

Child Protection in Swimming Procedures and Guidelines

The ASA Child Protection Working Group in conjunction with the NSPCC produced these procedures and guidelines

The membership of the ASA Child Protection Working Group includes representatives from clubs with experience in child welfare; the ASA Legal Affairs and Customer Services Departments; together with the Swim Line volunteers who are members of swimming clubs who work in child welfare as a profession; and the NSPCC.

The ASA has an ongoing commitment to the safety and protection of children in swimming.

The Child Protection Working Group, the establishment of Swim Line, the publication of this booklet together with other initiatives described in here is practical examples of this commitment.

FOREWORD

In the ASA we believe that children's welfare is everyone's responsibility, particularly when it comes to protecting children from abuse. Everyone in swimming - administrator, club official, coach, parent, friend, children themselves, everyone - can help.

Abuse can occur anywhere there are children - at home, at school, in the park, at the club. Sadly, there are some people who will seek to be where children are simply in order to abuse them. We believe that everyone in the ASA has a part to play in looking after the children with whom we are working. This is both a moral and arguably, a legal obligation. The Children Act 1989 indicates that anyone who has the care of a child should "do what is reasonable in all the circumstances for the purpose of safeguarding or promoting the child's welfare."

These child protection procedures stem from the following principles:

The child's welfare is the first consideration

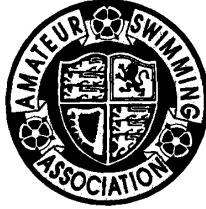
All children, regardless of age, any disability they may have, gender, racial origin, religious belief and sexual identity have a right to be protected from abuse.

We know that if the procedures are to help to protect children, everyone involved in swimming needs to see and discuss them. We are, therefore, asking club secretaries and welfare officers to make sure that they are widely distributed and discussed at club executive and general meetings.

Finally, please remember the ASA will support anyone who, in good faith, reports his or her concerns that a child is at risk of, or may actually be, being abused.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

The Children Act (1989) and Working together to Protect Children (1999) state that there are four main types of abuse - **Physical, Sexual, Emotional and Neglect**. Abuse may be the action or inaction by, for example, a coach volunteer or paid helper, family member or another young athlete.



Physical Abuse is just what the term implies - hurting or injuring a child, for example, by hitting, shaking, burning or biting them. In a sporting context it might also occur if a child is forced to train beyond his/her capabilities, or the intensity of training disregards disabled persons impairment.

Sexual Abuse occurs when a child knowingly or unknowingly takes part in something which meets the sexual needs of the other person or persons involved - it could range from sexually suggestive comments, masturbation to full intercourse. In a sporting context it could involve inappropriate photography or videoing, for the sexual gratification of the viewer.

Emotional Abuse occurs when a child is not given love, help and encouragement and is constantly derided or ridiculed or, perhaps even worse, ignored. Conversely, it can also occur if a child is over-protected. In a sporting context this is present in the unrealistic expectations of parents and coaches over what a child can achieve, or the undermining of an athlete through ridicule. Bullying is likely to come into this category. Racially and sexually abusive remarks constitute emotional abuse and it can be a feature of bullying.

Neglect usually means failing to meet children's basic needs such as food, warmth adequate clothing, medical attention etc. It could also mean failing to ensure they are safe or exposing them to harm. In a sporting context it may be when an athlete's personal or intimate requirements are ignored, particularly if they are disabled.

SOME INDICATIONS

Recognising child abuse is not always easy - even for the experts. The examples listed below are not a complete list and they are only indicators - not confirmation:

Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, bites or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries.

The child says that she or he is being abused, or another person says they believe (or actually know) that abuse is occurring

The child has an injury for which the explanation seems inconsistent or which has not been adequately treated

The child's behaviour changes, either over time or quite suddenly, and he or she becomes quiet and withdrawn, or alternatively becomes aggressive

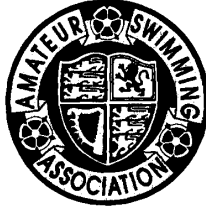
Refusal to remove clothing for normal activities or keeping covered up in warm weather

The child appears not to trust adults, e.g. a parent or coach with whom she or he would be expected to have, or once had, a close relationship, and does not seem to be able to make friends

He or she becomes increasingly neglected-looking in appearance, or loses or puts on weight for no apparent reason

Pain or itching, bruising or bleeding in or near the genital area

The child shows inappropriate sexual awareness for his/her age and sometimes behaves in a sexually explicit way.



Bear in mind those physically disabled children and young people are particularly vulnerable to abuse and may have added difficulties in communicating what is happening to them. Dependency on others for primary needs such as feeding, clothing and intimate care may make a young person feel powerless to report abusive treatment. A fear of retribution for “telling” can be a powerful “silencer”. Difficulty in identifying abusive situations or behaviour may allow it to continue.

IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THE WELFARE OF A CHILD

Please remember that it's not your responsibility to decide whether a child is being abused but we are asking you to act on your concerns. Make a detailed note of what you've seen or heard but don't delay passing on the information.

