Chapter 4
Practice

PRACTICE

Leaders in children's sport should always strive to interact positively with children, enhancing the child's involvement and enjoyment of the sporting activity and promoting the welfare of the participant. The Code assists in the achievement of these aims and can also help to protect Sports Leaders in their various roles by providing a framework for the promotion of good practice.

4.1 GUIDELINES FOR SPORTS LEADERS

Sports Leaders have an important role to play in promoting good practice in children's sport. They should have as their first priority the children's safety and enjoyment of the sport. The Sports Leaders' success should not be evaluated by performance or results of competition. They should enjoy a sense of achievement and pleasure through their work with young people. After undertaking appropriate education and training within the club or organisation, Sports Leaders will be well prepared to operate in a safe sporting environment with a knowledge and understanding of their role and responsibilities. They should be supported in their work by the sports club/organisation and parents/guardians.

Sports Leaders are responsible for setting and monitoring the boundaries between a working relationship and friendship with young participants. Sports Leaders should operate to the club's agreed code of conduct, which emphasises enjoyment, equality, fair play and the general well being of young people. This model of good practice should help children to demonstrate an awareness of equality, fair play and respect for Sports Leaders, other members of their group and the rules of the sport. The club/ organisation and parents/guardians should afford Sports Leaders the respect they deserve and make them aware of any special needs of the child.

Club / Organisational procedures should support the Sports Leaders' model of good practice, thus ensuring protection for both the Leader and the participant. In so doing, Sports Leaders should feel able to make a complaint in an appropriate manner and have it dealt with through an effective complaints procedure. They should be able to appeal any decision through an effective appeals procedure (See 3.4).

In order to act as a role model and to promote their safety and the safety of young people Sports Leaders should:

- Be positive, praise and encourage effort as well as results
- Put the welfare of young people first, strike a balance between this and winning
- Encourage fair play and treat participants equally
- Have the relevant knowledge and experience to work with young people
- Understand developmental needs of young people

Where possible, and for their own safety, Sports Leaders should avoid:

- spending excessive amounts of time with children away from others
- taking sessions alone
- taking children on journeys alone in their car
- the use of alcohol before coaching, during events and on trips with young people

Sports Leaders should not:

- use any form of corporal punishment or physical force on a child
- take children to the their home
- exert undue influence over a participant in order to obtain personal benefit or reward
- engage in rough physical games, sexually provocative games or allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any kind, and/or make sexually suggestive comments about, or to, a child
- take measurements or engage in certain types of fitness testing without the presence of another adult
- undertake any form of therapy (hypnosis etc.) in the training of children

For further information and sample codes for leaders see www.irishsportscouncil.ie and www.sportni.net

4.2 PHYSICAL CONTACT

Physical contact during sport should always be intended to meet the child's needs, NOT the adult's. The adult will probably use appropriate contact when the aim is to assist in development of the skill or activity or for safety reasons, e.g. to prevent or treat an injury. This should be in an open environment with the permission and understanding of the participant. In general

- Contact should be determined by the age and developmental stage of the participant - Don't do something that a child can do for themselves
- Never engage in inappropriate touching such as touching of groin, genital areas, buttocks, breasts or any other part of the body that might cause a child distress or embarrassment

4.3 GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Parents/guardians have the primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their children within sport. Parents/guardians should encourage their children to participate in sport for fun and enjoyment and should ensure that their child's experience of sport is a positive one. Lessons learned in children's sport will shape values and attitudes in adult life. They should always remember that children play sport for their own enjoyment not that of the parents/guardians. Parents/guardians have a duty to ensure that the context in which their child is participating is appropriate.

Parents/guardians and Sports Leaders will ideally work in partnership to promote good practice in children's sport and to support all efforts to protect against neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse in sporting activities. To do so, parents/guardians should ensure that sports clubs treat their children with fairness, respect and understanding, and that the club is fulfilling its responsibility to safeguard children. They should encourage their children to tell them about anyone causing them harm. They should become aware of club procedures and policies, in particular where changes are made that effect them or their children, and be informed of all matters relating to ethics and good practice. They should check that the *Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport* has been adopted and implemented in the club/organisation.

