



Information and guidance to coaches, teachers and poolside helpers

Introduction

The ASA recognise the commitment of all those who work directly with children in swimming, whether paid or unpaid. Swimming training, galas and events at all levels could not take place without coaches, teachers and the many poolside helpers and officials who give their time so generously.

Earlier in this document it has been stated that the responsibility to safeguard children in swimming lies with all those who work directly with, or have responsibility for, children in ASA clubs. Wavepower 2012/15 section 2 gives details of policies, procedures and guidance to enable all who work with children to do so in a safe and appropriate manner. The ASA has a Code of Conduct for all club, county and national level teachers, coaches, officials and poolside helpers, which can be found in Section 2 of Wavepower 2012/15. The ASA Code of Ethics can be found in the ASA Handbook and on the ASA website. All those who work directly with children on poolside must adhere to the club and ASA child safeguarding guidance and procedures to ensure they safeguard children at all times.

In recent years a great deal has been written in the media about the “bad and abusive coach” and very little about the vast majority of good and caring coaches without whom Wavepower would not be a practical document. The ASA have identified through annual studies of referrals to the Safeguarding Team that coaches, teachers and poolside helpers are viewed by swimmers as trustworthy adults. Coaches and teachers have been seen to be “chosen” by young swimmers as a safe and trusted adult to whom they can disclose concerns and abuse in the knowledge that person will help get their concern addressed in a proper and confidential manner. The ASA Safeguarding Team wish to acknowledge the important role undertaken by our coaches and teachers over and above that expected of them in their coaching and teaching role to safeguard our young swimmers and the important role they and all club officers play in putting the ASA Safeguarding Policies and Procedures into practice.

This section of Wavepower has been written with the help of the British Swimming Coaches Association (BSCA) and a representative group of coaches and teachers.

Safeguarding Swimmers

All those who work directly with children must ensure:

- Swimmers are treated with dignity and respect.
- Good practice is promoted to reduce the possibility of abusive situations occurring.
- They and every coach, volunteer, club, official and member of staff continually reflect upon their own coaching, supervisory style, philosophy and practices to ensure the safety and well being of children at all times.
- They always work appropriately and openly with children in the club.
- They are an excellent role model, this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of young people.
- They always put the welfare of each young person first, before winning or achieving goals.
- They build a balanced relationship based on mutual trust, which empowers young people to share in the decision-making process.
- They refer and deal with concerns regarding child safeguarding appropriately.



Coaches and teachers should:

- Keep up to date with the technical skills and qualifications.
- Complete a Criminal Records Bureau Enhanced Disclosure upon commencement in a new post and update that check every 3 years. This is a requirement of ASA Regulations and the ASA Coach Licensing Scheme.
- Complete an ASA approved Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport course upon commencement as a coach. This course should be updated every 3 years, this is a requirement of the ASA Coach Licensing Scheme.
- Maintain their membership of the ASA and Coach / Teacher License Scheme.
- Know and understand the ASA Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures contained in Wavepower.
- Ensure parents and swimmers obtain appropriate information regarding training and competitions.
- Work in partnership with club officers and event organiser(s).
- Not exceed the level of their competence and qualifications.
- Have open and regular communication with the young swimmers parents / carers.
- Ensure that activities are appropriate for the age, maturity, experience and ability of the young swimmer.
- Promote a good sporting environment, honesty, and team play.
- Follow ASA guidance on coaching young people. All coaches should follow the guidance from their awarding body relating to coaching / teaching children.
- Report any concerns they may have in relation to young people following reporting procedures laid down in Wavepower.
- Recognise the expectations on club swimmers to undertake other activities outside of the sport including the demands of school sports and school examinations.

