It is recommended that these conversations are conducted by a qualified dietitian who works closely with the club/organisation, gymnast and family.
2. Any nutrition information being communicated by an organisation/club (either written or verbal) must be evidence based and sourced from reputable organisations such as the Australian Institute of Sport, State Sporting Institutes, or Sports Dietitians Australia (www.sportsdietitians.com.au).
3. Any conversations or questions about supplementation including vitamins, minerals, powders, drinks or any non-whole food items should be directed to a sports dietitian or medical specialist. Do not discuss or promote supplements of any description to gymnasts.

Nutrition education and advice should only be delivered by an experienced sports dietitian.

4. If you would like to provide your gymnasts and/or gymnast families with evidence-based, age-appropriate nutrition education, it is recommended you seek the services of a qualified sports dietitian (see www.sportsdietitians.com.au).



Recommendation Three

Body Composition Assessment

Body Composition Assessment:

Body Composition assessments (which may include height, weight and skinfold measurements) should only be conducted by an experienced and certified anthropometrist. This testing should only be conducted after delivery of adequate education, and written consent has been received from the gymnast and a parent/guardian (for athletes under the age of 18.)

The purpose of assessing physique in gymnasts is to ensure gymnasts are maintaining an optimum performance physique throughout their athlete lifecycle. An optimum performance physique is not static, rather it should evolve and change depending on the gymnast's age (chronological and developmental), performance goals, skill level, and technical proficiency. Assessing the physique of gymnasts includes monitoring height, weight, skinfolds and girths. Such measurements can be used to track growth, development and help achieve optimal performance. This document outlines the guidelines for assessing physique, including who, what and when.

1. Consent for body composition assessment is essential. Both gymnast and a parent/guardian must provide written consent for any gymnast under the age of 18. Only the gymnast must provide consent if they are 18 or over. Consent forms must be kept confidentially in a secure, locked location as per Gymnastics Australia's Privacy Policy. See examples of consent forms in Appendices A, B and C.
2. It is recommended gymnasts must be a minimum age to commence physique assessments:
 - a. Height & Weight – Age 10 and above
 - b. Skinfolds & girth measurements – Age 12 and above
3. The following frequency for physique assessment is recommended:
 - a. Age 10-12 - Height & weight only, no more than quarterly (every 3 months)
 - b. Age 12-14 – All measures – no more than once per month
 - c. Age 14 and above – All measures – no more than once per month



Recommendation Three

Body Composition Assessment

Body Composition Assessment continued.

4. Prior to any body composition assessments, an information session is to be held with gymnasts and parents (if gymnasts are under 18) to provide a full explanation of the process, and to seek adequate informed consent.
5. All weight, height, skinfold measurements and physique assessments should be conducted by an experienced and trained anthropometrist.
6. All body composition assessment results are to be kept in a secure and locked location as per Gymnastics Australia's Privacy Policy.
7. Body composition assessment results should only be shared with or between the athlete's personal coach/s if consent from both gymnast and parent (if under 18) is given. Consent must be sought for every new communication which varies from the consent given. e.g. If results are being requested by another health professional.
8. Gymnasts should be measured in a private environment, with suitable supervision and same gender anthropometrist provided where necessary.
9. Physique assessment should be done on all gymnasts in a given squad, not select individuals. However, timing may be individualised to suit individualised performance plans and variations in biological processes known to impact the above measure.



Examples

Examples of how these guidelines may apply to the gymnastics environment:

1. To support the guidelines around tracking growth & body composition, you may change the language to, "we are tracking growth & body composition to make sure you are growing properly, maximising performance outcomes and reducing the risk of injury".
2. It is still important for coaches to be able to discuss the dynamics of a gymnast's body in regard to completing their skills and routines, however, it is crucial this is worded in the correct way. For example, instead of saying "the reason you were not able to complete your Vault is because you are too heavy." Consider changing the language and conversation to "we need to make sure you are physically fit and strong enough to complete your routines confidently and safely."
3. Your gymnast is performing a skill on the beam and you would like to provide feedback on landing technique. Instead of using the words "heavy" to describe the landing, consider other effective coaching techniques eg. adjustment to body positioning, talk about additional strength development drills that need to be added to their program to assist making the landing easier.
4. Your gymnast appears to be frustrated about lack of skill development and you have noticed some puberty-related body shape changes recently. It may be tempting to consider that the lack of skill development is related to body changes, (which may or may not be the case), and to give the gymnast some feedback about this change. Instead, aim to consider the common body image difficulties that gymnasts may have already when facing normal pubertal body changes. Try to stay positive, supportive & accepting as the gymnast navigates this period of time. Encourage them to see a sports dietitian and possibly involve a strength and conditioning coach to assist with these changes in the body.
5. Instead of saying a gymnast looks "light," or "lean" or "cut" or "shredded," choose another way to praise your gymnast. For example, looks "strong" or an attribute such as "you're looking more confident with that skill at the moment, well done."