Parents/guardians should remember that children learn best by example. To assist in the promotion of good practice with the club or organisation they should:

- be aware of the relevant Sports Leaders and their role within the club
- show appreciation of and respect for Sports Leaders and their decisions
- encourage their child to play by the rules
- behave responsibly on the sideline
- focus on their child's efforts rather than performance
- focus on the fun and participation of the child in the activity
- liaise with the Sports Leaders in relation to the times/locations of training sessions, medical conditions of their children and any requirement for their child's safety

To promote the procedures of good practice parents/guardians should be:

- encouraged to become members of the club, where feasible, and take an active interest in the running of the club or any sporting activities in which their children take part
- willing to become the Club Children's Officer or assist in the running of the club
- informed of the training and/or competitive programmes and be satisfied with the general environment that is created for their children
- informed if their child sustained an injury during sporting activities
- informed of problems or concerns relating to their children.
- informed in advance and have their consent sought in relation to matters regarding away trips, camps or specially organised activities (see also 4.6)

Comments and suggestions by parents/guardians should always be considered and their complaints acknowledged and dealt with as they arise through an effective and confidential complaints procedure.

Parents/guardians should not:

- ignore or dismiss complaints or concerns expressed by a child which relate to his/her involvement in sport
- ridicule or yell at a child for making a mistake or losing a game
- put undue pressure on their child to please or perform well, including forcing a child to participate when ill
- take safety for granted
- treat the club as a child-minding service

4.4 GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN

Children have a great deal to gain from sport in terms of their personal development and enjoyment. The promotion of good practice in sport will depend on the co-operation of all involved, including child members of sports clubs/organisations. Children must be encouraged to realise that they also have responsibilities to treat other children and Sports Leaders with fairness and respect.

4.4.1 Children in sport are entitled to:

- be listened to
- be believed
- be safe and to feel safe
- participate in sporting activities on an equal basis, appropriate to their ability and stage of development
- be treated with dignity, sensitivity and respect
- be happy, have fun and enjoy sport
- experience competition at a level at which they feel comfortable and the desire to win as a positive and healthy outcome for striving for best performance
- comment and make suggestions in a constructive manner
- make a complaint in an appropriate way and have it dealt with through an effective complaints procedure
- be afforded appropriate confidentiality
- be represented at decision making bodies/meetings within their sports club/organisation
- have a voice in the running of their club
- approach the Children's Officer/Designated Person with any questions or concerns they may have

4.4.2 Children should undertake to:

- play fairly, do their best and have fun
- shake hands before and after the event, whoever wins - and mean it
- respect officials and accept their decisions with grace, not a grudge
- respect fellow team members; give them full support both when they do well and when things go wrong
- respect opponents, they are not enemies, they are partners in a sporting event
- give opponents a hand if they are injured or have problems with equipment
- accept apologies from opponents when they are offered
- exercise self-control and tolerance for others, even if others do not
- be modest in victory and be gracious in defeat
- show appropriate loyalty to their sport and all its participants
- make high standards of fair play the example others want to follow

4.4.3 Children should not:

- cheat
- use violence, using physical contact only when it is allowed within the rules
- shout at, or argue with, the referee, officials, team mates or opponents
- take banned substances to improve performance
- bully or use bullying tactics to isolate another player
- use unfair or bullying tactics to gain advantage
- harm team mates, opponents or their property
- tell lies about adults or other children
- spread rumours
- keep secrets about any person who may have caused them harm

4.5 SUPERVISION AND GENERAL GUIDELINES

4.5.1 Transport

There is an extra responsibility on adults and leaders when they transport young people to events. Adults should

- Ensure there is adequate insurance on their car and that they follow the rules of the road, including the legal use of seat belts
- Ensure they do not carry more than the permitted number of passengers
- Avoid being alone with one passenger, put passengers in the back seat, have central drop off locations or seek parental permission when transporting on a regular basis. Parents should check with young people about the plans, listen to what the young people are saying, be sure they are happy with the transport arrangements.

