



Choosing a Sports Club or Coach for your child

Safeguarding Children for parents and carers looking for a sports club or activity for their children

Many parents support their children in attending various activities. These might include a sports group such as football or in attending a group to learn a new skill. They may also consider employing a personal coach. For many children this is a good and valuable experience assisting the child's development, self-esteem and enjoyment. When choosing any group activity, it is important that parents are confident that their children will be safe and happy. This leaflet provides some points for you to consider in selecting group activities.

What to do if your child tells you something inappropriate has happened

It is important that you listen to what your child says and believe what they are saying reassuring them that it is not their fault. If you are concerned that the tutor or coach has engaged in 'poor practice' i.e. has not done the right thing, rather than done something wrong that is abusive or a possible offence, generally, we would advise parents to cancel the activities or keep the young person away from the activities until there has been time to seek advice.

You should contact MASH on **020 8771 6222** or email mash@wandsworth.gov.uk if you are concerned that a coach or tutor has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children
- Behaved in a way that raises concerns as to their suitability to work with children

You should contact the Police if you believe that a crime has been committed.



Choosing The right group activity or club

If your child is interested in attending a group activity, for example to learn a new sport, or to join a team, it is important to visit and find out how the group operates. It is best to visit a standard group activity session so you can see first-hand what the staff are doing and whether the children seem happy. Coaches can sometimes be stern to maintain group discipline or excitable to motivate children to stretch their performance. The children may be a little anxious of the challenges at times but should never be upset nor become fearful of the coach or the activity. Paid or volunteer, all coaches and instructors should act professionally and in a similar way you would expect from school teachers. Taking care of children and young people is a huge responsibility and it is important that staff are well trained, supported and have the necessary skills and experience to work with children.

Questions you might want to ask a group leader, Team Manager or Organiser include:

There are a number of ways that parents and carers can ensure that the sports or group activity is safe and managed correctly

- Does the club or group have a policy on safeguarding children?
- Are staff and volunteers trained in Children's safeguarding
- Who do you speak to if you're worried about anything?
- Are staff trained to coach or teach children
- Do they have police checks (referred to as DBS checks)?

- Is the group linked to a professional body or recognised national organization (e.g a governing body like the Football Association) ?
- What is the staff ratio and is there a trained first aider on site?
- Are you required to sign any consent forms, or provide emergency contacts and your child's relevant medical details?
- Is there a written code of conduct for coaches and volunteers? (Many clubs will have codes of conduct for the children and parents as well).
- What's the policy if a child needs personal care?

What about discipline and punishment?

Children can find extra school activities a struggle at times, and they will not always behave or remain focused on the activity. When this happens, you need to be assured that the coach or leader will handle the situation appropriately. Coaches or activity leaders are not allowed to smack or hit pupils even if parents allow or request it. Coaches should not use physical activity which causes pain or discomfort and It is important that you and the coach discuss what are the right forms of discipline to use if your child misbehaves during the sessions. Any activity which causes pain or discomfort should not be applied as an aid to discipline or as a means of obtaining compliance. Thus, activities such as holding stress positions, or excessive physical exercise should never be used. Indeed all sports and activities should be enjoyable for children, and coaches should not overtrain children or force them to experience pain in order to develop in the sport or activity. This would include training or competing when injured.

National Governing Bodies

Many sports and activities are required to conform to national standards and safeguarding arrangements and are regulated by a Governing body. Clubs, sports and activities who operate under such bodies are required to meet safeguarding standards including safe recruitment of staff, appropriately safe activities and correct behaviour from staff and volunteers. However, such affiliations are not compulsory and some local clubs and activities may not be part of such regulatory Official arrangements. This means there is no external oversight or support should things go wrong.

We advise that parents and carers should always use clubs and activities which can demonstrate their affiliation to a National Governing Body.

We also advise that you review the National Governing Body's website to review national standards and safeguarding policies.