

# Club Guidelines

This is one of a series of documents intended to set the standard for implementation of the Code of Ethics within Rowing. It applies to all Clubs with young people participating in Irish Rowing.



**ROWING  
IRELAND**

## Rowing and young people

Leaders become involved in rowing for a variety of different reasons, come from various sporting backgrounds, and take on varying roles within clubs. Yet irrespective of the role or responsibility, we share a common goal in our commitment to sport for young people.

We want sport to be safe, we want sport to be fun and we want to ensure that no matter what sport young people are involved in, that it takes place in the spirit of **'fair play'**.

Fair play is the guiding principle of The Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport. The Code is designed to provide guidance for those working with young people in sport. It outlines for sports organisations the type of issues that need to be discussed and addressed to provide the safest and most enjoyable environment for young people.

The main reasons young people want to take part in rowing are they want to learn new skills, make new friends, be part of a group, to win and be successful, experience excitement, challenges and action. These too, are the reasons why most leaders are involved in sport for young people. We know sport has a lot to offer. Yet, irrespective of whether we want them to become fitter, more confident, more sociable or more skillful, we want young people to enjoy what they are doing and we want to create the safest possible environment in which they can do this.

## Guidance for Clubs

Here are some practical ways for your organisation to help safeguard the children and young people who take part in your activities:

- **A Child Friendly Club**
- **Code for Coaches/Leaders**
- **Code for Parents**
- **Ratios**
- **Changing rooms**
- **Injuries and illness**
- **Collection by parents/carers**
- **Discipline**
- **Physical contact**
- **Sexual activity**
- **Participants with disabilities**
- **Good practice for linking with schools**
- **Responsibility to Report**
- **Mobile Phones etc.**

## A Child Friendly Club

There are a number of steps a rowing club can take to ensure a fun and safe sporting environment for young people.

1. Examine the role the club plays in the quality of the participant's involvement.

Are all participants encouraged to:

- Have a go – put in their best effort
- Improve their skills
- Make friends
- Play by the rules
- Appreciate/accept everyone in the group, regardless of ability, race, religion, gender etc.
- Accept winning and losing as part of the sport.

Consider the reasons why young people want to play sport and compare them with the club's attitude to sport for young people. It may be necessary to make adjustments to the policies and procedures of the club.

2. Encourage members to be role models to junior members - participants learn best by example:

- Show appreciation of, and respect towards, officials and their decisions
- Encourage participants to play within the rules
- Behave responsibly as a spectator and in all interactions involving young people
- Focus on the fun and participation of young people in the activity

3. Examine the structures within the club. They should encourage the development of young people, making them the centre of all the club's activities, policies and procedures. Ensure that the club:

- Operates within a constitution which promotes a child-centred approach
- Has adopted The Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport in Ireland
- Has its members affiliated and signed up to an agreed code of good practice
- Clearly defines and outlines the roles and duties of leaders
- Has proper selection, recruitment and management policies in place, applicable to all members
- Has an effective disciplinary and complaints procedure, including an appeals procedure
- Appoints Children's Officers

4. The Sports Leader is an important influence on the young person's enjoyment of sport.

It is important that the club supports the leader as much as possible by:

- Encouraging an emphasis on fun as well as competition
- Providing opportunities for young people to socialise, learn and improve new skills
- Providing each junior member with a chance to participate
- Encouraging leaders to use modified games or equipment where possible
- Communicating often with leaders
- Offering leaders an opportunity to attend appropriate training
- Encouraging other committee members to attend or assist at sessions

5. Parents can also play their part to support the club. Encourage them to:

- Become a member of the club and commit to an agreed code of good practice
- Become the Children's Officer
- Take an active interest or offer to help in the running of the club, club events or any sporting activities in which their child takes part
- Be aware of their child's training and/or competitive programmes and its suitability for the child

6. Encourage all leaders working with young people to undertake appropriate education & training.

The local Sports Council and Coaching Ireland will work with Rowing Ireland and Clubs in the implementation of a specially designed module on working with 'Children in Sport', which will be available to leaders and Children's Officers.

General Training for all those working with young people should include:

- The Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport
- Knowledge specific to, or experience of, working with children, including the 'Children in Sport' training module.
- Understanding of child development as it relates to sport
- Communication skills
- A recognised up-to-date coaching qualification from Rowing Ireland to lead sport specific sessions
- Awareness of the appropriate response to suspicions or reports of child abuse
- Knowledge of or access to relevant first aid

In following the steps above sports clubs can be confident that they are contributing to the enjoyment of sport for young people.

Sport provides an excellent pathway for young people to learn new skills, become more confident and maximize their own potential. These benefits will occur through a positive approach to the involvement of children in sport that places the needs of the child first and winning and competition second.

Winning is an important goal but winning at all costs does not meet the needs of young participants. Help them to enjoy the thrill of competing, to improve their skills, to try hard, to have a good time, to have the courage to compete and to come back for more.

