



## **Section 4: Guidance for Coaches, Teachers and Poolside Helpers**

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## Guidance for Coaches, Teachers and Poolside Helpers

The ASA recognises the commitment of all those who work directly with children in aquatics, whether paid or unpaid. Training sessions, galas, competitions and events at all levels could not take place without coaches, teachers and the many poolside helpers and officials who give their time so generously.

Earlier in this document, it states that the responsibility to safeguard children in our sport belongs to all those who work directly with, or have responsibility for, children in our organisations. Section 2 of Wavepower gives details of policies, procedures and guidance to enable all who work with children to do so in a safe and appropriate manner. The ASA has produced a code of conduct which all local, county and national level teachers, coaches, officials and poolside helpers should adhere to. The codes of conduct can be found on pp. 52–55. The ASA Code of Ethics can be found in the ASA Handbook and on [www.swimming.org/asa](http://www.swimming.org/asa).

All those who work directly with children on poolside must adhere to the child safeguarding policies, procedures and guidance of the organisation and the ASA to ensure they safeguard children at all times.

In recent years, a great deal has been written in the media about the ‘bad and abusive coach’ and very little about the vast majority of good and caring coaches without whom Wavepower would not be a practical document. The ASA has identified through annual studies of referrals to the ASA Child Safeguarding Team that coaches, teachers and poolside helpers are viewed by members as trustworthy adults. Coaches and teachers are often ‘chosen’ by young members as a safe and trusted adult to whom they can confide in to disclose concerns about abuse, in the knowledge that the trusted person will help get that concern addressed in a proper and confidential manner. The ASA Child Safeguarding Team wishes to acknowledge the importance of the role undertaken by our coaches and teachers over and above that expected of them to safeguard our young members, and the important role that they, and all staff play in putting the ASA Child Safeguarding Policies and Procedures into practice.

This section of Wavepower, which has been written with the help of the British Swimming Coaches Association (BSCA) and a representative group of coaches and teachers, provides clear and specific guidance to enable best practice (already being applied by the majority) to be implemented by all.

## Safeguarding Members

All those who work directly with children must ensure that:

- Children are treated with dignity and respect.
- Good practice is promoted, in order to reduce the possibility of abusive situations occurring.
- They, along with every coach, volunteer, official and member of staff continually reflect upon their own coaching, supervisory style, philosophy and practices to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children at all times.
- They always work appropriately and openly with children in the organisation.
- They are an excellent role model, which includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of young people.
- They always put the welfare of each young person first, before winning or achieving goals.

- They build a balanced relationship based on mutual trust, which empowers young people to share in the decision-making process.
- They refer and deal with concerns regarding child safeguarding appropriately.

Coaches and teachers should:

- Keep up to date with their technical skills and qualifications.
- Complete a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check upon commencing a new post and update that check every three years.
- Complete an ASA-approved Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport course upon commencement as a coach and attend a refresher course every three years.



- Know and understand the ASA Child Safeguarding Policies and Procedures contained in Wavepower.
- Ensure parents and members obtain appropriate information regarding training and competitions.
- Work in partnership with officers and event organiser(s).
- Not exceed the level of their competence and qualifications.
- Have open and regular communication with the young members' parents/carers.
- Ensure that activities are appropriate for the age, maturity, experience and ability of the young member.
- Promote honesty, teamwork and a good sporting environment.
- Follow ASA guidance on coaching young people. All coaches should follow the guidance from their awarding body relating to coaching/teaching children.
- Report any concerns they may have in relation to young people following reporting procedures laid down in Wavepower.
- Recognise the expectations on members to undertake other activities outside of the sport including the demands of school sports and school examinations.
- Abuse their position of power or trust with children or adults.
- Resort to bullying tactics or verbal abuse.
- Cause a child to lose self-esteem by embarrassing, humiliating or undermining the individual.
- Spend excessive amounts of time with one swimmer to the detriment of the squad/team.
- Do things of a personal nature for young people that they can do for themselves.
- Smoke or consume alcohol while working with children and young people.
- Engage in a sexual relationship with a swimmer aged 17 or under.