If you are a member, or the parent/carer or friend of a member, of swimming club you should

- tell a **club officer** such as the **club secretary, chairperson, coach** or any **committee member**, or at an event the **referee** - unless, of course, you suspect them of being involved

Or

- Ring **Swim Line on 0808 100 4001** - Swim Line is the ASA's own Helpline where you can talk to someone who understands both swimming and the requirements of child protection. If you need urgent advice you have the option to transfer to the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline.
- talk to the child's parents/carers about the concerns if you think there may be an obvious explanation such as a bereavement or pressure from studies/exams
- Ring **Swim Line on 0808 100 4001** - Swim Line is the ASA's own Helpline where you can talk to someone who understands both swimming and the requirements of child protection. If you need urgent advice you have the option to transfer to the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline
- Contact your local Social Services Department or, in an emergency, the Police.

If you're working with swimmers away from home, at a training camp perhaps, or a national or regional competition, tell the **team manager** or the **chief coach**

If you're working with a school - tell the **head teacher**.

If you're working in a swim scheme such as local authority swim lessons, refer to your local Child Protection procedures

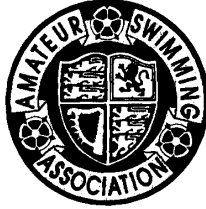
Again, please remember to make a detailed note of what you've seen or heard but don't delay passing on the information. NB you should also write to the ASA Legal Department to advise them of your concern and to whom you have reported it.

Address the letter to:

ASA Legal Affairs Dept., Harold Fern House, Derby Square, Loughborough LE11 5AL

If, however, despite the action you've taken, you feel that the situation hasn't changed, or that nothing has been done please contact **Swim Line** on the **0808 100 4001** number and talk to them about your concerns.

If you are a **club officer** or **referee** you can:



IF A CHILD TELLS YOU THAT HE OR SHE IS BEING ABUSED

React calmly so as not to frighten or deter them.

Reassure them that you are glad that they told you

Don't promise to keep it to yourself.

Explain that you need to make sure that they will be safe and may have to pass on the information to someone trusted to deal with it appropriately

Listen to what the child says and, please, take it seriously.

Only ask questions if you need to clarify what the child is telling you - don't ask the child about explicit details.

Don't ask leading questions - a leading question is one that pre-supposes the answer e.g. "Did Jim hit you?"

Make a detailed note of what the child has told you but, as advised in the previous section, please don't delay passing on the information.

It is never easy to respond to a young person who tells you that they are being abused and you may feel upset and worried yourself. Make sure that you are offered adequate support and an opportunity for de-briefing, bearing in mind confidentiality.

GOOD PRACTICE WHICH CAN HELP TO PREVENT CHILD ABUSE

Avoid situations where teacher/coach/club official and child are alone. The ASA acknowledges that occasionally there may be no alternative - for example, a child may fall ill and have to be taken home. We would stress, however, that one to one contact must never be allowed to occur on a regular basis. Further guidance on this issue is contained in the ASA *Code of Ethics*.

Ascertain the child's and the parent's/carer's views about manual support for children who need this kind of help particularly when they are in the water.

If it's necessary to do things of a personal nature for children who are young or who are disabled, make sure you have another adult accompanying you. Get the child's consent if at all possible and certainly get consent from the parent/carer. Let the child know what you are going to do and why.

Ask parents/carers and/or nominated club officials to be responsible for children in changing rooms.

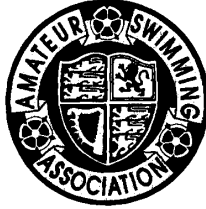
Get teachers/coaches/club officials to work in pairs if classes or groups of children have to be supervised in the changing room.

Ensure that male and female teachers/coaches/club officials always accompany mixed teams.

Don't allow any physically rough or sexually provocative games, or inappropriate talking or touching by anyone, in any group for which you have responsibility.

In competitions and galas, look out for people who don't appear to be relatives or friends of children who are swimming but, nevertheless, seem to spend a lot of time videoing or photographing them. Report these incidents to the organisers or the pool management immediately.

If you're organising a swim meet arrange an accreditation system for parents/relatives and friends and bona fide press photographers. - See Appendix D, *Guidance on Photography and Video-recording*.



Ensure your club adheres to ASA law with particular reference to:

The *Code of Ethics* - See Appendix A

This guidance on child protection

The requirement for coaches and helpers to be registered with the ASA - See Appendix C, *Database Information*

Publicise the ASA Swim Line phone no - 0808 100 4001.

AND FINALLY

If the procedures and guidance contained here are implemented properly, they can offer safeguards to everyone involved in swimming and in doing so help to maintain the credibility of the ASA. Most of all, though, they can help to prevent children being abused.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - *Code of Ethics*

Appendix B - Extract from ASA Law

Appendix C - *Database Information*

Appendix D - *Guidance on Photography and Video-Recording*

Appendix E – Swim Line poster