

Creating a Welcoming Club Environment.



A positive club environment plays an important role in the player experience. Players are more likely to enjoy their participation and remain involved when they feel welcomed, included, connected and valued.

Creating a welcoming environment isn't just about what happens on game day. It is shaped by the way players are welcomed, how teams interact, the behaviour that is encouraged, how the club communicates and the opportunities people have to build connections.

Every club can take practical steps to create an environment where people feel they belong and want to be part of the club.

WHAT DOES A WELCOMING CLUB LOOK LIKE?

A welcoming club is one where:

- New players and families are welcomed and supported
- Players feel comfortable being themselves
- People are treated with respect
- Positive behaviour is expected and encouraged
- Players feel connected to their teammates and the wider club
- Everyone has opportunities to participate and contribute
- Communication is clear, respectful and inclusive
- Concerns can be raised safely and taken seriously
- Players feel valued for more than their performance on court

Ask your Club: Would a new player know that they belong here from their first day?

1. WELCOME NEW PLAYERS

The first few weeks can shape how a player feels about their new club.

Practical Ideas:

- Contact new players before their first training session
- Provide clear information about where to go, what to bring and what to expect
- Introduce new players to their coach, teammates and key club contacts
- Check in with new players after their first few sessions
- Make sure new families understand how they can get involved

Try this: Create a simple "Welcome to Our Club" process that every new player experiences.

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2. BUILD CONNECTION AND FRIENDSHIPS

For many players, relationships and friendships are an important part of their netball experience.

Practical Ideas:

- Create opportunities for teams to socialise
- Organise club-wide activities that bring different teams together
- Encourage players to support other teams
- Connect younger and older players through mentoring or club activities
- Celebrate team and club achievements together
- Make it easy for new players to build connections

Ask: Are we creating opportunities for players to make friends, not just play netball?

3. CREATE POSITIVE TEAM CULTURES

A player's experience can be strongly influenced by the environment within their team.

Coaches and team leaders can:

- Set clear expectations for respectful behaviour
- Encourage teammates to support each other
- Celebrate effort, improvement and teamwork
- Address negative or exclusionary behaviour early
- Make sure all players have opportunities to contribute
- Avoid behaviours that create cliques or leave players feeling excluded

Remember: A strong team culture is one where players feel safe, supported and part of the group.

4. MAKE EVERYONE FEEL INCLUDED

Creating a welcoming environment means considering the experience of every participant, regardless of their ability, background, age, experience or reason for playing.

Practical ideas:

- Use inclusive and respectful language
- Avoid assumptions about why people participate
- Provide opportunities for different levels of ability and experience
- Make sure social activities are accessible to all players
- Recognise different contributions to the club
- Listen when participants tell you something is making them feel excluded

Ask: Who might not feel included in our current club environment, and what could we do differently?

5. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

Good communication helps players and families feel informed, valued and connected to the club.

Practical ideas:

- Provide information early and consistently
- Clearly explain expectations, changes and key decisions
- Make information easy to understand
- Provide opportunities for players and families to ask questions
- Explain decisions that directly affect participants
- Make sure players know who they can speak to if they have a concern

Clear communication builds trust and helps people feel part of the club.

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6. LISTEN TO YOUR PLAYERS

Creating a welcoming environment means understanding how players actually experience the club.

Ask players:

- Do you feel welcomed?
- Do you feel like you belong?
- Do you feel connected to your teammates?
- Do you feel supported by your coach?
- Is there anything that makes you feel excluded?
- What is one thing we could do to improve your experience?

Use a short Player Experience Check In during the season and use the feedback to identify areas for improvement.

7. RESPOND TO CONCERNS

Players need to know that their concerns will be listened to and taken seriously.

Clubs should:

- Make it clear who players can speak to
- Provide a safe and respectful way to raise concerns
- Respond consistently and appropriately
- Address negative or exclusionary behaviour early
- Communicate outcomes where appropriate
- Use feedback to identify broader issues that may need to be addressed

Don't wait for players to leave before responding to concerns about their experience.

8. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO STAY CONNECTED

Sometimes players may not be able to continue in their current competition or format.

A welcoming club looks for ways to keep people concerned, even when their circumstances change.

Consider:

- Social competitions
- Flexible participation options
- Shorter seasons
- Different playing opportunities
- Coaching or umpiring
- Volunteering
- Social club activities

Ask: If a player can't continue in their current role, what other ways can we help them stay connected to our club and netball?

A SIMPLE CLUB CHECK

Use the following questions to reflect on your current environment.

- Welcome – Do new players and families feel welcomed from the beginning?
- Connection – Do players have opportunities to build friendships?
- Team Culture – Are our teams positive, respectful and inclusive?
- Belonging – Do players feel valued and part of the club?
- Communication – Do players and families receive clear information?
- Voice – Do we regularly listen to our players?
- Support – Do players know where to go if they have a concern?
- Flexibility – Do we provide ways for people to stay connected when circumstances change?

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TURN YOUR REFLECTION INTO ACTION

You don't need to change everything at once.

- Identify – What is one area of the player experience we could improve
- Choose – Select one priority
- Act – Choose 2 to 3 practical actions
- Check – Ask players whether their experience has improved

Example:

- Priority – New players don't feel connected
- Goal – Improve the experience of new players
- Actions – Introduce a welcome process, allocate a buddy to each new player and check in with new player's mid-season
- Measure – Ask new players whether they feel welcomed, connected and included

CREATING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS RETENTION

A welcoming club environment can help create the conditions for players to:

- Feel Welcome
- Build Connections
- Enjoy Their Experience
- Feel They Belong
- Want to Stay Involved

KEY TAKEAWAY

Creating a welcoming club environment starts with understanding how players experience your club. By welcoming people, building connections, encouraging positive team cultures, listening to players and responding to their needs, Clubs can create experiences where people feel valued, connected and want to keep playing.