Engaging in sexual relations with a child under 16 years of age is a criminal offence.

The ASA Code of Ethics for coaches and teachers can be found on [www.swimming.org](http://www.swimming.org) or in the ASA Handbook.

ASA coaches, teachers, officials and helpers should not:

- Take children to their home or other secluded places where they will be alone.
- Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games.
- Share a room with a child.
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching.
- Make sexually suggestive remarks to a child or young people.
- Reduce a child to tears as a form of control.
- Allow children to use inappropriate language or behaviour unchallenged.
- Allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Leave the pool venue before all members have been collected or are continuing to be supervised by appropriate officers.



## Relationships with members aged 17 and under

The relationship between coaches, teachers or members of staff who hold a position of trust and responsibility and members of the organisation under 18 must be professional and appropriate at all times. In some situations, legislation may reflect this requirement as outlined below in the sections on the Relationship of Trust and Grooming. However, the importance of the relationship between a coach and a member must never be forgotten. Not only does it develop a child's sporting potential and self-esteem, but it also allows them to develop an appropriate and trusting relationship with a responsible adult. Research of child safeguarding cases in aquatics has shown that it is this relationship that has enabled many young people to disclose their concerns.

The coach/member relationship is a complex one for both parties. It is important that the coach acknowledges that children often develop feelings for people in positions of trust, often identified as 'a crush' or 'hero worship'. In the case of a sports coach, this may result from a young person's admiration of the coach's previous achievements, e.g. as a national level athlete, representative of their country, etc. If this should happen to you, always inform the welfare officer to note the matter, and ensure that concerns are discussed and managed in an open and transparent manner. The welfare officer will be able to advise you on how to manage the issue and any action to take, if required. You and the welfare officer will be able to deal with such situations ensuring you and the young person are safe from harm or allegation.

Coaches may develop stronger relationships with some young members than with others. It would be unrealistic not to acknowledge that it is possible to like one person more than another. However, the professional nature of the coach's position requires them to never favour one member or group of members over another. If one member requires more attention for reasons identified by the coach (e.g. the member is preparing for a national level event) then that is totally acceptable, but such preferential treatment or extra attention must be justifiable as being necessary to a member's professional development, and should not be to the detriment of other members.

Some coaches have considered it acceptable to give rewards to members who do well, and it is acknowledged that in the vast majority of cases, gifts were given with no ulterior motive other than to reward success or improvement.

However, as outlined in the section on grooming on p. 99, the giving of gifts or favours can be identified or misconstrued as part of the grooming process. Our clear advice to coaches is to not give members gifts in any form. It is recommended that if a the coach feels that a member has attained a level of achievement that should be rewarded, then it is the organisation that should recognise that, on the coach's recommendation, and that any reward, gift or recognition given is then from the organisation and not one individual.

Where a coach does wish to carry out a rewards system, they should inform the relevant personnel within the organisation to make them aware of this, and provide details of the infrastructure around it. This may protect the coach from potential allegations of favoritism or grooming. In all cases, the reasoning behind creating the rewards system, and the justification for awarding a reward to an individual should be done on an open and transparent basis, for the sake of all concerned.

It is important that coaches work within the ASA Code of Ethics and follow good practice as outlined in the Code of Conduct on p. 54 to ensure their behaviour towards their members is appropriate. All coaches are in a position of trust over young members and the general rule is to act professionally at all times. If an action you take could be deemed to be unprofessional and inappropriate, then do not take that course of action.

### Relationship of trust

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 states: 'It is an offence for a person aged 18 years or over to involve a child under that age in sexual activity where he or she is in a specified position of trust in relation to that child. This includes those who care for, advise, supervise or train children and young people.'

This does not currently apply in law to aquatics teachers or coaches but the ASA has adopted this policy into the ASA's codes of conduct and the ASA Code of Ethics, and any relationship of this nature may result in disciplinary action.

