



department for  
culture, media  
and sport

# Helping keep your child **safe in sport**

Child protection leaflet for parents



improving  
the quality  
of life for all



department for  
children, schools and families



**Our aim is to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, support the pursuit of excellence, and champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries.**

# Introduction

Sport plays a positive role in the lives of many children and young people. As well as the obvious health benefits, they can also gain important social and life skills. That is why it is important that everyone who provides sport does as much as possible to create and maintain an enjoyable and safe environment.

As a parent or carer you play a very important role in protecting your child and helping them get the best from sport. The information you give them and the example you set can provide them with the knowledge and confidence needed to deal with potentially threatening or abusive situations. It is also important for you to check how a sports club or activity is run. This is your responsibility. Even though the organisation may seem professional, you should not make any assumptions about the way the club or activity is run until you have checked it yourself.

This leaflet gives advice to help you ask the right questions about important child protection measures that the sports providers should have in place, wherever and whatever your child participates in.

If you're concerned about the safety of a child, please contact the free **NSPCC Child Protection Helpline - 0808 800 5000**, which offers a confidential advice service.

# Joint foreword

Gerry Sutcliffe and Kevin Brennan

In the UK many millions of children enjoy taking part in sport every week. We know that parents and carers appreciate how important such participation is for a child's health and development. We want to ensure that all children have the best possible experience. That's why it's important that sport takes place in an environment where children are safe from the possibility of any form of ill-treatment. We hope this leaflet will help you to know what to look for and what to ask when you enrol your child in any sports activity.

All organisations providing sports for children should welcome your questions about how they will keep your child safe. Sports clubs have specific responsibilities to make sure that their coaches and other staff are safe to work with children. Although most coaches want to work with children for the right reasons, and ill-treatment of children by sports coaches is very rare, clubs still need to check the background of people they employ. Clubs should be able to provide you with confirmation that staff and volunteers are suitable and have undergone the right checks.

With this leaflet we want to help parents and carers to make the right decision about where your child takes part in sport, and how to ensure their safety. We hope you find the series of questions helpful.



Handwritten signature of Gerry Sutcliffe in black ink, written over a white background.

**Gerry Sutcliffe**

Minister for Sport



Handwritten signature of Kevin Brennan in black ink, written over a white background.

**Kevin Brennan**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
for Children, Young People and Families

### Message of support

At the NSPCC we believe all children should be able to enjoy sport in a safe environment. The information in this leaflet will help you understand what to look for if you think there may be a problem - and what questions to ask. This is not only for the sake of your child's well-being and safety, but also for your own peace of mind.



### Dame Mary Marsh

NSPCC Director and Chief Executive



# A checklist

When choosing from the many sports activities available in local communities there are a number of questions you should ask and things you should look for in relation to the safety of your child. This includes the commitment of the club to good practice and child protection.

You could ask the following questions:

- ✓ **Child Protection Policy**  
A good club will welcome questions about its activities and the safety of its environment. It will have a child protection policy and you should be told what to do if your child has any concerns. Ideally, there should be a club welfare officer who will answer any questions you might have.
- ✓ **Criminal Records Bureau check**  
You need to be sure that the staff and volunteers who will be working with your child are suitable. Ask if the club undertakes enhanced level CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks on coaches and helpers.
- ✓ **Training and education**  
Appropriate training and education ensures that everyone working with children in sport is aware of how to make the activities enjoyable for them. Ask if coaches and volunteers have undertaken training through a recognised Sport National Governing Body, or achieved a formal qualification in the sport.

# A good club **will welcome** questions about their activities and the **safety of their environment**

- ✓ **Events away from home**  
Ask about what arrangements the club makes to ensure children are kept safe when they take part in competitions or events away from home.
- ✓ **Club accreditation**  
Find out whether the club has an accreditation award such as Clubmark or National Governing Body equivalent. This shows that it has achieved a recognised minimum standard that ensures it provides a good experience for children.
- ✓ **Promoting your child's welfare**  
Ask about how the club safeguards and promotes the welfare of children. This can include a register at the beginning and end of sessions; first aid provision; the number of children looked after per coach/trainer; arrangements for transporting them to and from events; and signing children in and out.

# Things to watch out for

**The following may alert you to any inappropriate situations that may be affecting your child:**

- Activities where parents are discouraged from staying to watch or from becoming involved.
- Individuals who take charge and operate independently of organisational guidelines.
- Individuals who show favouritism or personally reward specific children.
- Encouragement of inappropriate physical contact.
- Poor communication and negative responses to questions about safeguards for your child.
- A "win at all costs" attitude towards the sport or activity.
- Children who drop out or stop going for no apparent reason.
- Invitations for children to spend time alone with staff or volunteers (or even to visit their home).

If you feel any of the above may be happening, contact the sports organisation immediately and ask questions.



# Helping your child

Of course you want your child to enjoy their sporting activities. While you don't want to put them off getting involved, it is important that you teach them what to do if they feel they are being badly treated by someone who is supposed to be coaching or looking after them.

If your child is affected by such behaviour you may notice them appearing worried or not wanting to take part in their sport. Talk to them, but understand that if they are being badly treated, it may be difficult for them to open up immediately. Remember to tell them it is not their fault.

