

Involving Young People in Mixed Aged Sport/Activity

Background

Young people have a right to participate and progress in sports activities at all levels in an environment that promotes their welfare and safety and in which their interests are prioritized. The paramount consideration should always be the well-being of young participants. This principle applies when consideration is given to mixed age activities - ie having young participants compete with or against adults, or children of different ages competing together.

Sport-specific NGB guidance

Many governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and other organisations have developed clear guidelines, rules or requirements regarding mixed aged participation – often to address possible inequalities in size or ability, as well as the potential safety issues involved. These considerations are particularly important when young people compete with adults. Clearly the nature of the sport or activity will have a major bearing on any advice given. Most contact sports (including rugby, boxing and judo) and several other sports bodies (for example, golf) have addressed this issue and produced clear guidelines to promote the welfare of young people engaged in mixed-age activities.

Event organizers and activity providers should as a minimum comply with all NGB guidance relevant and appropriate to the planned sport or activity.

Issues to consider and address

As well as more obvious factors such as the physical implications of mixed age participation, there are a number of other specific issues that need to be taken into account when mixed aged activities involving children, young people or adults are considered. All of these need to be discussed and agreed with the young person, their carers and the event organizer/activity leader beforehand. It may be helpful for a written agreement covering all arrangements to be drawn up and shared with all parties.

Physical safety

- An assessment of the possible risks to a young person in engaging in the activity with older (probably larger) competitors should be undertaken.
- It is not necessarily appropriate or safe to make judgments solely on the basis of a young person's age, as rates of both physical and emotional development can result in significant differences. For example, the size, maturity or technical competence of one fourteen year old may be substantially greater compared to another.
- While a comparatively well-built young person may be able to compete physically with older participants, they may struggle with other aspects of their involvement (eg the way in which the competitive ethos is expressed or demonstrated by adults, particularly in defeat; adult humour and other social aspects of the sport) in a way that adults may not.

Supervision

- Have adequate arrangements been made for the young person to be supervised by an appropriate person (including chaperones) before, during and after the sports event – including non-competition free time?

Changing/showering arrangements

- Do arrangements cater for the needs of perhaps a single young person amongst a larger group of adults?
- It may be necessary to consider separate changing/showering arrangements for young people – this could include them using the same facilities but at slightly different times to the adults, or allowing them to change and shower at home.
- Many young people are particularly sensitive about undressing or showering in front of others.
- If a child feels uncomfortable changing or showering in front of others, no pressure should be placed on them to do so.



Travel and sleeping arrangements

- When events are held away from the club or base, or involve overnight stays, what arrangements will be made to ensure the well-being of the young person?
- Have basic issues such as food preferences (particularly for travel abroad) been discussed?
- Has consideration been given to young people sharing rooms with others of similar ages; to ensuring same-sex sleeping arrangements; and adequate supervision arrangements (eg if adults have to share sleeping accommodation with young people, ensure there are at least two adults, and more than one young person)

Codes of Conduct

- Do all other participants, coaches and staff understand the implications of young people being involved in the activity?
- Have all adults and young people signed up to relevant codes of conduct that cover issues like appropriate language, behaviour (eg alcohol, smoking, relationships between young people and adults or other young people etc)?

Raising any concerns

- Is it clear to the young person and all other parties how any concerns can be raised and with whom?
- This should include contact details for someone with the party with safeguarding responsibilities and access to external contacts, such as national safeguarding leads or ChildLine (0800 1111).

Recruitment

Under the government's Freedom Bill, currently passing through parliament, it is likely that those responsible for providing activities specifically for 16 and 17 year olds will be considered to be in Regulated Activity, and will be required to undertake CRB checks. A number of sports organisations are seeking a proportionate approach to guidance on checks required for those working with open aged, adult orientated activities that may include young people aged 16 or 17 years.

The CPSU have developed a briefing paper on '[Safeguarding the Elite Young Athlete](#)' available online at www.thecpsu.org.uk.

The following are examples of guidance from specific sports for involving children and young people in mixed age sport/activity:

- [Rugby Football League \(RFL\)](#)
- [Rugby Football Union \(RFU\)](#)

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