The ASA adopts the Home Office guidelines which recommends the principle that people in positions of trust and authority should not have sexual relationships with 16/17 year olds in their care. The power and influence a coach or teacher has in a professional relationship with a young



person cannot be underestimated. In addition to this, the young person's success or failure and team selection may be dependent on the coach. It is vital for all coaches and teachers, as well as other volunteers, to recognise the responsibility they have and ensure that they do not abuse that position of power and trust.

Therefore, the position of the ASA is that no sexual relationship should exist between any young member of the organisation aged 16/17 years and their coach or teacher, and that the relationship between coach and member must be appropriate at all times.

Please note that young people aged 16/17 years can legally consent to some types of sexual activity. However, in almost all provisions of legislation (under the Children's Act 1989) they are still classified as children.



## Grooming

Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the grooming of a child for the purposes of developing that relationship into a sexual one is a criminal offence.

Grooming is when an abuser builds a relationship with a child or young person in an attempt to 'set up' or 'prepare' them in order to sexually abuse them. Not all sexual abuse is preceded by grooming, but it is very common and may be used by strangers or by those known to the victim. It often involves a process of deceit, where the abuser continually appears to be a helpful and generous person to the child, or their parent/carer, to get their trust in order to gain the opportunity to abuse. The grooming process can take weeks, months or even years and can be very subtle. Many adult and child victims of grooming often do not realise that they are being manipulated until after the sexual abuse has taken place. Some victims are never able to see how the grooming led to their or their child's abuse.

People who sexually abuse children may use many techniques to prepare their victims. Some of these techniques include:

- Offering services and/or assistance that is inappropriate from someone in a position of trust.
- Paying inappropriate attention to certain children in a group situation.
- Giving gifts.
- Having an inappropriate and intrusive interest into a child's physical and sexual development.
- Having inappropriate social boundaries (e.g. telling the potential victims about their own personal problems, etc).
- Sexualising physical contact, such as inappropriate tickling and wrestling.

This can lead to:

- Manipulating a child through threats or coercion.
- Gradually exposing the victim to nudity and/or sexual material in order to 'normalise' inappropriate behaviour.

This is not an exhaustive list and other exploitative strategies can be used and adapted to the individual child that the potential abuser has targeted.

The ASA recognises the importance of the positive coach/member relationship. It is the positive nature of that relationship that has led to many coaches being 'the trusted adult' that young people disclose their concerns of abuse to. The vast majority of coaches behave professionally and develop the coach/member relationship with young people in a responsible and appropriate manner. However, it is clear from the ASA's experience and research, that a small minority of persons in positions of trust, including sports coaches, abuse their position and groom young people, and in many cases their parents too, prior to committing acts of sexual abuse.

The ASA is clear in its expectations that ASA coaches have a responsibility to maintain that relationship of trust within the boundary of professionalism as outlined in the ASA Code of Ethics and codes of conduct. Coaches who breach that professional relationship in a manner that may be considered as possible grooming, even without police action being taken, are not only placing the young person at risk but also placing themselves at risk of allegation and possible action under the ASA Disciplinary and Child Protection Regulations for a breach of the ASA Code of Ethics and codes of conduct.



## Managing challenging behaviour

Individuals who deliver sports activities to children may, on occasions, be required to deal with a child's challenging behaviour.

These guidelines aim to promote good practice and to encourage a proactive response to support children to manage their own behaviour. The guidelines suggest some strategies and sanctions which can be used, and also identify unacceptable sanctions or interventions, which must never be used by any individual.

The guidelines will also include the views and suggestions of children.