4.5.2 General Supervision

- Ensure adequate Adult: Child ratios. Good practice dictates that a leader should try to ensure that more than one adult is present. This will help to ensure the safety of the children as well as protect adults
- Adult:Child ratios will depend on the nature of the activity, the age of the participants and any special needs of the group, a general guide might be 1:8 for under 12 years of age and 1:10 for over 12 years of age
- There should be at least one adult of each gender with mixed parties

- Away trips will need higher rates of supervision and these should be checked out with the governing body or organiser, children and young people should be supervised at all times.
- Avoid adults being left alone with young participants, if a leader needs to talk separately to a participant this should be done in an open environment, in view of others
- Respect the privacy of young people while changing, leaders may only need to enter changing rooms where the participants are very young or require special assistance. When necessary, leaders should supervise in pairs or seek assistance, it is the safety and welfare of the participants that is of paramount importance
- Leaders should not be left alone with young people at the end of a training session. Clearly state times for start and finish of training and/or competitions. If late collections occur leaders should remain in pairs until participants have left. It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to make arrangements for collection of young people, it should be made clear that the club is responsible for only club activities
- If a child suffers an injury or accident the parents/guardians should be informed. See sample accident form on www.irishsportscouncil.ie

4.5.3 Overnight & Away trips

- Written permission of parents/guardians should be obtained for all overnight away trips, this should include permission to travel, behaviour agreement and any medical/special needs of the group, (including permission to treat the participant)
- The agreement should be signed by both parents and participants
- A meeting with parents and participants is useful to communicate travel times, competition details, other activities, gear requirements, special needs (medical or dietary), and any other necessary details, contact details, codes of conduct, etc.
- The governing body should share any appropriate information with leaders of the group
- All adults who travel on away trips should be carefully chosen, using the recruitment and selection procedure in section 3.5 of this code
- The roles and responsibilities of adults participating in away trips should be clearly defined
- The Governing Body of Sport/Sports Club should appoint a Team Manager/Head of Delegation for away trips. S/he should have overall responsibility for the children's well-being, behaviour and sleeping arrangements. S/he should be appointed as an official of the club for the duration of the trip
- The Team Manager should submit a written report to the organisers as soon as possible after the end of the trip
- On away trips, coaches should be accountable to the Team Manager in all non-performance related matters
- Where there are mixed teams there should be leaders of both genders (at least one female and/or male in the management/coaching structure)
- Adults should not share a room with a child. Where the presence of an adult is needed there should be more than one child in the room with the adult. If children are sharing a room, it should be with those of the same groupings, age and gender
- Managers should check out the venue beforehand, so that separate and appropriate sleeping arrangements can be made in advance
- Alcoholic drink, smoking and other illegal substances / activities are forbidden to participants. Leaders should act as role models in this respect.

4.5.4 Hosting

Being a host family or being hosted is an integral part of many sports and, if handled appropriately, can add to a child's enjoyment and experience at a competition. Hosting can be a challenging role but also very rewarding. Special care should be taken in the selection of homes for overnight stays. A host should be provided with as much information about the child/children staying with them and details of the competition. Where practicable more than one child should be placed with each host family. The family in turn should agree to provide references and be vetted when and if this is available. In addition clubs should follow the recruitment and selection procedures outlined in Section 3.5 of this Code.

When arranging for events/trips abroad, the club or Governing Body will be dependent on the ability of the host organisation to access vetting services and obtain appropriate references. It is the responsibility of the trip organiser to provide the hosts with the relevant information on the child and details of what is expected.