ASA coaches, teachers, officials and helpers should not:

- Take children to their home or other secluded places where they will be alone.
- Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games.
- Share a room with a child.
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching.
- Make sexually suggestive remarks to a child or young people.
- Reduce a child to tears as a form of control.
- Allow children to use inappropriate language or behaviour unchallenged.
- Allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Leave the pool venue before all swimmers have been collected or are continuing to be supervised by appropriate club officers.
- Abuse their position of power or trust with children or adults.
- Resort to bullying tactics or verbal abuse.
- Cause a swimmer to lose self esteem by embarrassing, humiliating or undermining the individual.
- Spend excessive amounts of time with one swimmer to the detriment of the squad / team.
- Do things of a personal nature for young people that they can do for themselves.
- Engage in a sexual relationship with a swimmer aged 17 or under. **NOTE:** Engaging in sexual relations with a child under 16 years of age is a criminal offence.
- Smoke or consume alcohol while working with children and young people.

Please note: This is not an exhaustive list.

The ASA Code of Ethics for coaches and teachers can be found at www.swimming.org or in the ASA handbook.



Relationship with swimmers aged 17 and under

The relationship between coaches and ASA club members who hold a position of trust and responsibility with swimmers under 18 must be professional and appropriate at all times. In some situations legislation may reflect this requirement as outlined below in the sections on the Relationship of Trust and Grooming. However, it must never be forgotten how important the relationship between a coach and swimmer is. Not only does it develop a child's swimming potential and self esteem but it also allows them to develop an appropriate and trusting relationship with a responsible adult. Research of child safeguarding cases in swimming has shown that it is this relationship that has enabled many young people to disclose concerns of a child safeguarding nature to the coach or officer of the club.

The coach / swimmer relationship is a complex one for both parties. It is important that the coach acknowledges that children often develop feelings for people in positions of trust, often identified as "a crush" or "hero worship". In the case of a sports coach this may result from a young person's admiration of the coach's previous achievements i.e. as a national level swimmer, representative of their country etc. Should this happen to you always inform the club Welfare Officer to note the matter and ensure that concerns are discussed and managed in an open and transparent manner as well as advising you on how to manage the issue and take action if required. You and the club Welfare Officer will be able to deal with such situations ensuring you and the young person are safe from harm or allegation.

Coaches may develop stronger relationships with some swimmers than others. It would be unrealistic not to acknowledge that everyone can like one person more than another. However, the professional nature of the coach's position requires they never favour one swimmer or group of swimmers over another. If one swimmer requires more attention for reasons identified by the coach (i.e. the swimmer is preparing for a national level event) then that is totally acceptable, but such preferential or extra attention must be justifiable as a requirement of the sport and for that swimmers professional development and not seen to be detrimental to other swimmers.

Some coaches have seen it as acceptable to give rewards to swimmers who do well and it is acknowledged that in the vast majority of cases, gifts were given with no ulterior motive other than to reward success or improvement.

However, as outlined in the section on Grooming, the giving of gifts or favours can be identified or misconstrued as part of the grooming process. Our clear advice to coaches is do not give your swimmers gifts in any form. It is recommended that if a swimmer is felt by the coach to have attained a level of achievement that should be rewarded then it is the club that should recognise that, on the coach's recommendation, and any recognition in kind is then from the club and not one individual.

Where a coach does wish to carry out such a rewards system, then they should keep relevant personnel within the club or programme hierarchy aware of this and the infrastructure around it so that this cannot be misconstrued. In such cases, the basis behind the rewards and the awarding of rewards should be done on an open and transparent basis, for the sake of all concerned.

It is important that coaches work within the ASA Code of Ethics and follow good practice as outlined in the Code of Conduct to ensure their behaviour to swimmers is appropriate. All coaches are in a position of trust over swimmers and the general rule is to act professionally at all times. If an action you take could be deemed to be unprofessional and inappropriate then do not take that course of action.



Relationship of trust

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 states: "It is an offence for a person aged 18 years or over to involve a child under that age in sexual activity where he or she is in a specified position of trust in relation to that child. This includes those who care for, advise, supervise or train children and young people".