These guidelines are based on the following principles:

- The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.
- All those involved in activities (including children, coaches/volunteers and parents/carers) should be given clear guidelines about required standards of conduct, and the organisation's process for responding to behaviour that is deemed unacceptable.
- Children must never be subjected to any form of treatment that is harmful, abusive, humiliating or degrading.
- Some children exhibit challenging behaviour as a result of specific circumstances, e.g. a medical or psychological condition, and coaches may therefore require specific or additional guidance. These and any other specific needs the child may have should be discussed with parents/carers and the child in planning for the activity, to ensure that an appropriate approach is agreed, and additional support provided where necessary, e.g. Children's Services.
- Sport can make a significant contribution to improving the life experience and outcomes for all children and young people.

Every child should be supported to participate and only in exceptional circumstances, where the safety of a child or of other children cannot be maintained, should a child be excluded from activities.

### Planning activities

Good coaching practice requires planning sessions around the group as a whole but also involves taking into consideration the needs of each individual within that group. As part of session planning, coaches should consider whether any members of the group have, presented previously or are likely to present, any difficulties in relation to the tasks involved, the other participants or the environment.

Where potential risks are identified, strategies to manage those risks should be agreed in advance of the session, event or activity. The planning should also identify the appropriate number of adults required to safely manage and support the session, including being able to adequately respond to any challenging behaviour and to safeguard other members of the group and the staff/volunteers involved.

When children are identified as having additional needs or behaviours that are likely to require additional supervision, specialist expertise or support, this should be discussed with parents/carers and the young person, where appropriate. The organisation should seek to work in partnership with parents/carers, and where necessary, external agencies, to ensure that a child or young person can be supported to participate safely.

### Agreeing acceptable and unacceptable behaviours

Staff, volunteers, children, young people and parents/carers should be involved in developing an agreed statement of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (code of conduct) and the range of sanctions which may be applied in response to unacceptable behaviour. This can be done at the start of the season, in advance of a trip away from home or as part of a welcome session at a residential camp.

Issues of behaviour and control should regularly be discussed with staff, volunteers, parents and children in the context of rights and responsibilities. When children are specifically asked as a group to draw up a code of conduct that will govern their participation in activities, experience indicates that they tend to arrive at a very sensible and working set of 'rules' with greater 'buy-in' from participants than those simply



imposed by adults within the organisation. If and when such a code is compiled, every member of the group can be asked to sign it, as can new members as they join.

## Managing challenging behaviour

In responding to challenging behaviour, the response should always be proportionate to the actions, be imposed as soon as is practical and be fully explained to the child and their parents/carers. In dealing with children who display negative or challenging behaviours, staff and volunteers might consider the following options:

- Time out – from the activity, group or individual work.
- Reparation – the act or process of making amends.
- Restitution – the act of giving something back.
- Behavioural reinforcement – rewards for good behaviour, consequences for negative behaviour.
- De-escalation of the situation – talking through with the child.
- Increased supervision by staff/volunteers.
- Use of individual ‘contracts’ or agreements for their future or continued participation.
- Sanctions or consequences, e.g. missing an outing.
- Seeking additional/specialist support through working in partnership with other agencies to ensure a child’s needs are met appropriately, e.g. referral for support to Children’s Services, discussion with the child’s key worker if they have one, speaking to the child’s school about management strategies (all require parental consent unless the child is felt to be ‘at risk’ or ‘in need of protection’).
- Temporary or permanent exclusion.

The following should never be permitted as a means of managing a child’s behaviour:

- Physical punishment or the threat of such.
- Refusal to speak to or interact with the child.
- Being deprived of food, water, access to changing facilities or toilets or other essential facilities.
- Verbal intimidation, ridicule or humiliation.

Staff and volunteers should review the needs of any child for whom sanctions are frequently necessary. This review should involve the child, parents/carers

and, in some cases, others involved in supporting or providing services for the child and his/her family, to ensure an informed decision is made about the child’s future or continued participation. As a last resort, if a child continues to present a high level of risk or danger to him or herself, or others, he or she may have to be suspended or barred from the group or club activities.

## Physical intervention

The use of physical intervention should always be avoided unless it is absolutely necessary to prevent a child injuring themselves or others, or causing serious damage to property. All forms of physical intervention should form part of a broader approach to the management of challenging behavior.