Focus on the importance of participation for each child, best effort and enjoyment. If participants enjoy their earlier experiences of sport they are more likely to stay involved, returning many benefits in terms of the health and well being of our future adult population.

### [Code of Conduct and Good Practice for Coaches/Sports Leaders](#)

### [Code of Conduct and Good Practice for Parents and Guardians](#)

#### Ratios

Adult/participant ratios should be based on the age of the children involved, the degree of risk the activity involves, and whether there are disability needs. The lower the age of the participants, the greater the need for supervision. If the activity is mixed gender, male and female staff should be available.

Further information: [Guidelines on staffing/supervision ratios for children/young people's activities](#)

## Changing rooms

- For private club facilities, when children and young people use changing rooms, they should be supervised by two members of staff/volunteers. Adult staff /volunteers should not change or shower at the same time using the same facilities. For mixed gender activities, separate facilities should be available for boys and girls.
- If a child feels uncomfortable changing or showering in public, no pressure should be placed on them to do so. Instead, they should be encouraged to shower or change at home.
- If children with disabilities use your club, make sure they and their carers are involved in deciding how they should be assisted. Ensure they are able to consent to the assistance that is offered.

## Injuries and illness

Your organisation should have guidelines and report forms for any injuries children sustain during activities. Where staff witness an injury the parents must be told as soon as possible. If the child needs medical attention you must arrange this immediately and inform the parents/carers as soon as possible. You should always ensure you have up-to-date contact details at activities or events and information about any relevant medical conditions.

### [Sample Accident Reporting Form](#)

## Collection by parents/ carers

Your organisation should develop and publicise policies about the collection of children and young people from activities. These policies should be based on the age of the children and the location, time and type of activity.

Make sure you receive permission from parents/carers for children and young people to participate in any of the events, training or practice sessions you run. This should be done by using a consent form.

### **Sample Parental / Guardians Consent Form**

This form may be one of the few formal communications with every parent therefore we would recommend that you use it to also promote the safeguarding practices you have in place. You should provide a timetable of activities at the beginning of the season. You should also notify parents/carers of any changes to this timetable in writing.

### **Late collection of children**

Late collection of children by parents presents clubs and coaches with a potentially difficult situation. Your organisation should develop written guidelines for parents, this could be included in a code of conduct which explains your policy for dealing with late collection of children.

### **Code of Conduct and Good Practice for Parents and Guardians**

- make clear that it is not your organisation's responsibility to transport children home on behalf of parents who have been delayed
- include a staff/volunteer contact number and an instruction to parents/carers to phone if there is any likelihood of late collection
- ask parents to provide an alternative contact name or number, for staff/volunteers to use when they are not available on their usual number.

In cases of late collection, staff and volunteers **should:**

- attempt to contact the child's parent or carer on their contact number
- use the alternative contact name/number if necessary
- wait with the child/young person at the sport facility, with other staff/volunteers or parents present if at all possible
- remind parents/carers of the policy relating to late collection.

In cases of late collection, staff and volunteers **should not:**

- take the child home or to any other location
- send the child home with another person without permission from a parent or carer
- ask the child to wait in a vehicle or sport facility with you alone.

## Discipline

When discipline is used it should be with the clear intention of teaching or reinforcing appropriate behaviour. It must not be used impulsively, to gain power, or to embarrass or humiliate a child/young person.

Discipline should be used only to:

- develop a sense of responsibility for behaviour
- develop respect for others and their property
- reinforce the rules or values of the sport
- reinforce positive behaviour or attitudes
- reinforce awareness of health and safety aspects of the activity.

### **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 coach 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 coach 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.

## Physical contact

Many sports require a degree of physical contact between sports staff and children or young people. Coaches and staff may need to use it to instruct, encourage, protect or comfort. Your organisation should develop and publicise clear guidelines about physical contact, so that adults and children/young people understand what are the appropriate types of touching and their appropriate contexts.

Physical contact during sport should always be intended to meet the child's needs, NOT the adult's. The adult should only use physical contact if their aim is to:

- develop sports skills or techniques
- to treat an injury
- to prevent an injury
- to meet the requirements of the sport.
- The adult should explain the reason for the physical contact to the child. Unless the situation is an emergency, the adult should ask the child for permission.
- The contact should not involve touching genital areas, buttocks or breasts.
- Physical contact should not take place in secret or out of sight of others.
- All injuries should be fully recorded by staff.

## Sexual activity

Within sport, as within other activities, sexual relationships do occur. All sports organisations should therefore be aware of the law relating to sexual behaviour and should develop and promote guidelines relating to sexual activity. These guidelines should address sexual activity both between children and young people and between adults and young people.

**Sexual activity between children/young people involved in sport** should be prohibited during team events, in sports facilities or social activities organised by the club/organisation. Inappropriate or criminal sexual behaviour committed by a young person may lead to disciplinary action in accordance with the sports governing body guidance and reports being made to external agencies like the police or social work departments.

