

Child Protection Policy – P(W)WSC

Revised March 2006

Introduction

Most children are well cared for and have happy and trusting relationships with adults. However some less fortunate children are the victims of physical, sexual or mental abuse and possibly neglect. The abuse may occur anywhere; in the home, at school, or even in the sporting environment. Indeed it is known that some perpetrators of these acts may actively seek employment or voluntary work with children in order to harm them, or to satisfy their perverted needs. Every Penarth (Wales) Water Ski Club Instructor, Coach, Volunteer or Official should therefore take steps to safeguard the welfare of children and protect them from abuse when they are in their care.

P(W)WSC wishes to promote the highest possible standards of care for participants when at their clubs or participating in water skiing in its diverse forms.

This document provides guidance to the reader where an allegation of abuse or suspected abuse against a water ski minor occurs.

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is a term used to describe the ways in which children are harmed, usually by adults and often by people they know and trust. Children may be abused within their family, at school and sometimes in the sporting environment.

There are many forms of abuse:

Physical Abuse

Where an adult: -

- Physically hurts or injures a child by shaking, hitting, or squeezing the child.
- Gives alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison to a child.
- Attempts to suffocate or drown a child.
- Inflicts a type and intensity of training, which exceeds the capacity of the child's immature and growing body.

Sexual Abuse

Children may be sexually abused by adults (male and female), to satisfy the adults own sexual or other perverted needs.

- Full sexual intercourse, fondling, masturbation or oral sex.
- Taking pornographic pictures or videos, or showing children inappropriate pictures, literature or videos
- In sports situations where physical contact is made (i.e. during stretching exercises and supporting or handling) sexual abuse may go unnoticed.
- The misuse of the power of the coach over young children may lead to abusive situations developing.

Emotional Abuse

- The child is frequently shouted at or taunted.
- The child is constantly criticised and bullied or
- An unrealistic pressure to perform to high expectations is placed upon the child by the coach, official or parent/guardian.

The Affects of Abuse

The effects of abuse on a child at any age can be so damaging (if untreated) that the effect may carry through to adulthood. It may lead to an adult who was abused as a child, not being able to maintain a trusting, stable relationship. It could also lead in adulthood to involvement in prostitution, drugs, suicide or even their own abuse of a child in the future.

Recognising That A Child Is Being Abused

Most people cannot imagine that anyone they know could transgress in such a harmful way towards a child, and their suspicions of abuse by another may make them feel uncomfortable.

It is worth remembering that in a case of sexual abuse, the vulnerable child may be targeted over time by the perpetrator through a calculated grooming process. This may involve 'secrecy testing' by the abuser to gain the child's trust and confidence "**not to tell**" or that the abuse "**is our secret**".

Signs that can alert you to the fact that a child might be suffering a form of abuse include: -

- Unexplained physical bruising or injury, particularly in unusual places.
- An injury for which an explanation as to its occurrence seems to be inconsistent.
- Unexplained sudden changes in behaviour (i.e. withdrawing, very quiet, sudden outburst of temper or emotion)
- Inappropriate sexual awareness or language, or engaging in sexually explicit behaviour.
- The child is prevented from socialising with other children or has difficulty making friends.
- The child is distrustful of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected (i.e. parents, coach, family friend)
- The child displays variations in eating patterns (i.e. over eating or loss of appetite).
- The child loses weight for no apparent reason (the child may be trying to make himself/herself less sexually attractive).
- The child becomes increasingly dirty or unkempt.
- Something another child or person has said which suggests a child is being abused.

Responding To Signs, Suspicions Or Allegations Of Abuse

It is important to note that although a child could be displaying some of the signs indicated above, or behaving in a way which might cause you concern; it does not necessarily follow that the child is being abused. On the other hand, there may not be any signs at all, but you may still have an uneasy feeling about a particular situation.

However, if you have reasonable grounds for being concerned about a particular incident that involves an Instructor, Coach, Official, Volunteer or member of the P(W)WSC it is not your responsibility to decide if abuse is being perpetrated. It is your responsibility though to act on those concerns and to do something about it.

Dealing With Allegations

Although it is both a rare and sensitive issue, child abuse within sport has occurred, and every effort must be made to inhibit the likelihood of child abuse within the sport of water skiing.

It is crucial that everyone involved in the sport recognises the potential for child abuse, and takes seriously any allegations made against an Instructor, Coach, Official, helper or member of P(W)WSC or indeed anyone working closely with children within the sport.

