



*Chapter 2*  
**People**

## PEOPLE

*Everyone involved in sport i.e. children, parents/guardians and Sports Leaders should accept the role and responsibilities that they undertake in their commitment to maintaining an enjoyable and safe environment.*

### 2.1 ADULTS INVOLVED IN SPORT

The roles of every adult involved in children's sport should be clearly defined. Many leadership roles contribute to the successful development and organisation of children's sport. These may overlap on occasions, but it is very important that each Sports Leader has a clear idea of his/her role and responsibilities. Each person involved in children's sport should ensure that the *Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport* is agreed, adopted and implemented in the organisation to which they are affiliated.

The principal leadership roles in sport are outlined in the Glossary.

### 2.2 ADULT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN SPORT

The trust implicit in adult-child relationships in sport places a duty of care on all adults, voluntary or professional, to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the child while engaged in their sporting activity. Adults have a crucial leadership role to play in sport. Whether they are parents/guardians or Sports Leaders or teachers, they can contribute to the creation of a positive sporting environment for young people. The unique nature of sport allows Sports Leaders to develop positive and special relationships with children. Such relationships have tremendous potential to help children to develop and express themselves in an open and secure way. Positive adult-child relationships will result in growth, development and fulfilment for all those involved in children's sport.

Most adults who become involved in children's sport do so in their own free time. There may, therefore, be a reluctance to make impositions upon them with regard to either conditions of training, or reproaches for any misdemeanours. However, given the important and responsible roles which adults play at many different levels in sport, it is essential that their competence and ability to deal with children in a fair, empathic and ethical way is supported, guided and maintained. A consistent method of recruiting and selecting Sports Leaders should be in place, including seeking references, confirming identity and checking adequacy of qualifications. Effective management of Sports Leaders is also equally central to the promotion of good practice in the club/organisation. This should include support, supervision, access to training and effective communication between members of the club/organisation.

#### **Adult-child relationships in sport should be:**

- open, positive and encouraging
- entered into by choice
- defined by a mutually agreed set of goals and commitments
- respectful of the creativity and autonomy of children
- carried out in a context where children are protected and where their rights are promoted
- free from physical, emotional or sexual abuse and neglect or any threat of such harm
- respectful of the needs and developmental stage of the child
- aimed at the promotion of enjoyment and individual progress
- governed by a code of ethics and good practice in sport that is agreed and adhered to by all members of the sports club/organisation
- respectful, but not unquestioning of authority
- mindful of the fact that children with disabilities may be more vulnerable

### 2.3 CHILD TO CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Interaction between children should be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and fair play. Adults including parents/guardians, who create an environment in which quality, open relationships are valued and where the integrity of each individual is respected, can promote such interaction.

### 2.4 RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS /GUARDIANS

Parents/guardians play a key role in the promotion of an ethical approach to sport and young people's enjoyment in sport. Parents/guardians therefore need to be aware, informed and involved in promoting the safest possible environment for children to enjoy their participation in sport. Sports Leaders need the support of parents/guardians in conveying the fair play message.

### 2.5 THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF SPORTS LEADERS

Sports Leaders play a vital role in children's sport. Sports organisations and sports groups should ensure that the work of Sports Leaders which occurs mainly on a voluntary basis, is guided by this Code of Ethics and Good Practice whilst also recognising that they are entitled to obtain a healthy sense of achievement and satisfaction through their involvement in children's sport. (See 4.1)

### 2.6 GOVERNING BODIES OF SPORT

*A Governing Body of Sport is the organisation recognised by the respective international federation as being responsible for the administration of a particular sport on a countrywide basis or the national body responsible for national games. The Governing Body is responsible for overseeing the adoption and implementation of this Code by all its affiliated members.*

To maximise compliance with the Code, each Governing Body of Sport should:

- ensure that the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport is adopted, agreed to, implemented and signed up to by all members
- amend, as necessary, its Constitution to reflect a safe and clearly defined method of recruiting, selecting and managing
- appoint a National Children's Officer/Designated Person (See 2.8/9). S/he should be a member of the Executive Committee
- ensure that effective disciplinary, complaints and appeals procedures are in place
- have in place procedures for dealing with a concern or complaint made to the Statutory Authorities against a committee member or a Sports Leader. Regulations should stipulate that a Sports Leader who is the subject of an allegation, which has been reported to the Statutory Authorities, should stand aside while the matter is being examined. *s/he should be invited to resume full duties when and if appropriate internal disciplinary procedures are completed*
- ensure that all sports clubs with child members are fully affiliated and signed up to the Governing Body's constitution
- be represented by appropriate personnel at all education/training workshops dealing with the Code
- where children are involved in representative teams, designate an appropriate senior officer in the Governing Body as the person with responsibility for following the guidelines of the Code
- review its child protection procedures regularly through open discussion with its members, Sports Councils and Statutory Authorities
- promote contact with representatives of the Statutory Authorities. The building of these relationships will contribute to the creation of an environment in which education and knowledge of child protection issues and procedures are widely known
- examine and take appropriate action in response to any reports or observations of unusual incidents (high rate of transfers, dropouts) received from clubs