Your child may be upset or frightened by witnessing bad behaviour by a member of staff towards one of their friends. You can help by making sure that the matter is taken forward. You can also let them know that their friend should tell an adult they trust as soon as possible. This could be:

- A parent or guardian, or someone else in their family
- Another member of staff at the sports club
- A teacher or school counsellor
- Their doctor or school nurse
- Another adult they may trust or feel comfortable with
- ChildLine, the free helpline for children and young people in the UK. Children and young people can call on **0800 1111** to talk about any problem

# Examples & frequently asked questions

**“I have asked to see the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check for my child’s coach but have been told I can’t. How can I be sure that the club have carried out these checks?”**

Don’t worry - There are very clear guidelines from the CRB about who can have access to a CRB disclosure certificate and you are not allowed to see it. However, the club will have confirmation from its governing body that the check has been undertaken, and will have a record that there are no concerns.

Many clubs have accreditation programmes such as Clubmark, Swim 21, Gym mark or the FA Charter mark. As part of the accreditation they will have had to show that they have taken all necessary steps to make sure all volunteers are suitable to work with children. If for any reason you have concerns, tell the welfare officer at the club or national governing body. Contact details for national governing bodies can be found at the following website:  
[www.sportengland.org/index/get\\_resources/resource\\_ul.htm#governing](http://www.sportengland.org/index/get_resources/resource_ul.htm#governing)

**“My child has been asked to take part in a competition away from home but I can’t find any details about what arrangements have been made.”**

A good club will have clear guidance for those organising trips and for children and their parents/carers that clarify arrangements to ensure your child’s welfare is a priority. If you have any concerns speak to the organiser.

## **A good club should always encourage parents to be part of their child's sporting activities and this includes watching training sessions**

**"My child's coach has suggested some additional one to one coaching sessions to help development. I don't know if we should accept."**

One to one coaching in isolation, with very few exceptions, is not considered to be good practice. If the coach has suggested this, ask for some more information and ask for the club's welfare officer to be involved in the discussion.

**"The club won't allow us to watch the training sessions and have told us this is because we will put the children off."**

A good club should always encourage parents to be part of their child's sports and this includes watching training sessions. However, there are some activities, particularly those using specialist equipment, where distractions can cause difficulties. There are also occasions where a minority of parents interfere with the coaching. Ask the club what safe arrangements are available for viewing – and if it has have a code of conduct for parents.

**Children should enjoy their sport.**  
**It is positive that the child wants to continue playing sport, and this should be encouraged**

**"I arrived to pick up my child from the session and the coach said they had left with a friend. Should children be allowed to leave sessions?"**

The club and coach are responsible for the supervision of your child during the session and should be clear about guidelines for collecting children from activities. Normal practice is that children, particularly under nine, will always be collected by parents unless alternative arrangements have been made by you and the club has been informed.

**"My child's photo and some of their details are on the club website but we were not asked for permission. Can a club do this without our permission?"**

No, a good club should always ask for your permission to put images or information about your child on the website. Club websites do provide a good way of promoting and celebrating young people's involvement and success in sport. However care needs to be taken about the details that are included.

**"I find it difficult to get information from the club about the training sessions and how the teams are picked."**

Clubs should operate in a fair and open manner. It is important that children and parents understand both what is expected of them and what they can expect of the club. Clubs should be happy to answer any questions to show how activities will be provided in a way that makes all children feel valued and able to participate to the best of their ability.

**“My child is being weighed at every training session and is becoming worried about how much they eat.”**

Monitoring a child's weight at every training session is not appropriate or necessary. It can create a range of problems for children and young people, including medical ones. For those sports where weight is an element of competition, guidance should be available from the governing body about how and when weight should be monitored. Feel free to speak to the club welfare officer if you have any concerns.

**“My child has suddenly started saying they don't want to continue with the club and asked if we can find somewhere else to play.”**

Talk to your child and try to find out more, as there could be many reasons for this. Also talk to other parents to see if their children are expressing similar concerns. If the cause is linked to the behaviour of someone in the club it is important to report this to the club welfare officer.

## **Suggest that the club start an anti-bullying policy that can be promoted through its activities**

**“My child has been receiving text messages from their coach, and when I asked they said all the squad do.”**

Coaches should not be contacting your child independently without your knowledge and consent. While there may be occasions when it is necessary for a coach to contact a young person at short notice the parent should always be informed. Ask your child if they are worried about any of the texts and ask to see them. If you are concerned in any way speak to the club welfare officer.

**“I’ve complained to the club secretary about the bullying my child has experienced in the club changing rooms. I have been told I am over sensitive and it’s normal for children to behave in this way.”**

It is important that you do not have your concerns dismissed. Children should be appropriately supervised in changing areas. Speak directly to the club welfare officer or contact your sports national governing body for guidance. Suggest that the club start an anti-bullying policy that can be promoted through its activities.

**For more information about choosing  
a club for your child go to:**

Clubmark website – [www.clubmark.org.uk](http://www.clubmark.org.uk)

CPSU website – [www.thecpsu.org.uk](http://www.thecpsu.org.uk)

**If you have concerns go to:**

NSPCC helpline - 0808 800 5000

Childline - 0800 1111



NSPCC: Registered charity number 216401

**For information on the governing bodies of sport please visit:**

[www.sportengland.org/index/get\\_resources/resource\\_ul.htm#governing](http://www.sportengland.org/index/get_resources/resource_ul.htm#governing)

**For more information about safe guarding your children please visit:**

[www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/safeguarding](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/safeguarding)

**For information about the Criminal Records Bureau please visit:**

[www.crb.gov.uk](http://www.crb.gov.uk)

We can also provide documents to meet the specific requirements of people with disabilities.

Please call 020 7211 6200 or email [enquiries@culture.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@culture.gov.uk)

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

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