Key Recommendations

It is recommended that these Body Positive Guidelines are presented to all gymnasts, coaches, judges, staff, committee members, key stakeholders and families within all Gymnastics Australia's member clubs and associations. These guidelines should be positioned as a priority within the management plan of these organisations.

It is expected that all Gymnastics Australia and State Association staff as well as all clubs make every reasonable effort to align their culture, programs and behaviours with the recommendations contained in these Body Positive Guidelines. This is critical to ensure that the sport of gymnastics offers a safe and positive environment for all participants in order to have a positive experience and to reach their potential.

It is recommended that, wherever possible, and in particular if your program intends to run a High-Performance program, that experienced health professionals (e.g. sports doctor, sports dietitian, sports psychologist) are involved in programs to support the delivery of the Body Positive message, by leading the implementation of an education program for gymnasts, coaches and support personnel and by conducting any required body composition assessments.

If you feel the above Guidelines are not being followed, please contact your program's management, State Associations Member Protection Officer, Gymnastics Australia's Member Protection Officer or Gymnastics Australia's Child Safe Manager.

The Body Positive Guidelines have been developed by Gymnastics Australia in consultation with Fiona Sutherland, APD, Sports Dietitian; and Director, The Mindful Dietitian and Body Positive Australia



Guidelines

Appendix A

Consent Form – Physique Assessment

I, _____ (Full name of parent/guardian if gymnast is under 18, name of gymnast if over 18), acknowledge and agree that:

- a. I have been provided with a copy of the document 'Body Positive Guidelines, which describe physique assessment recommendations. I have read and understood that document;
- b. An appropriate staff member has explained to me in detail the nature of the assessment and I understood their explanation; and
- c. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions, and have received a satisfactory response, about the nature, associated risks and discomforts of each assessment.

I agree that I will:

- a. Present my child (present myself if over 18), for the assessment in a suitable condition and wearing appropriate clothing.
- b. Advise the staff conducting the assessment of: any illness, injury or other physical, mental or medical condition my child/I has/have, that may increase the risk of undertaking the assessment; or if I feel that they/I cannot complete the assessment safely for any other reason.

I understand that my child's/my participation in the assessment is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent freely and without prejudice (e.g. without limiting future assessment opportunities) at any time before or during the assessment.

I understand that the information obtained during the assessment will be treated confidentially, respecting my child's/my right of privacy. However, I consent to the information being shared as part of a wider performance assessment with my personal coach/s, and parents.

Signature of Athlete:.....
 Parent/Guardian name (if athlete is under over 18).....
 Parent/Guardian signature (if athlete is under over 18).....
 Date:/...../.....

Developed by Gymnastics Australia Dietitians Group



Appendix B

Consent Form - Weights and Heights

a. I,(Full name of parent/guardian if athlete is under 18) consent for the measurement of weight and height to be completed on my child.
..... (Name of gymnast)

b. Consent for the measurement of my weight and height to be completed (If gymnast is over 18)
.....(Name of gymnast)

I understand the following (please tick to indicate understanding):

- the process of taking weight and height (how, when and why it will be done)
- the benefits and risks to my child/myself
- how this information will be taken, stored and used both now and in the future
- that I will be informed if/when there are any changes to this process
- that I will be informed if there are any concerns, or queries at any time
- I understand that I can withdraw this consent at any time

Signed:
(Parent/guardian if gymnast is under 18, gymnast to sign if over 18)

Date:

Developed by Gymnastics Australia Dietitians Group



Appendix C

Consent Form - Skinfolding

I, _____ (Full name of parent/guardian if athlete is under 18, gymnast name if over 18)

Consent for the measurement of skinfolding to be completed:
_____ (Name of gymnast)

I understand that skinfolds will be taken in the following manner (to be completed by qualified Anthropometrist completing the measurements);

Frequency:

Location:

Anthropometrist(s):

I understand the following (please tick to indicate understanding):

- the process of skinfolding (how, when and why it will be done)
- the benefits and risks involved
- how this information will be taken, stored and used both now and in the future
- that I will be informed if/when there are any changes to this process
- that I will be informed if there are any concerns, or queries at any time

I understand that I can withdraw this consent at any time.

Signed: _____
(parent/guardian if athlete is under 18, gymnast if over 18)

Date: _____

Developed by Gymnastics Australia Dietitians Group