This does not currently apply in law to swimming teachers and coaches but the ASA have adopted this policy into the ASA Code of Conduct and Ethics and any such relationship may result in disciplinary action.

The ASA adopts the Home Office guidelines, which recommend the principle that people in positions of trust and authority do not have sexual relationships with 16/17 year olds in their care. The power and influence a coach or teacher has in a professional relationship with a young person cannot be underestimated. Additionally, the young person's success or failure and team selection may be dependent on the coach. It is vital for all coaches and teachers, as well as other volunteers, to recognise the responsibility they have and ensure that they do not abuse that position of power and trust.

It is therefore the ASA position that no sexual relationship should exist between any young person aged 16/17 years who is a competitor with their coach or teacher and that the relationship between the coach and athlete must be appropriate at all times.

Please note that young people aged 16/17 years can legally consent to some types of sexual activity however, in some provisions of legislation (under the Children's Act 1989) they are classified as children.

Grooming

Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 the grooming of a child for the purposes of developing that relationship into a sexual one is a criminal offence.

Grooming is when an abuser builds a relationship with a child or young person and tries to 'set up' and 'prepare' another person under the age of 16 in order to sexually abuse them. Not all sexual-abuse is preceded by grooming, but it is a very common and may be used by strangers or by those known to the victim. It is a process of deceit, relying on the person appearing to be a helpful and generous person to the child or their parent/carer to get their trust in order to gain the opportunity to abuse. The grooming process can take weeks, months and years and can be very subtle. The adult and child victims of grooming often do not realise that they are being manipulated until

after the sexual abuse has taken place. Some victims are never able to see how the grooming led to their or their child's abuse.

People who sexually abuse children may use many techniques to prepare their victims, such as:

- Offering services and assistance that is inappropriate from someone in a position of trust.
- Paying inappropriate attention to certain children in a group situation.
- Giving gifts.
- Having an inappropriate and intrusive interest into children's physical and sexual development.
- Having inappropriate social boundaries (e.g. telling the potential victims about their own personal problems, etc).
- Sexualising physical contact, such as inappropriate tickling and wrestling.

This can lead to:

- Manipulating a child through threats or coercion.
- Gradually exposing the victim to nudity and/or sexual material in the form of imagery.

This is not an exhaustive list and other exploitative strategies can be used and adapted to the individual child that the potential abuser has targeted.

The ASA recognise the importance of the positive coach / athlete relationship. It is the positive nature of that relationship that has led to many coaches being "the trusted adult" that young people disclose abuse to. The vast majority of coaches behave professionally and develop the coach / athlete relationship with young people in a responsible and appropriate manner. However, it is clear from the ASA's experience and research, that a small minority of persons in positions of trust, including sports coaches, abuse their position and groom young people, and in many cases their parents, prior to committing acts of sexual abuse.

The ASA is clear in its expectations that ASA coaches have a responsibility to maintain that relationship of trust within the boundary of professionalism as outlined in the ASA Code of Ethics and Conduct. Coaches who breach that professional relationship in a manner that may be considered as possible grooming, even without police action being taken, are not only placing the young person at risk but also placing themselves at risk of allegation and possible action under the ASA Disciplinary and Child Protection Regulations for a breach of the ASA Code of Conduct and Ethics.



Coach Licensing

The majority of people involved with swimming and the associated disciplines recognise the need to have a well regulated 'professional' workforce. Licensing can contribute towards the achievement of the aim.

The ASA licence equates to an 'accreditation to practise'. Any candidate achieving an ASA Awarding Body coach or teacher qualification, or such qualification accepted by the ASA Awarding Body (past or present), will be eligible to apply for a Coach or Teacher licence. An individual's licence will reflect their qualification attainment level and disciplines. Each licence will be valid for a 3-year period and will be renewable subject to the holder meeting the specified criteria.

Whilst the licence will require the licensee to keep up to date with their knowledge and experiences, vocational delivery quality will remain the responsibility of the employer, club and the individual. The opportunity to become licensed is open to all qualified aquatic professionals, whether paid or unpaid for their service, who meet the stated criteria and are committed to ongoing personal development. However, the requirement to become licensed does not apply to all.