## 2.7 SPORTS CLUBS

To ensure that best practice is being followed, all sports clubs should work closely with their Governing Body of Sport. In promoting best practice in children's sport and in implementing this Code at club level each club should:

- adopt and implement the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport as an integral part of its policy on children in the club
- have its constitution approved and adopted by club's members at an AGM or EGM
- promote the voice of the child, in particular through meetings and the AGM. One parent/guardian should have one vote for all their children under 18 years of age, where relevant
- ensure that the Club Management Committee is elected or endorsed by registered club members at each AGM
- adopt and consistently apply a safe and clearly defined method of recruiting and selecting Sports Leaders (See 3.5)
- clearly define the role of committee members, all Sports Leaders and parents/guardians
- appoint at least one Children's Officer as outlined at 2.8.1 in this Code. In the event that a club caters for both boys and girls, one Children's Officer of each gender would ideally be appointed
- have a Designated Person to act as liaison with the Statutory Authorities in relation to the reporting of allegations or suspicions of child abuse. (See 5.12) Any such reports should be made according to the procedures outlined in this Code
- ensure best practice throughout the club by disseminating its code of conduct, including the disciplinary, complaints and appeals procedures in operation within the club to all its members. The club's code of conduct should also be posted in all facilities used by the club
- have in place procedures for dealing with a concern or complaint made to the Statutory Authorities against a committee member or Sports Leader or other members of the club. Regulations should stipulate that a Sports Leader who is the subject of an allegation, which has been reported to the Statutory Authorities, should stand aside, while the matter is being examined. *s/he should be invited to resume full duties when and if appropriate internal disciplinary procedures are completed*
- ensure that relevant Sports Leaders report to the Club Management Committee on a regular basis
- encourage regular turnover of committee membership while ensuring continuity and experience
- develop effective procedures for responding to and recording accidents
- ensure that any unusual activity (high rate of drop-out, transfers, etc.) is checked out and reported by the Club Chairperson to the Governing Body of Sport
- ensure that all club members are given adequate notice of AGMs and other meetings
- ensure that all minutes of all meetings (AGMs/EGMs/, Committee) are recorded and safely filed.

## 2.8 CHILDREN'S OFFICERS

The appointment of Children's Officers in Governing Bodies and sports clubs/organisations is an essential element in the creation of a quality atmosphere. They act as a resource with regard to children's issues.

In summary Children's Officers should review current policies in relation to young people, check that all activities are safe and fun, and inform adults of how to deal with any concerns that may arise in relation to the protection of young people.

## 2.8.1 NATIONAL CHILDREN'S OFFICER FOR GOVERNING BODY OF SPORT

Each Governing Body of Sport should appoint a National Children's Officer. The National Children's Officer should be a member of the Executive Committee, or have access to the committee and its accompanying documents, to ensure that children's interests are kept on, and influence the decisions of, the agenda of the Governing Body.

The role of the National Children's Officer involves:

- Familiarisation with *Children First and Our Duty to Care* to ensure they can act as an information source to other members of the organisation
- Commitment to attendance at appropriate training as required in order to act as a resource to members in relation to children's needs
- Co-ordination of training for others
- The promotion of the values, attitudes and structures which make sport enjoyable for children – see general statement on children's sport, see section 2.8.3
- Circulation of all relevant information and resource materials, on children's sport to clubs and affiliates of the sports organisations
- Communication with Club Children's Officers to ensure the distribution of the Code and the promotion of related education programmes, materials events and governing body related codes
- Liaison with all clubs to examine the rules, regulations and structures to ensure that they are child centred, e.g., equal playing time, appropriate competition structures, modified equipment to allow sense of achievement and success, use of protective gear, bullying policy etc.
- Liaison with clubs, to ensure drop-out rates and transfers are monitored so that unusual developments or trends can be addressed, including transfer of sports leaders
- Assisting in the development of a system of record keeping which maintains confidentiality while allowing for appropriate information to be passed to relevant authorities where necessary
- Ensuring that the Governing Body develops an appropriate sport specific code, which includes a policy statement, codes of conduct, disciplinary procedures, bullying policy, safety statement, recruitment and selection policy and reporting procedures.

