

GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

Staff/volunteers 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 supporting children to manage their own behaviour. They suggest some strategies and sanctions which can be used and also identify unacceptable sanctions or interventions which must *never* be used by staff or volunteers.

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 provided with clear guidelines about required standards of conduct, and the organisation/club's process for responding to behaviour that is deemed unacceptable.
- Children must never be subject to any form of treatment that is harmful, abusive, humiliating or degrading.
- Some children exhibit challenging behaviour as a result of specific circumstances, eg 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, where necessary, additional support provided e.g. from external agencies, Children's Social Care services etc
- Sport can make a significant contribution to improving the life experience and outcomes for all children and young people¹[1]. 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 club 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 athlete within that group. As part of session planning, coaches should consider whether any members of the group have presented in the past or are likely to present any difficulties in relation to the tasks involved, the other participants or the environment.

Where staff/volunteers identify potential risks, 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 where appropriate young people. The club 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 club 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 club. 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 practicable 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 Social Care, 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.

A policy for managing challenging behaviour

In conclusion, all organisations that have a duty of care to children and young people should develop and implement a policy 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 your 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 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 behaviour to access club activities.
- The circumstances where external agencies will be contacted for support or in response to concerns e.g. – Children's Social Care services, the Police.

- What will happen after an incident? Your organisation must have in place arrangements to check on the physical and emotional wellbeing of the child and staff, guidance on recording, 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" (sportsotland/ Children 1st)