What are the benefits to coach licensing?

- Provides proof of competence.
- Provides some protection for children through Criminal Records Bureau (CRB).
- Helps to promote high standards for teaching and coaching.
- Provides a framework for continuous improvement and professional development.
- Assists employers and clubs in the selection of teachers and coaches.
- Provides for a separation of qualified and unqualified staff.
- Acts as a catalyst for implementing change.
- Commits the holder to uphold the Code of Ethics in swimming.
- Provides external credibility for the profession and the governing bodies of swimming.
- Provides an online search facility for employers and clubs to check the licence status of individuals.

Further information on Coach Licensing can be obtained from the ASA Awarding Body or on the ASA website www.swimming.org

Frequently asked questions

The ASA recognise that coaches, teachers and poolside helpers may be wary in putting themselves in positions where false allegations can be made and for this reason may overly interpret the guidance given in this document. It is important the guidance is interpreted appropriately and in a common sense manner so it does not hinder the building of professional, appropriate and safe relationships with swimmers.

Below are some questions that have arisen in recent months that should assist in looking at the procedures in a manner that shows appropriate flexibility and advice of where specific guidance can be obtained.

1. What do I do if I find I am inadvertently left alone with a swimmer?

Firstly don't panic. You are now the only person in situ who can ensure the wellbeing of that young person so although the guidance says "do not place yourself in a situation where you are alone with a young person" in this case to absent yourself would potentially put that young person at risk. You should therefore ensure the wellbeing of the child. In this case that means wait with that child until the parent arrives and use your mobile to inform another coach or committee member of the situation.

It is unlikely you will have the parent's phone number but the swimmer should be able to give their number or if of an age to have their own mobile phone contact the parent themselves. Take sensible precautions while waiting with the young person – talk only about matters which are acceptable between coach and swimmer and if you are in a leisure centre with other users wait for the parent in a public area. If you are at a venue that has no other users wait in an area that is open and where the parent can clearly see you when they arrive.

If a parent is repeatedly arriving late to collect their child discuss this with the club welfare officer. The ASA provides a Late Collection of Children Policy which the welfare officer may decide to action.



2. If a parent fails to arrive, it is getting late and I cannot contact them by phone what should I do?

In such circumstances it may be necessary for you to consider transporting that swimmer home. If other suitable adults are present ask one to accompany you and the young person in the car to the swimmers home. If not ensure you tell another club officer of the action you are taking by phone, sit the swimmer in the back of the car and make sure before you set off you know where you are going to return the child home.

When you arrive at the swimmers home hand the swimmer over to the parent. Do not get into discussion with the parent about their failure to collect their swimmer in front of the swimmer concerned but suggest you will inform the club Welfare Officer and ask they speak to the parent the following day.

3. As a coach on poolside can I physically comfort a swimmer who is upset, can I congratulate a swimmer who has done well by shaking their hand and can I assist a young swimmer manually in the water?

The answer to all the above is yes but always in a reasonable and appropriate manner.

As regards comforting a swimmer it is not always necessary to place an arm around a swimmer who is upset. Sitting down and listening to them and maybe holding their hand can show concern for their upset. Often swimmers do get distressed if they compete and feel they have done a "bad swim" and sometimes a coach by just being positive can assist for example saying "well the dive and turns were good and we can look in training next week at the stroke issues". And certainly you can shake the hands of a swimmer who has done well, this is often seen by a swimmer as high praise from the coach.

As regards teaching in the water and other handling issues the ASA guidance document "Teaching in the water and handling children" has been written to advise and guide on how to safely handle young swimmers in the water. This document can be found at www.swimming.org.

4. I work mainly with able bodied swimmers at my club but on occasions I coach young disability swimmers some of whom are just learning to swim and some who are ready to move up into squads. I am unsure on how to physically handle swimmers with a disability safely when in the water and how to integrate them when ready into the sessions I teach / coach with mainly mainstream swimmers.

