

St.Helens Swimming Club Child Protection Policy

Introduction

All sporting organisations, which make provision for children and young people, must ensure that:

- The welfare of the child is paramount;
- All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse;
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately;
- All staff (paid/unpaid) working in swimming have a responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate officer.

Staff/volunteers are not trained to deal with situations of abuse nor decide if abuse has occurred.

Policy statement

Swimming has a duty of care to safeguard all children involved in swimming from harm. All children have a right to protection, and the needs of disabled children and others who may be particularly vulnerable must be taken into account. Swimming will ensure the safety and protection of all children involved in swimming through adherence to the Child Protection guidelines adopted by swimming.

A child is defined as under 18 The Children Act 1989.

Policy aims

The aim of the Swimming Child Protection Policy is to promote good practice:

- Providing children and young people with appropriate safety and protection whilst in the care of swimming;

Allow all staff /volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues.

Promoting Good Practice with Young People

Introduction

Child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can arouse strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgement about any action to take. Abuse can occur within many situations including the home, school and the sporting environment. Some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with young people in order to harm them. A coach, instructor, teacher, official or volunteer may have regular contact with young people and be an important link in identifying cases where a young person needs protection. All suspicious cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document. When a child enters the club having been subjected to child abuse outside the sporting environment, sport can play a crucial role in improving the child's self esteem. In such instances the club must work with the appropriate agencies to ensure the child receives the required support.

Good Practice Guidelines

All personnel should be encouraged to demonstrate exemplary behaviour in order to protect themselves from false allegations. The following are common sense examples of how to create a positive culture and climate within swimming:

Good practice means:

- Always working in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging an open environment i.e. no secrets).
- Treating all young people/disabled adults equally, and with respect and dignity.
- Always putting the welfare of each young person first, before winning or achieving goals.
- Maintaining a safe and appropriate distance with players (e.g. it is not appropriate to have an intimate relationship with a child or to share a room with them).
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empowers children to share in the decision-making process;
- Making sport fun, enjoyable and promoting fair play.
- Ensuring that if any form of manual/physical support is required, it should be provided openly and according to guidelines provided by the Coach Education Programme. Care is needed, as it is difficult to maintain hand positions when the child is constantly moving. Young people should always be consulted and their agreement gained. Some parents are becoming increasingly sensitive about manual support and their views should always be carefully considered.
- Keeping up to date with the technical skills, qualifications and insurance in sport.
- Involving parents/carers wherever possible (e.g. for the responsibility of their children in the changing rooms). If groups have to be supervised in the changing rooms, always ensure parents/teachers/coaches/officials work in pairs.
- Ensuring that if mixed teams are taken away, a male and female member of staff should always accompany them. (NB however, same gender abuse can also occur)
- Ensuring that at tournaments or residential events, adults should not enter children's rooms or invite children into their rooms.
- Being an excellent role model – this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of young people.
- Giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Recognising the developmental needs and capacity of young people and disabled adults – avoiding excessive training or competition and not pushing them against their will.
- Securing parental consent in writing to *act in loco parentis*, if the need arises to give permission for the administration of emergency first aid and/or other medical treatment.
- Keeping a written record of any injury that occurs, along with the details of any treatment given.
- Requesting written parental consent if club officials are required to transport young people in their cars.

Practice to be avoided

The following should be **avoided** except in emergencies. If cases arise where these situations are unavoidable they should only occur with the full knowledge and consent of someone in charge in the club or the child's parents. For example, a child sustains an injury and needs to go to hospital, or a parent fails to arrive to pick a child up at the end of a session:

- Avoid spending excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others;
- Avoid taking children to your home where they will be alone with you.

Practice never to be sanctioned

The following should **never** be sanctioned. You should never:

- Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay;
- Share a room with a child;
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching;
- Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged;
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun;
- Reduce a child to tears as a form of *control*;
- Allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon;
- Do things of a personal nature for children or disabled adults, that they can do for themselves;
- Invite or allow children to stay with you at your home unsupervised.

NB. It may sometimes be necessary for staff or volunteers to do things of a personal nature for children, particularly if they are young or are disabled. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of parents and the players involved. There is a need to be responsive to a person's reactions. If a person is fully dependent on you, talk with him/her about what you are doing and give choices where possible. This is particularly so if you are involved in any dressing or undressing of outer clothing, or where there is physical contact, lifting or assisting a child to carry out particular activities. Avoid taking on the responsibility for tasks for which you are not appropriately trained.