Sports Council for Northern Ireland recommend that in Northern Ireland the Governing Body appoint a person, dependent on the structure, to one of the following 3 posts:

- The Governing Body Children's Officer is an executive member in a Northern Ireland stand-alone organisation
- The Governing Body Children's Officer representing the Ulster Branch/Council/Region of an All-Ireland Governing Body
- The Governing Body Children's Officer of a Northern Ireland Sporting Organisation with regional affiliation to a UK parent body

## 2.8.2 CLUB CHILDREN'S OFFICER

Club Children's Officers should be child centred in focus and have as the primary aim the establishment of a child centred ethos within the club. S/he is the link between the children and the adults in the club. S/he also takes responsibility for monitoring and reporting to the Club Management Committee on how club policy impacts on young people and Sports Leaders.

The Children's Officer should be a member of or have access to, the Club Management Committee and should be introduced to the young people in an appropriate forum. The Children's Officer should have the following role:

- To promote awareness of the code within the club, among young members and their parents/guardians. This could be achieved by:- the production / distribution of information leaflets, the establishment of children's/age-group specific notice boards, regular information meetings for the young people and their parents/guardians
- To influence policy and practice within the club in order to prioritise children's needs
- Establish contact with the National Children's Officer at governing body level.
- To ensure that children know how to make concerns known to appropriate adults or agencies. Further information is outlined in Section 5.12 in this Code
- To encourage the appropriate involvement of parents/guardians in the club activities
- To act as an advisory resource to Sports Leaders on best practice in children's sport
- To report regularly to the Club Management Committee
- To monitor changes in membership and follow up any unusual dropout, absenteeism or club transfers by children or Sports Leaders
- To ensure that the children have a voice in the running of their club and ensure that there are steps young people can take to express concerns about their sports activities / experiences.
- Establish communication with other branches of the club, e.g. facilitate parent's information sessions at the start of the season
- Keep records on each member on file, including junior members, their contact numbers and any special needs of the child that should be known to leaders
- Ensure each member signs an annual membership form that includes signing up to the code of conduct
- Ensure that the club rules and regulations include:-
  - \* complaints, disciplinary and appeals procedures
  - \* an anti-bullying policy
  - \* safety statement
  - \* rules in relation to traveling with children
  - \* supervision and recruitment of leaders

*(Note: This may simply mean adopting the regulations set out in the governing body's code for children's sport)*

### 2.8.3 General Statement on Sport for Young People

Each organisation will have their own specific rules to their own sport but these are often taken from the adult section and may not be suitable for young people. Below are some suggestions that are related to younger members of the organisation.

- Ensure the equipment and facilities that children use are suited to their age and stage of development
- List competitive structures that will be used with all age groups, e.g. Blitzes, jamborees, skills awards, mini-games etc. Outline competitions that will allow participation and skill development for very young participants
- Set out appropriate adult:child ratios, e.g. 2 leaders to every 16 children (1:8), but no leader works alone (review this with insurance company)
- Members U18 years of age must wear protective gear - NGB should list all necessary gear. Notify parents at the start of the season
- Members U16 should not play on 2 teams. They may play on a team above their own age category but should not play on more than one team in any one season.
- List any criteria for selection to squads, regional, national etc.
- List means by which Sports Leaders will be recruited into the club / organisation and decide who will check references
- Outline a development pathway for your sport, i.e. what skills (technical, tactical, physical, etc.) should the participant have at 8 years, 12 years, 16 years, etc. How many hours of practice and/or competition will each age group participate in? How is it intended to develop a positive attitude for all young people to sport and physical activity?

### 2.9 DESIGNATED PERSON

Every club/organisation should designate a person to be responsible for dealing with any concerns about the protection of children. The designated person is responsible for reporting allegations or suspicions of child abuse to Health Services Executive or Social Services (NI) and/or An Garda Síochán / PSNI. It is recommended that this person is a senior club person. However, if there is difficulty identifying a separate individual to take this role, the Children's Officer can be appointed as designated person once the club/organisation is clear about the responsibilities of the each role.

The organisation's child protection policy and procedures should include the name and contact details of the designated person and the responsibilities attached to the role.