The ASA has published a document entitled "Inclusion of swimmers with a disability" which is available to all coaches and teachers at www.swimming.org The document includes guidance on what is safe and the appropriate handling of swimmers with a disability. This guidance should answer many of your questions but it is also advised that you undertake one of the ASA Continual Professional Development (CPD) courses such as "Integrating swimmers with a physical and sensory impairment into mainstream teaching" and "Integrating disabled swimmers into a mainstream coaching environment" to assist in your ongoing development and inform your working with disability swimmers.



Managing challenging behaviour guidelines

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, e.g. 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, additional support provided where necessary 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 people.

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 young people, where appropriate. 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.

Physical intervention

The use of physical intervention should always be avoided unless it is absolutely necessary to prevent a child injuring themselves or others, or causing serious damage to property. All forms of physical intervention should form part of a broader approach to the management of challenging behavior.

Physical contact to prevent something happening should always be the result of conscious decision-making and not a reaction. Before physically intervening, the member of staff or volunteer should ask themselves, 'Is this the only option in order to manage the situation and ensure safety?' It is good practice to ensure that if you have to physically intervene in a situation with a child/ young person, it is in the least restrictive way necessary to prevent them from getting hurt, and used only after all other strategies have been exhausted. Studies have shown that, where this is the case, children and young people understand and accept the reasons for the intervention.

The following must always be considered:

- Contact should be avoided with buttocks, genitals and breasts. Staff / volunteers should never behave in a way, which could be interpreted as sexual.
- Any form of physical intervention should achieve an outcome that is in the best interests of the child whose behavior is of immediate concern.
- Staff / volunteers should consider the circumstances, the risks associated with employing physical intervention compared with the risks of not employing physical intervention.
- The scale and nature of physical intervention must always be proportionate to the behaviour of the young person and the nature of harm / damage they might cause.
- All forms of physical intervention should employ only a reasonable amount of force, i.e. the minimum force needed to avert injury to a person or serious damage to property - applied for the shortest period of time.
- Staff / volunteers should never employ physical interventions, which are deemed to present an unreasonable risk to children or staff / volunteers.



- Staff / volunteers shall never use physical intervention as a form of punishment.
- Physical intervention should NOT involve inflicting pain.
- Where children are identified as having additional needs or behaviors that are likely to require physical intervention, this should be discussed with parents / carers and where necessary the club will seek advice from or work in partnership with external agencies (e.g. Children's Social Care) to ensure that a child or young person can be supported to participate safely. This may include asking for the provision of a suitably trained support worker / volunteer or accessing staff / volunteer training in physical intervention.

Any physical intervention used should be recorded as soon as possible after the incident by the staff / volunteers involved using the Incident Report or Referral Form. A copy should be passed to the club welfare officer as soon as possible.

Views of the child

It is clear from the accounts of children and young people that physical intervention provokes strong feelings. Children may be left physically or emotionally hurt. Even a child who hasn't directly been involved in the situation may be fearful that it will happen to them in future or have been upset by seeing what has happened to others.

A timely debrief for staff / volunteers, the child and parents should always take place following an incident where physical intervention has been used. This should include ensuring that the physical and emotional well being of those involved has been addressed and ongoing support offered where necessary. Staff / volunteers, children and parents should be given an opportunity to talk about what happened in a calm and safe environment.

There should also be a discussion with the child and parents about the child's needs and continued safe participation in the group or activity.

It is important that staff and volunteers are made aware of and understand the organisation / club's guidance about managing challenging behavior to ensure that they are aware of ways in which they may need to intervene and are clear about the practice guidance in this area.

Policy for managing challenging behaviour

In conclusion, all organisations that have a Duty of Care to children and young people should develop and implement policies 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 behavior 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 or 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" (Sport Scotland / Children 1st).

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