

Information for Sports Leaders



Introduction

Sports leaders involved in young people's sport have a great opportunity to be a positive role model and help build an individual's confidence. This summary explains what you should do to keep young people **safe** and make sure they have **fun**. It also helps you think about what responsibilities you have.

Sports Leaders (Code of Ethics pg.29)

Sports Leaders have an important role to play in promoting good practice in children's sport. They should have as their first priority the children's safety and enjoyment of the sport. The Sports Leaders' success should not be evaluated by performance or results of competition. They should enjoy a sense of achievement and pleasure through their work with young people. After undertaking appropriate education and training within the club or organisation, Sports Leaders will be well prepared to operate in a safe sporting environment with a knowledge and understanding of their role and responsibilities. They should be supported in their work by the sports club/organisation and parents/guardians.

Sports Leaders are responsible for setting and monitoring the boundaries between a working relationship and friendship with young participants. Sports Leaders should operate to the club's agreed code of conduct, which emphasises enjoyment, equality, fair play and the general well being of young people. This model of good practice should help children to demonstrate an awareness of equality, fair play and respect for Sports Leaders, other members of their group and the rules of the sport. The club/organisation and parents/guardians should afford Sports Leaders the respect they deserve and make them aware of any special needs of the child.

Club / Organisational procedures should support the Sports Leaders' model of good practice, thus ensuring protection for both the Leader and the participant. In so doing, Sports Leaders should feel able to make a complaint in an appropriate manner and have it dealt with through an effective complaints procedure. They should be able to appeal any decision through an effective appeals procedure (See 3.4).

In order to act as a role model and to promote their safety and the safety of young people Sports Leaders should:

- Be positive, praise and encourage effort as well as results
- Put the welfare of young people first, strike a balance between this and winning
- Encourage fair play and treat participants equally
- Have the relevant knowledge and experience to work with young people
- Understand developmental needs of young people

Where possible, and for their own safety, Sports Leaders should avoid:

- spending excessive amounts of time with children away from others

- taking sessions alone
- taking children on journeys alone in their car
- the use of alcohol before coaching, during events and on trips with young people

Sports Leaders should not:

- use any form of corporal punishment or physical force on a child
- take children to their home
- exert undue influence over a participant in order to obtain personal benefit or reward
- engage in rough physical games, sexually provocative games or allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any kind, and/or make sexually suggestive comments about, or to, a child
- take measurements or engage in certain types of fitness testing without the presence of another adult
- undertake any form of therapy (hypnosis etc.) in the training of children

For further information and sample codes for leaders see www.irishsportsCouncil.ie and www.sportni.net

Parents (Code of Ethics pg.30)

Parents/guardians have the primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their children within sport. Parents/guardians should encourage their children to participate in sport for fun and enjoyment and should ensure that their child's experience of sport is a positive one. Lessons learned in children's sport will shape values and attitudes in adult life. They should always remember that children play sport for their own enjoyment not that of the parents/guardians. Parents/guardians have a duty to ensure that the context in which their child is participating is appropriate.

Parents/guardians and Sports Leaders will ideally work in partnership to promote good practice in children's sport and to support all efforts to protect against neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse in sporting activities. To do so, parents/guardians should ensure that sports clubs treat their children with fairness, respect and understanding, and that the club is fulfilling its responsibility to safeguard children.

They should encourage their children to tell them about anyone causing them harm. They should become aware of club procedures and policies, in particular where changes are made that affect them or their children, and be informed of all matters relating to ethics and good practice. They should check that the *Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport* has been adopted and implemented in the club/organisation.

Parents/guardians should remember that children learn best by example. To assist in the promotion of good practice with the club or organisation they should:

- be aware of the relevant Sports Leaders and their role within the club
- show appreciation of and respect for Sports Leaders and their decisions
- encourage their child to play by the rules
- behave responsibly on the sideline

- focus on their child's efforts rather than performance
- focus on the fun and participation of the child in the activity
- liaise with the Sports Leaders in relation to the times/locations of training sessions, medical conditions of their children and any requirement for their child's safety

To promote the procedures of good practice parents/guardians should be:

- encouraged to become members of the club, where feasible, and take an active interest in the running of the club or any sporting activities in which their children take part
- willing to become the Club Children's Officer or assist in the running of the club
- informed of the training and/or competitive programmes and be satisfied with the general environment that is created for their children
- informed if their child sustained an injury during sporting activities
- informed of problems or concerns relating to their children.
- informed in advance and have their consent sought in relation to matters regarding away trips, camps or specially organised activities (see also 4.6)

Comments and suggestions by parents/guardians should always be considered and their complaints acknowledged and dealt with as they arise through an effective and confidential complaints procedure.