If any of the following occur you should report this immediately to another colleague and record the incident. You should also ensure the parents of the child are informed.

- If you accidentally hurt a player.
- If he/she seems distressed in any manner.
- If a player appears to be sexually aroused by your actions.
- If a player misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.

Guidelines for Use of Photographic Filming Equipment at Sporting Events

There is evidence that some people have used sporting events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of young and disabled sportspeople in vulnerable positions. It is advisable that all clubs be vigilant with any concerns to be reported to the Club Child Protection Officer.

Videoring as a coaching aid: there is no intention to prevent club coaches and teachers using video equipment as a legitimate coaching aid. However, performers and their parents/carers should be aware that this is part of the coaching programme and care should be taken in the storing of such films.

Recruitment and selecting staff and volunteers

Swimming recognises that anyone may have the potential to abuse children in some way and that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children. When undertaking pre-selection checks the following should be included:

All volunteers /staff should complete an application form. The application form will elicit information about an applicant's past and a self-disclosure about any criminal record.

Consent should be obtained from an applicant to seek information from the Criminal Records Bureau (to be introduced in September 2001).

Two confidential references, including one regarding previous work with children. These references must be taken up and confirmed through telephone contact.

Evidence of identity (Passport or driving licence with Photo).

Responding to suspicions or allegations

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in swimming, in a paid or unpaid capacity to take responsibility or to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However there is a responsibility to act on any concerns through contact with the appropriate authorities.

Swimming will assure all staff/volunteers that it will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith reports his or her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.

Where there is a complaint against a member of staff there may be three types of investigation

- A criminal investigation,
- A child protection investigation,
- A disciplinary or misconduct investigation.

The results of the police and child protection investigation may well influence the disciplinary investigation, but not necessarily.

Action if there are concerns

The following action should be taken if there are concerns (See Appendix A):

Poor Practice

- If, following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice; the Club Child Protection Officer will deal with it as a misconduct issue.
- If the allegation is about poor practice by the Club Child Protection Officer, or if the matter has been handled inadequately and concerns remain, it should be reported to the relevant swimming officer who will decide how to deal with the allegation and whether or not to initiate disciplinary proceedings.

Suspected Abuse

- Any suspicion that a child has been abused by either a member of staff or a volunteer should be reported to the Club Child Protection Officer, who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.
- The Club Child Protection Officer will refer the allegation to the social services department who may involve the police, or go directly to the police if *out-of-hours*.
- The parents or carers of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from the social services department.
- The Club Child Protection Officer should also notify the relevant swimming officer who in turn will inform the Swimming Child Protection Officer who will deal with any media enquiries.
- If the Club Child Protection Officer is the subject of the suspicion/allegation, the report must be made to the appropriate Manager or in his/her absence the Swimming Child Protection Officer who will refer the allegation to Social Services.

Confidentiality

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned.

Information should be handled and disseminated on a **need to know basis** only. This includes the following people:

- The Club Child Protection Officer;
- The parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused;
- The person making the allegation;
- Social services/police;
- The Swimming Regional Development Manager and Swimming Child Protection Officer;
- The alleged abuser (and parents if the alleged abuser is a child). *

*Seek social services advice on who should approach alleged abuser.

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws (e.g. that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

Internal Enquiries and Suspension

- The Swimming Child Protection Officer will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further police and social services inquiries.
- Irrespective of the findings of the social services or police inquiries the Swimming Disciplinary Committee will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of staff or volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision; particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases, the Swimming Disciplinary Committee must reach a decision based upon the available information which could suggest that on a balance of probability, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of children should always remain paramount.

Support to Deal with the Aftermath

- Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to children, parents and members of staff. Use of Helplines, support groups and open meetings will maintain an open culture and help the healing process. The British Association of Counselling Directory (**The British Association for Counselling Directory** is available from The British Association for Counselling, 1 Regent Place, Rugby CV21 2PJ, Tel: 01788 550899, Fax: 01788 562189, E-mail: bac@bac.co.uk, Internet: www.bac.co.uk) may be a useful resource.
- Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to the alleged perpetrator of the abuse.

Allegations of Previous Abuse

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (e.g. by an adult who was abused as a child or by a member of staff who is still currently working with children). Where such an allegation is made, the club should follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to the social services or the police. This is because other children, either within or outside sport, may be at risk from this person. Anyone who has a previous criminal conviction for offences related to abuse is automatically excluded from working with children. This is reinforced by the details of the Protection of Children Act 1999.