#### 2.9.1 The National Designated Person should:-

- Have knowledge of the Code of Ethics and statutory guidelines
- Have a knowledge of categories and indicators of abuse
- Undertake training in relation to child protection
- Assist with the ongoing development and implementation of the organisation's child protection training needs
- Provide information and advice on child protection within the organisation
- Together with the National Children's Officer advise the organisation of child protection training needs
- Be familiar with and able to carry out reporting procedures as outlined in Section 5.12 - 5.19 of this Code
- Communicate with parents and/or agencies as appropriate
- Be aware of national and local services responsible for child protection, i.e. principal and duty social workers, etc.
- To inform Health Services Executive / Social services and/or An Garda Síochána/PSNI of relevant concerns about individual children, using the Standard Reporting Form, (see Appendix 6 for sample used in ROI). Keep a copy of this form and ensure acknowledgement of receipt of this form

- Ensure appropriate information is available at the time of referral and that the referral is confirmed in writing, kept under confidential cover
- Liaise with Statutory Authorities and other agencies as appropriate
- Organise the implementation of procedures designed to deal with concerns regarding poor practice within the sport
- Ensure Sports Leader(s) are aware of allegations against them
- Ensure that an individual case record is maintained of the action taken by the organisation, the liaison with other agencies and the outcome
- Ensure records are kept in confidence in a secure location and access is on a 'need to know' basis
- Affiliated clubs and groups should report suspected abuse in relation to Sports Leaders or persistent poor practice to the national governing body's designated person who will then have the responsibility of advising the organisation of ways to ensure that other clubs are protected from re-occurrence of situations of abuse
- The designated person/children's officer will assist the administration on issues of confidentiality, record keeping and data protection.

### 2.9.2 Club Designated Person

- Have knowledge of the Code of Ethics and statutory guidelines
- Have a knowledge of categories and indicators of abuse
- Undertake training in relation to child protection
- Be familiar with and able to carry out reporting procedures as outlined in Section 5.12 - 5.19 of this Code
- Communicate with parents and/or agencies as appropriate
- Assist with the ongoing development and implementation of the organisation's child protection training needs
- Liaise with the national children's officer in relation to child protection training needs
- Be aware of local contacts and services in relation to child protection, i.e. principal and duty social workers and their contacts
- To inform local duty social worker in the Health Services Executive Local Area Board / local Social Services and/or An Garda Síochána/PSNI of relevant concerns about individual children, using the Standard Reporting Form, (see Appendix 6). Keep a copy of this form and ensure acknowledgement of receipt of this form
- Report persistent poor practice to the National Designated Person
- Advise club administrators on issues of confidentiality, record keeping and data protection

*Children's Officers/Designated Persons do not have the responsibility of investigating or validating child protection concerns within the club/organisation and have no counseling or therapeutic role. These roles are filled by the Statutory Authorities as outlined in Children First and Our Duty to Care. It is, however, possible that child protection concerns will be brought to the attention of the Children's Officer. In this event, it is essential that the correct procedure is followed, (See 5.12)*



## 2.10 ROLE OF THE IRISH SPORTS COUNCIL AND SPORTS COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Irish Sports Council and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland have jointly agreed that a common approach is essential in promoting good practice in children's sport.

### **This approach is based on the following underpinning principles:**

- children's involvement in sport should be an enjoyable experience
- the safety of children should always be the paramount concern of those adults responsible for providing sporting opportunities at whatever level an individual adult is involved
- the appropriateness of the experience provided for children should be determined by and based on a child-centred ethos which place the needs of the child at the centre of activities taken
- all adults have a responsibility to be aware of child protection as an issue
- Sports Leaders should be properly recruited and managed and that appropriate training should be made available to them
- the provision of support by the Councils will be subject to the adoption and implementation of the Code by Governing Bodies of Sport

The Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport should be made available to and used by all those involved in children's sport in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Sports Councils will ensure the widest possible dissemination of the Code and ask that this Code is adopted and implemented by all sports clubs/organisations. This approach is based on the need for All-Island consistency in advice offered to clubs, Sports Leaders, parents/guardians, children, and in particular, Governing Bodies of Sport who are responsible for the administration of their sports.

It is intended that information contained in the Code can provide a yardstick by which sports clubs/organisations can measure themselves against the best advice available on policies, procedures and practices that characterise good organisations. It can provide a framework for Sports Leaders who want to protect both themselves and the children they encourage to participate. The positive impact of these guidelines for clubs, leaders and parents/guardians can only be achieved by the Governing Bodies with the support and co-operation of their affiliated clubs.