Parents/guardians should not:

- ignore or dismiss complaints or concerns expressed by a child which relate to his/her involvement in sport
- ridicule or yell at a child for making a mistake or losing a game
- put undue pressure on their child to please or perform well, including forcing a child to participate when ill
- take safety for granted
- treat the club as a child-minding service

Children (Code of Ethics pg.31)

Children have a great deal to gain from sport in terms of their personal development and enjoyment. The promotion of good practice in sport will depend on the co-operation of all involved, including child members of sports clubs/organisations. Children must be encouraged to realise that they also have responsibilities to treat other children and Sports Leaders with fairness and respect.

Children in sport are entitled to:

- be listened to
- be believed
- be safe and to feel safe
- participate in sporting activities on an equal basis, appropriate to their ability and stage of development
- be treated with dignity, sensitivity and respect

- be happy, have fun and enjoy sport
- experience competition at a level at which they feel comfortable and the desire to win as a positive and healthy outcome for striving for best performance
- comment and make suggestions in a constructive manner
- make a complaint in an appropriate way and have it dealt with through an effective complaints procedure
- be afforded appropriate confidentiality
- be represented at decision making bodies/meetings within their sports club/organisation
- have a voice in the running of their club
- approach the Children's Officer/Designated Person with any questions or concerns they may have

Children should undertake to:

- play fairly, do their best and have fun
- shake hands before and after the event, whoever wins - and mean it
- respect officials and accept their decisions with grace, not a grudge
- respect fellow team members; give them full support both when they do well and when things go wrong
- respect opponents, they are not enemies, they are partners in a sporting event
- give opponents a hand if they are injured or have problems with equipment
- accept apologies from opponents when they are offered
- exercise self-control and tolerance for others, even if others do not
- be modest in victory and be gracious in defeat
- show appropriate loyalty to their sport and all its participants
- make high standards of fair play the example others want to follow

Children should not:

- cheat
- use violence, using physical contact only when it is allowed within the rules
- shout at, or argue with, the referee, officials, team mates or opponents
- take banned substances to improve performance
- bully or use bullying tactics to isolate another player
- use unfair or bullying tactics to gain advantage
- harm team mates, opponents or their property
- tell lies about adults or other children
- spread rumours
- keep secrets about any person who may have caused them harm

Contact your own sports governing body for sport specific code of conduct.

Transport Guidelines (Code of Ethics pg.32-33)

When travelling with young people you should:

- Ensure that there is adequate insurance cover
- Not carry more than the permitted number of passengers
- Ensure use of safety belts and booster seats (if required)
- Avoid being alone with one participant
- If with **one person you could**
 - Put passenger in the back seat
 - Drop off at central locations
 - Seek parental permission transporting players on a regular basis
 - Clearly state times of pick- up and drop off

Supervision (Code of Ethics pg.32-33)

When deciding on the level of supervision required sports leaders should consider;

- If they have adequate adult to child ratio, as a guide- 1:8 for under 12 years and 1:10 for 12 years plus
- Nature of activity / Away trips / Overnight stays)
- Age of participants
- Special needs of the group
- Having leaders of both genders with mixed groups
- Avoiding being alone with one participant
- When talking to an individual doing so in an open environment, in view of others
- Changing room
- Ensuring parents / leaders supervise the changing rooms in pairs of appropriate gender
- Stating clearly time of training sessions or competitions
- Leaders remaining in pairs until all participants have been collected
- Keeping attendance records
- Keeping record of incidents / injuries
- Asking parents to stay and supervise sessions

Bullying (Code of Ethics pg.41)

Clubs should develop an ethos which encourages members to report bullying by;

- Having an anti-bullying policy – (Fact sheet on Website)
- Raising awareness of bullying as an unacceptable form of behaviour-(link to Codes of behaviour)
- Having co-operation from parents/guardians to counter bullying

Discipline Procedures (Code of Ethics pg.23)

Disciplinary, complaints and appeals procedures are essential for a well run club and these should include information on;

- Appointment of a disciplinary committee (3 members minimum)
- How and who communicates with those parties involved
- Responding within a set period of time for example within 10 days
- Ensuring either party have the right to appeal

Physical Contact (Code of Ethics pg.30)

Physical contact during sport should always be intended to meet the child's needs, NOT the adult's. The adult will probably use appropriate contact when the aim is to assist in development of the skill or activity or for safety reasons, e.g. to prevent or treat an injury. This should be in an open environment with the permission and understanding of the participant.

Some situations or teaching & coaching may require a 'hands on' approach. Consider the following:

- Avoid unnecessary physical contact
- Any necessary contact should be in response to the needs of the child and not the adult
- It should be in an open environment with the permission and understanding of the participant
- It should be determined by the age and developmental stage of the participant - Don't do something that the child can do for itself
- Never engage in inappropriate touching

It is particularly important that adults understand this to ensure the safety of their youth members and to protect their own position as well as the overall reputation of the organisation in which they are involved.