Action if Bullying is suspected

The same procedure should be followed as set out in the Section relating to responding to suspicions or allegations, if bullying is suspected. All settings in which children are provided with services or are living away from home should have rigorously enforced anti-bullying strategies in place.

Action to Help the Victim and Prevent Bullying in Sport:

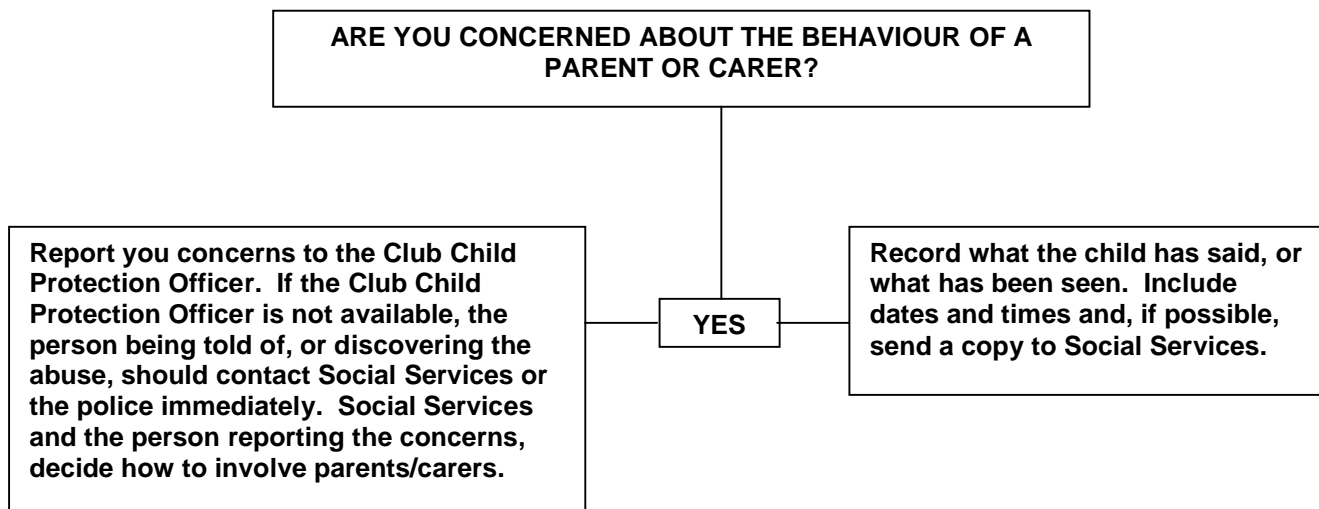
- Take all signs of bullying very seriously.
- Encourage all children to speak and share their concerns (It is believed that up to 12 children per year commit suicide as a result of bullying, so if anyone talks about or threatens suicide, seek professional help immediately). Help the victim to speak out and tell the person in charge or someone in authority. Create an open environment.
- Investigate all allegations and take action to ensure the victim is safe. Speak with the victim and the bully (ies) separately.
- Reassure the victim that you can be trusted and will help them, although you cannot promise to tell no one else.
- Keep records of what is said (what happened, by whom, when).
- Report any concerns to the Club Child Protection Officer or the school (wherever the bullying is occurring).

Action Towards the Bully (ies):

- Talk with the bully (ies), explain the situation, and try to get the bully (ies) to understand the consequences of their behaviour. Seek an apology to the victim(s).
- Inform the bully's parents.
- Insist on the return of *borrowed* items and that the bully (ies) compensate the victim.
- Provide support for the coach of the victim.
- Impose sanctions as necessary.
- Encourage and support the bully (ies) to change behaviour.
- Hold meetings with the families to report on progress.
- Inform all organisation members of action taken.
- Keep a written record of action taken.