Host families should

- Agree to abide by the Governing Bodies Code of Conduct
- Consent to appropriate checks and references
- Attend host family meetings before competitions or events
- Provide a safe and supportive environment for young people

Governing Bodies / Clubs should

- Provide a travel pack to hosting families
- Check out references with hosting families
- Provide an itinerary of the trip
- Gather information on destination and venue

Young People

- Should sign a behaviour agreement
- Should not be asked to share a bed or a room with an adult
- Should be happy with the arrangements
- Should show respect to the host families

4.6 SAFETY

All Governing Bodies of Sport and sports clubs should ensure that a clear statement of specific and potential risks attached to their particular sport is widely publicised to all members. They should also have specific procedures in place for safeguarding against such risks. The following practices should apply in order to promote safety:

- activities being undertaken should be suitable for the ability, age, and experience of the participants
- equipment and facilities should meet the highest possible standards and be appropriate to the maturity of the participants
- where protective equipment is deemed necessary it should be used
- First Aid should be available for all-training sessions and events. There should be a proper First Aid Kit. First Aid information should be a basic element of a coaching leadership course
- injuries should be recorded, with a note of the action taken in relation to each one. It is recommended that each club maintain an accident book with a specific incident form for completion by Sports Leaders, with due regard for confidentiality. If you have concerns in relation to the welfare of the child see section 5.12
- parents/guardians should be notified, by the Sports Leader, of injuries/illness which children incur while participating in a sporting activity
- all clubs should have a simple and widely known emergency plan to ensure safety procedures
- umpires and referees should ensure that the conduct of the games conform to the standards set by the Governing Body of Sport
- children should be taught the rules of the game at club level and be encouraged to abide by them, keeping in mind that many rules are there for safety

- it is important that before children participate in a sporting activity, they have learned and agreed personal safety rules. If Sports Leaders take children into potentially dangerous situations they should hold the appropriate qualification required by the Governing Body concerned
- parents/guardians should know, and abide by, the starting and finishing times of sessions and events

4.7 INSURANCE

All clubs and organisations should ensure that appropriate insurance cover is in place to cover the activities of the club, Sports Leaders and participants. Away trips should be included in such cover. For away trips parents/guardians should be made aware of the need for comprehensive insurance to cover their child, e.g. health /medical insurance etc.

Adults transporting children in their cars should be aware of the extent and limits of their motor insurance cover, particularly in relation to acceptable numbers and liability.

4.8 REGISTRATION, DROPOUT AND CLUB TRANSFERS

Loss of club members, including adult transfers, should be monitored. Any unusual or unexpected dropout or club transfer of children or Sports Leaders should be checked out by the Club Children's Officer and/or the governing body. If any concerns regarding a child or children's welfare are raised the matter should be handled in accordance with procedures outlined in section 5.12 of this Code.

4.9 DISCIPLINE IN CHILDREN'S SPORT

Discipline in sport should always be positive in focus, providing the structure and rules that allow participants to learn to set their own goals and strive for them. It should encourage young people to become more responsible for themselves and therefore more independent.

Children should be helped to become responsible about the decisions and choices they make within sport, particularly when they are likely to make a difference between playing fairly and unfairly. There should be no place for fighting, over-aggressive or dangerous behaviour in sport.

4.9.1 THE USE OF SANCTIONS

The use of sanctions is an important element in the maintenance of discipline. The age and developmental stage of the child should be taken into consideration when using sanctions. Sanctions should be fair and consistent and in the case of persistent offence, should be progressively applied. They should never be used to retaliate or to make a Sports Leader feel better. The following steps are suggested and should always be used in conjunction with the code of conduct for young people:

- rules should be stated clearly and agreed
- a warning should be given if a rule is broken
- a sanction (for example, use of time out) should be applied if a rule is broken for a second time. The use of green, yellow and red cards are encouraged, irrespective of the sport
- if a rule is broken for the third time the child should be spoken to, and if necessary, the parents/guardians may be involved
- sanctions should not be applied if a Sports Leader is not comfortable with them. If an appropriate action cannot be devised right away, the child should be told that the matter will be dealt with later, at a specified time and as soon as possible
- a child should not be sanctioned for making errors when s/he is playing
- physical activity (e.g. running laps or doing push-ups) should not be used as a sanction. To do so only causes a child to resent physical activity, something that s/he should learn to enjoy throughout his/her life
- sanctions should be used sparingly. Constant sanctioning and criticism can cause a child to turn away from sport
- once sanctions have been imposed, it is important to make the young person feel s/he is a valued member of the group again
- where relevant some sanctions may need to be recorded and parents informed

4.10 USE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC AND MOBILE EQUIPMENT

Each club should adopt a policy in relation to the use of images of athletes on their websites and other publications, as there have been concerns about the risks posed directly and indirectly to children and young people. Adults and sports leaders need to work together to prevent those wishing to cause such harm to young people. Remember having photographic and filming guidelines is not about preventing parents from taking pictures, it is to ensure that only those who have a right to take photographs do so. Anyone concerned about photography taking place at events or training sessions can contact the children's officer/ designated person and ask them to deal with the matter.

The purpose is to reduce the risk of inappropriate, unsolicited attention from people within and outside the sport. Group photographs where the club is identified rather than individuals are good for publicity without creating a risk to those in the photographs. As a guide try to remember the following:-

- If the athlete is named, avoid using their photograph.
- If a photograph is used, avoid naming the athlete.
- Ask for the athlete's permission to use their image to ensure that they are aware of the way the image is to be used to represent the sport.
- Ask for parental permission to use the athlete's image to ensure that parents are aware of the way the image is to be used to represent the sport. A permission form could be used or make an announcement at the start of an event.
- To reduce the risk of inappropriate use, only use images of athletes in suitable dress. The content of the photograph should focus on the activity not on a particular child
- Talk to children's officer/designated person if you are worried about use of images

Amateur photographers/film/video operators wishing to record an event or practice session should seek accreditation with the children's officer, event organiser or leader of session. Permission forms should be available on site.

To ensure spectators and participants are informed of the policy, the club/event/organisation should display the following information prior to the start of an event and where possible make an announcement over a tanoy.

"In line with the recommendation in the _____ *(name of club /association's) Code of Conduct, the promoters of this event request that any person wishing to engage in any video, zoom or close range photography should register their details with the organisers. It is not advisable that children are photographed or filmed without their permission and/or the permission of their parent/guardian".*

Working in Partnership to protect young people

Photographs, when used with personal information, can be used as a means of identifying children. This practice can make a child vulnerable to an individual who may wish to "groom" that child for abuse. Furthermore the content of the photo can be used or adapted for inappropriate use. There is evidence of this adapted material finding its way onto child pornography sites. Adults and sports leaders need to work together to prevent those wishing to cause such harm to young people.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are often given to children for security, enabling parents to keep in touch and make sure they are safe. Young people value their phones highly as it offers them a sense of independence. In addition mobile phones allow quick and easy contact, which can make a safe and efficient way to carry out club business. However such technology has also allowed an increase in direct personal contact with young people, in some cases used to cross personal boundaries and cause harm to young people. Within clubs there is a need to encourage responsible and secure use of mobile phones by adults and young people.

As a young person remember

- If you receive an offensive photo, email or message, do not reply, save it, make a note of times and dates and tell a parent or children's officer/designated person within the club.
- Be careful about who you give your phone number to and don't respond to unfamiliar numbers
- Change your phone number in cases of bullying or harassment
- Don't use the phone in certain locations; inappropriate use of your camera phone may cause upset or offence to another person, e.g. changing rooms
- Treat you phone as you would any other valuable item so that you guard against theft

As a Leader remember

- Use group texts for communication among athletes and teams and inform parents of this at the start of the season
- It is not appropriate to have constant communication with individual athletes
- Don't use the phone in certain locations; inappropriate use of your camera phone may cause upset or offence to another person, e.g. changing rooms

For further information see www.irishsportscouncil.ie/code