Physical contact to prevent something happening should always be the result of conscious decision-making and not an unplanned reaction. Before physically intervening, the member of staff or volunteer should ask themselves, ‘Is this the only option in order to manage the situation and ensure safety?’ It is good practice to ensure that if you have to physically intervene in a situation with a child/young person, it is in the least restrictive way necessary to prevent them from getting hurt, and used only after all other strategies have been exhausted. Studies have shown that, where this is the case, children and young people understand and accept the reasons for the intervention.

The following must always be considered:

- Contact should be avoided with buttocks, genitals and breasts. Staff/volunteers should never behave in a way which could be interpreted as sexual.
- Any form of physical intervention should achieve an outcome that is in the best interests of the child whose behavior is of immediate concern.
- Staff/volunteers should consider the circumstances, e.g. the risks associated with employing physical intervention compared with the risks of not employing physical intervention.
- The scale and nature of physical intervention must always be proportionate to the behaviour of the young person and the nature of harm/damage they might cause.
- All forms of physical intervention should employ only a reasonable amount of force, i.e. the minimum force needed to avert injury to a person or serious damage to property – applied for the shortest period of time.





- Staff/volunteers should never employ physical interventions which are deemed to present an unreasonable risk to children or themselves.
- Staff/volunteers should never use physical intervention as a form of punishment.
- Physical intervention should NOT involve inflicting pain.
- Where children are identified as having additional needs or behaviors that are likely to require physical intervention, this should be discussed with parents/carers and where necessary, the organisation will seek advice from or work in partnership with external agencies (e.g. Children's Services) to ensure that a child or young person can be supported to participate safely. This may include asking for the provision of a suitably trained support worker/volunteer or accessing staff/volunteer training in physical intervention.

Any physical intervention used should be recorded as soon as possible after the incident by the staff/volunteer(s) involved, by using the Incident Report Form and passing it to the welfare officer/ASA Child Safeguarding Team as soon as possible.

## Views of the child

It is clear from the accounts of children and young people that physical intervention provokes strong feelings. Children may be left physically or emotionally hurt. Even a child who hasn't directly been involved in the situation may be fearful that it will happen to them in future or have been upset by seeing what has happened to others.

A timely debrief, for the staff/volunteers, the child and the parents, should always take place following an incident where physical intervention has been used. This should include ensuring that the physical and emotional wellbeing of those involved has been addressed and ongoing support offered where necessary. Staff/volunteers, children and parents should be given an opportunity to talk about what happened in a calm and safe environment.

There should also be a discussion with the child and parents about the child's needs and continued safe participation in the group or activity.

It is important that staff and volunteers are made aware of and understand the organisation's guidance about managing challenging behavior to ensure that they are aware of ways in which they may need to intervene and are clear about the guidance in this area.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, all organisations that have a duty of care to children and young people should develop and implement policies and procedures on managing challenging behaviour, or consider incorporating this into their child protection policy. It should clearly set out the following:

- The standard of conduct expected from staff/volunteers and participants.
- How the organisation will respond to unacceptable behaviours.
- How the organisation will respond to 'high risk' behaviours. This will give children and young people a clear message about when staff may need to get involved to stop a particular form of behaviour, and describe options to avoid confrontation through, for example, time out.
- The circumstances in which children will be restrained. A decision to restrain a child should be firmly based on the safety of the child or of others, and must NEVER be made as a punishment or to get children to comply with instructions.
- The guidance, information or any support and/or training available to staff/volunteers, particularly where they are supporting a child with recognised challenging behavior to access the organisation's activities.
- The circumstances where external agencies will be contacted for support or in response to concerns, e.g. Children's Services or the police.
- What will happen after an incident? The organisation must have arrangements in place to check on the physical and emotional wellbeing of the child and staff, provide guidance on who should be informed and a system for recording and monitoring.

This briefing has been developed from *Creating a Safe Environment in Sport, Scottish Governing Bodies Child Protection Guidelines* (Sport Scotland/Children 1st).