Appendix A: A Quick Guide to Procedures

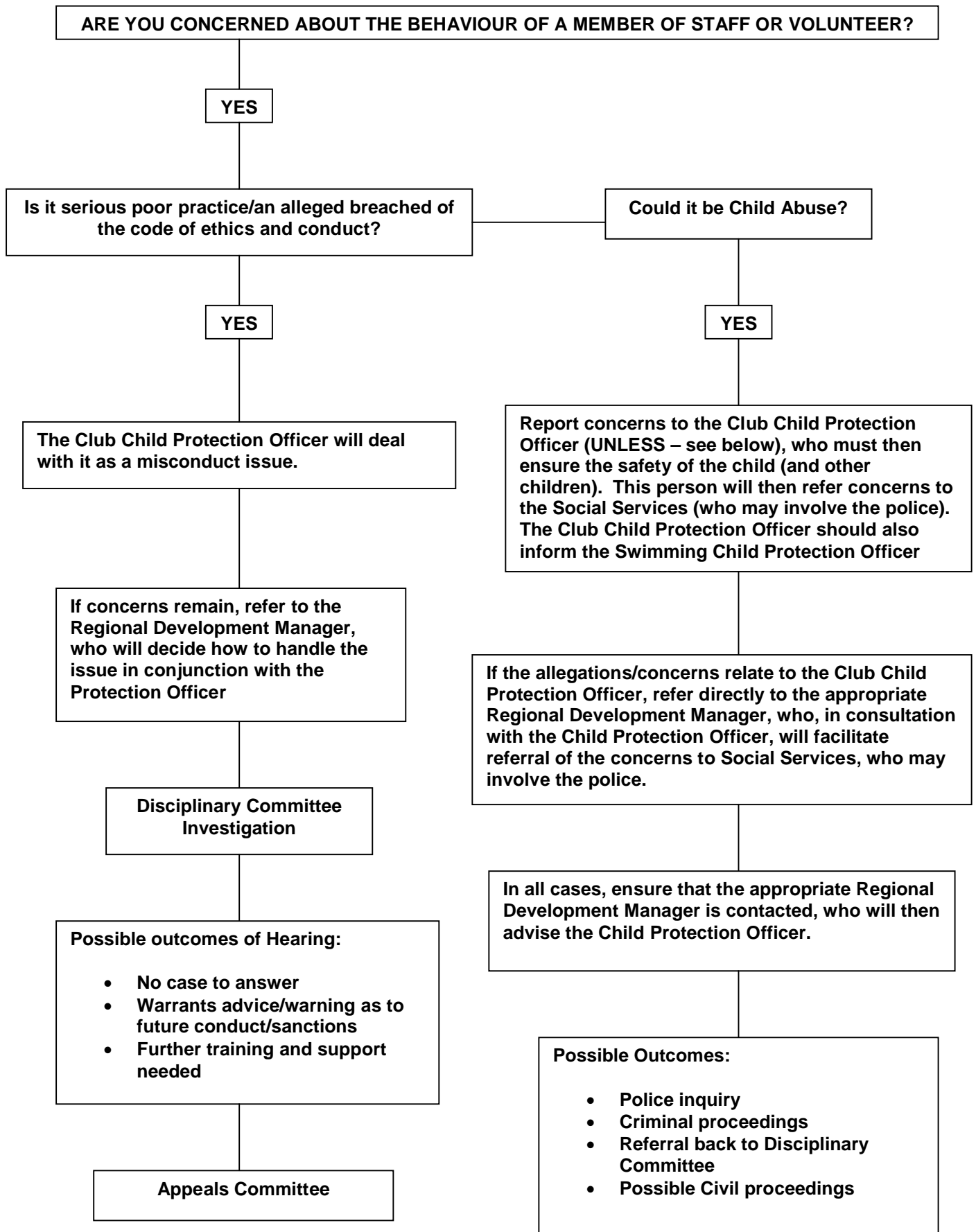
This guide is designed to inform the most appropriate action in relation to concerns about either a parent or carer (e.g. outside the immediate sporting environment).



Remember:

- Maintain confidentiality on a *need to know* basis only.
- Ensure the Club Child Protection Officer follows up with social services.
- The Club Child Protection Officer should also report the incident to the Swimming Child Protection Officer who should ascertain whether or not the person/s involved in the incident play a role in swimming and act accordingly.

This guide is designed to inform the most appropriate action in relation to concerns about a member of staff or volunteer within swimming.



If you do not know who to turn for advice or are worried about sharing your concerns with a senior colleague, you should contact the social services direct (or the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000, or Childline on 0800 1111)

What to do if there are concerns

Information passed to the social services or the police must be as helpful as possible, hence the necessity for making a detailed record at the time of the disclosure/concern. Information passed to the social services or the police must be as helpful as possible, hence the necessity for making a detailed record at the time of the disclosure/concern. Information should include the following:

- Name of child
- Age of child and date of birth
- Home address and telephone number
- Is the person making the report expressing their own concerns or those of someone else
- What is the nature of the allegation? Include dates, times, any special factors and other relevant information.
- Make a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
- A description of any visible bruising or other injuries. Behavioural signs indirect signs?
- Witnesses to the incidents.
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred.
- Have the parents been contacted?
- If so what has been said?
- Has anyone else been consulted? If so record details.
- If it is not the child making the report has the child concerned been spoken to? If so what was said?
- Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record details.