Safety (Code of Ethics pg.34-35)

Sports Leaders should check their club/organization has a safety statement and procedures for safeguarding against/potential risks that include;

- Keeping records of medical conditions
- Ensuring activities are suitable for age and stage of development of participants
- Keeping a record of emergency contact numbers for parents / guardians
- Ensuring any necessary protective gear is used
- Ensuring first aid kit is close at hand with access to qualified first-aider
- Officials (umpires, referees, etc.) ensuring the conduct of the game
- Participants knowing and keeping the rules of their sport
- Leaders holding appropriate qualifications required by the governing body
- Ensuring there is adequate insurance cover for all activities
- Ensuring parents / guardians are present at finishing time of sessions or events

Mobile Phones (Code of Ethics pg. 36)

As technology develops it is important that clubs continue to ensure young people remain safe by;

- Having a statement on the use of mobile phones to encourage responsible and secure use of mobile phones
- Sports leaders using group texts to communicate messages, as it is not appropriate to have constant communication with an individual athlete
- If young people receive offensive text/photo they should know to inform the designated person or parent
- Ensuring phones are not used in certain location's e.g. changing rooms

Photographic Images (Code of Ethics pg.35-36)

Parents/carers want to be able to celebrate the achievements of their children when taking part in sporting activities through photographs and sports organisations will also want to promote their activities to encourage increased participation. The Irish Sports Council does not advocate the banning of photography, but recommends that it is subject to appropriate and proportionate safeguards being in place to ensure a safe sporting environment for children and young people by;

- Having a policy in relation to the use of images on websites and publications
- Ensuring that if an athlete is named, you avoid using a photograph and if photo is used, avoid naming the athlete
- Seeking parental permission e.g. consent form or announcement at event
- Only using images of athletes in suitable dress
- Ensuring amateur photographers seek accreditation

Remember having photographic and filming guidelines is not about preventing parents from taking pictures, it is to ensure that only those who have a right to take photos do so.

Protection

Signs of Child Abuse (Code of Ethics pg.44)

Signs of abuse can be physical, behavioural or developmental. A cluster or pattern of signs is the most reliable indicator of abuse. Indicators should be noted. It is important, however, to realise that all of these indicators can occur in other situations where abuse has not been a factor.

Grounds for Concern (Code of Ethics pg.44)

Consider the possibility of child abuse if there are reasonable grounds for concern. Reasonable grounds for concern (*Children First*) exist when there is:

- a specific indication from a child that s/he has been abused
- an account by a person who saw the child being abused
- evidence, such as an injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way
- an injury or behaviour which is consistent both with abuse and with an innocent explanation but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse. An example of this would be a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indications of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour;
- consistent indication, over a period of time, that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect

Responding to Child Abuse (Code of Ethics pg 46)

If a young person discloses information of suspected abuse you should:

- Sensitive - listen and Facilitate Vs. Interview
- Stay calm - don't react emotionally
- Take child seriously
- Don't promise to keep information a secret
- Make no judgmental statements
- Use open, non-specific questions
- Explain – what happens next
- Praise their courage / action to 'tell'

Reporting Suspected or Disclosed Child Abuse (Code of Ethics pg 45)

The following steps should be taken in reporting child abuse to the statutory authorities:

- Note dates, times, locations, context
- Any other relevant information
- Consult Informally with HSE if you have a concern
- Inform the family - unless it would endanger the child
- Report to designated person within Club And / Or Designated officer within Health Service Executive

A designated person reporting suspected or actual child abuse to the statutory authorities will first inform the family of their intention to make such a report, unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine any further investigation

Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998

Protection from civil liability when:

- Reported in 'good faith and without malice'
- To a 'designated officer' of HSE or the Gardai
- Protection from penalisation by an employer

False reporting is an actual offence and carries a fine or 12 months imprisonment

National Counselling Service

There is a confidential counselling service is now available to adults who have experienced childhood sexual, physical or emotional abuse in an institutional, educational or family setting-

National Counselling Service Free phone number 1800 670 700

For specific guidance on the following, visit your National Governing Body's own guidelines.

Considerations should be given to the following areas:

Peer abuse

Social networking services, social media and sport: guidelines for safeguarding children and young people

Text and email messaging - safeguarding guidelines

Understanding the grooming or entrapment process

Managing challenging behaviour

Useful websites

Irish Sports Council – www.irishsportsCouncil.ie

Office for the Minister for Children – www.omc.gov.ie

Sport NI – www.sportni.net

NSPCC – www.thecpsu.org.uk