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## Frequently asked questions

The ASA recognises that coaches, teachers and poolside helpers may be wary of putting themselves in a position where false allegations can be made and for this reason may overly interpret the guidance given in this document. It is important the guidance is interpreted appropriately and in a common sense manner so it does not hinder the building of professional, appropriate and safe relationships with members.

Below are the answers to some questions that are asked regularly, which we hope will allay some of the concerns you may have and provide assistance to help you interpret the procedures in an appropriately flexible manner, as well as advising where specific guidance can be obtained from.

### 1. What do I do if I find I am inadvertently left alone with a young person?

Firstly, don't panic. You are now the only person available who can ensure the wellbeing of that young person, so although the guidance says 'do not place yourself in a situation where you are alone with a young person', in this scenario, to absent yourself could potentially put that young person at risk. You should therefore ensure the wellbeing of the child, as that should always be the first and foremost consideration. In this case, that means you should wait with that child until the parent arrives, and use your mobile to inform another coach or committee member of the situation.

It is unlikely you will have the parent's phone number but the young person should be able to provide this, or, if they are old enough to have their own mobile phone, they can contact the parent themselves. Take sensible precautions while waiting with the young person. Talk only about matters which are acceptable between coach and member and if you are in a leisure centre with other users, wait for the parent in a public area. If you are at a venue that has no other users, wait in an area that is open and where the parent can clearly see you when they arrive.

If the late arrival of a parent is happening repeatedly, discuss this with the welfare officer as the ASA Late Collection of Children Policy (p. 81) should be brought into action.

### 2. If a parent fails to arrive, it is getting late and I cannot contact them by phone what should I do?

In such circumstances, it may be necessary for you to consider transporting that member home. If other suitable adults are present, ask one to accompany you and the young person in the car to the member's home. If not, ensure you tell another officer or staff member of the action you are taking by phone, sit the member in the back of the car and make sure you know where you are going before you set off to return the child home.

When you arrive at the member's home, hand the member over to the parent. Do not get into discussion with the parent about their failure to collect their child in front of the member concerned, but suggest you will inform the welfare officer and ask they speak to the parent the following day.

### 3. As a coach on poolside, can I physically comfort a young person who is upset, can I congratulate a member who has done well by shaking their hand and can I assist a young member manually in the water?

The answer to all the above is yes but always in a reasonable and appropriate manner.

Be mindful that to comfort a young person who is upset, it is not always necessary or appropriate to place an arm around them. Sitting down and listening to them, and maybe holding their hand, can show concern for their situation. Often young people do get distressed if they compete and feel they have done a 'bad swim' and sometimes a coach can assist just by being positive, for example, saying "well the dive and turns were good, and we can look in training next week at the stroke issues."

You can certainly shake the hand of a member who has done well. This is often seen by a young person as high praise from the coach.

The concerns about manually assisting young members in the water when teaching or coaching, along with other handling issues, are addressed in the ASA guidance document *Teaching in the water and handling children*.



It has been written to advise and guide on how to safely handle young members in the water. This document can be found at [www.swimming.org](http://www.swimming.org).

- 4. I work mainly with able-bodied members at my organisation but I occasionally coach young disabled members, some of whom are just learning to swim and some who are ready to move up into squads. I am unsure on how to physically handle members with a disability safely when in the water, and how to integrate them when ready into the sessions I teach/coach with mainstream members.**

The ASA has published a document entitled *Inclusion of swimmers with a disability* which is available to all coaches and teachers at [www.swimming.org](http://www.swimming.org). The document includes guidance on what is safe and the appropriate handling of swimmers with a disability. This guidance should answer many of your questions but it is also advised that you undertake one of the ASA Continual Professional Development (CPD) courses such as *Integrating swimmers with a physical and sensory impairment into mainstream teaching and/or Integrating disabled swimmers into a mainstream coaching environment* to assist in your ongoing development and to inform your work with disabled members.