**Sexual interactions between adults and young people (16+) involved in sport** raise serious issues given the power imbalance inherent in the relationship. Where a young person is of the age of consent the power of the adult over that young person may influence their ability to genuinely consent to sexual activity. A coach or other adult in a position of authority may have significant power or influence over a young person's career.

Sexual activity between adults and young people (16+) involved in the same sport should be prohibited when the adult is in a position of trust or authority (coach, trainer, official). Inappropriate or criminal sexual behaviour committed by an adult should lead to suspension and disciplinary action in accordance with the sports governing body guidance, which in the case of criminal action must include contacting the police.

**Sexual activity between adults and children under the age of 16** is a criminal act and immediate action must be taken to report it.

## Rowers with disabilities

- Children or young people with disabilities should have the same rights and opportunities as others involved in sport to have fun and be safe. Their particular vulnerability to abuse or neglect requires sports clubs/organisations to take additional steps to safeguard them.
- Information relating to club policies and procedures should be fully accessible to children and young people with communication difficulties.
- Specialist training or advice should be sought by clubs/organisations that involve children/young people with disabilities in sport. For example, when staff/volunteers need to guide blind or partially sighted children, training will help ensure that they use the most appropriate methods. If training is not available, ask the child for advice or seek the advice of parents or carers.
- When transporting children with disabilities, the vehicles used should meet the needs of the children and be roadworthy. Appropriate and trained escorts should be in attendance in the vehicle.
- When children with disabilities are lifted or manually supported, the individual child should be treated with dignity and respect. Relevant health and safety guidelines must be followed to ensure the safety of the child and those assisting. It is recommended that those assisting receive appropriate training.

### Vulnerability

It is recognised that children with a disability:

- have the same needs and require the same safeguards as all children
- may also have additional needs associated with their disability, which may increase their vulnerability to abuse
- are often more dependent on adults, e.g. in intimate care needs and may be cared for by a number of different adults. Such children often spend a lot of time away from home
- may be unable to recognise abusive behaviour because they may have learning difficulties or a lack of awareness, and /or reduced exposure to the norm of adult/children interactions. For example, a child with disabilities may have difficulty in differentiating between appropriate and inappropriate touching
- particularly those with physical disabilities, may have a poor and/or incomplete body image and therefore may not recognise inappropriate behaviour.

## Good practice for linking with schools

All clubs that link with schools need to be able to evidence that they meet nationally agreed minimum operating standards that demonstrate a commitment to the welfare of children and young people.

Schools and clubs need to be confident that any sporting activity provided by your club for children, independently or in partnership with schools, is of high quality and both safe and fun. Here are a few good practice pointers for clubs linking with schools:

- Ensure your club has adopted and promoted the Rowing Ireland Code of Ethics
- Ensure these are made available to all club members upon request and that all club members (coaches / staff / volunteers / parents / children) are aware of how they can get help if they have any concerns and who to contact.
- Appoint a club Children's Officer who has been appropriately recruited and selected because of their suitability for the job and commitment to child welfare. Ensure that they have a clearly defined role and responsibilities and access to training to afford them the skills, knowledge and confidence to undertake this role.
- Find out about Code of Ethics training opportunities through your National Children's Officer and actively encourage staff, volunteers, coaches, officials and other club members to make sure they are updated regularly.
- Ensure that activities are well structured and varied to ensure that the needs of children of all abilities can participate - as an athlete, official, leader or volunteer. Ensure that you are aware of any additional support needs that any participating child might have and have a clear understanding with the school about how these needs can appropriately be addressed.
- Ensure that adults working with children are appropriately recruited and vetted to ensure their suitability to work with children and young people. This should be supported by supervision, induction and training as appropriate.
- Make every effort to ensure that coaches or other adults never work in isolation with a child or groups of children. At least two responsible adults must be present at all times when activities are being delivered.
- Ensure that there are practice guidelines in place for any trips or fixtures away from the club or school facility that involve transportation of children.

## Responsibility to Report

Any person, who has concerns about a child's welfare or who suspects that a child is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, has a responsibility to report their concerns to the Health Board or Gardai/Police.

Persons unsure about whether or not certain behaviours are abusive and therefore reportable, are advised that they can seek advice from the duty social worker in their local health board area where they will receive appropriate advice.

In cases of emergency where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the duty social worker is not contactable, call the Gardai/Police. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation, pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities.

All clubs should have clear procedures for responding to reports or concerns relating to the safety and welfare of children. Coaches / volunteers, children and parents / guardians should be aware of how and to whom they report concerns within the club or organisation.

## Mobile Phones etc.

Mobile phones and communication devices are often given to children for security, enabling parents to keep in touch and make sure they are safe.

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. Within clubs there is a need to encourage responsible and secure use of these devices.

In this respect Coaches are advised to:

- 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, or may cause a safety risk e.g. on the water.

For further information or advice see:

[www.rowingireland.ie](http://www.rowingireland.ie)

**Or contact:** National Children's Officer, c/o Rowing Ireland, Sport HQ, 13 Joyce Way, Parkwest, Nangor Road, Dublin 12. Tel. +3531 625 1130  
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