The person in charge at a water ski site or other water ski venue must be notified immediately of any circumstances, which cause concern. If the senior person is unclear about what action to take, advice should be sought from P(W)WSC Child Protection Officer or from Social Services.

In isolation, the circumstances of an incident or allegation may centre around poor practice on the part of the individual. Alternatively, having been revealed, it may be found to be one of a series of other incidents that collectively, may cause concern.

It is acknowledged that taking appropriate action is never easy, and the discovery that a member of staff or colleague is, or may be, abusing a child will raise concerns and emotive feelings among other colleagues.

These emotions may evolve around feelings of:

- **Doubt** - Is the allegation true?
- **Confusion** - What will happen? What actions should be taken? What will be the effect?
- **Guilt** - Should I have known? Did I miss something? Did I have any suspicions? Should I have said something?
- **Fear** - Will I or others be suspected?
- **Concerns** - What can I do to support all those people who may need support? How will it affect further relationships or contacts with children? Are the systems in place to expose future situations?

There is clearly a need to have support mechanisms in place for those involved in, or surrounding the issue.

P(W)WSC is primarily concerned with the well being and safety of all its members, whether employees, volunteers, Instructors, Coaches, Officials, or participants. P(W)WSC will therefore support anyone who in good faith, and where he/she has reasonable grounds for doing so, reports his or her concerns that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.

Responding To Issues Of Poor Practice Or Allegations Or Concerns

Issues Of Poor Practice

- If the issue is clearly one of poor coaching practice at P(W)WSC, the Senior Coach, should deal with it locally as a misconduct issue. Details however should be referred to the P(W)WSC's Child Protection Officer to effect positive remedial action.
- If the issue is non coaching related, but relates to the poor practice of any P(W)WSC Official, employee, or volunteer, details should be referred to the P(W)WSC Child Protection Officer, who will initiate positive remedial action.

Issues of Child Abuse

- If there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been abused the circumstances should be reported immediately to the Senior Coach, or person in charge. He or she must take appropriate action to ensure the safety of the child in question; and other children who may be at risk.

In considering such action, the following guidelines will be helpful:

1. Unless the suspicion or allegation involves a parent or guardian as the perpetrator, **always and firstly inform the parent or guardian of the circumstances.**
2. If you have noticed a dramatic change in a child's behaviour, first talk to the parents.
There may have been a bereavement or similar life occurrence, which may have caused the child to be unhappy, or for the behaviour to have changed.
3. If your concerns for the child are about domestic or parental sexual abuse or violence, consult the person in charge of the club or another adult you respect and trust. It is the responsibility of the person in charge to make a decision to contact the Social Services. If you cannot contact the person in charge or the concerns are about him/her, you should contact the Social Services yourself. They will be able to advise you on further action.
If a child indicates that he/she is being abused or information is received which gives rise to concern that the child may be being abused the person receiving the information should:
 - Stay calm and ensure that the child is safe and feels safe.
 - Reassure the child that he/she is not to blame and that it is was right to tell you.
 - Show and reassure the child that you are taking what he/she says seriously and recognise any difficulties inherent in interpreting what the child says. (e.g. a child's description of sexual or other matters)
 - Keep questions to a minimum but sufficient to ensure a clear and accurate understanding of what has been said. **ALSO** make a record of all that has been said, heard or seen.
 - Be honest and tell the child that you may have to inform others to help protect him/her.

NEVER

- Rush into actions that may later prove to be inappropriate.
- Make promises to a child or other person that you cannot keep.

Having considered the Guidelines issued above, and with particular reference to the parental or guardian role, the Person in Charge should then with parental or guardian co-operation take two forms of action.

1. Refer the allegation to the Social Services Department who may then involve the Police if the matter is considered serious enough to warrant their action. (If the parent or guardian was not initially informed of the incident they will be usually contacted by the relevant Service at the earliest opportunity deemed by them to be appropriate.)
2. Notify Welsh Water Ski Association (Chairperson or Director of Coaching) who will determine whether to temporarily suspend any accused individual, pending further Social Services, or Police enquires. An appropriate course of action will be advised depending on the circumstances.

Where appropriate, P(W)WSC will conduct an investigation in respect of any allegation or reported incident involving child abuse within our sport, and will support investigation by any other statutory authority. There may therefore be three types of investigation.

1. A disciplinary or misconduct investigation by P(W)WSC.
2. A child protection investigation primarily led by the Social Services.
3. A criminal investigation undertaken by a Police Child Protection Unit.

Social Services and Police Child Protection Units have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to ensure that children are protected, and to help those who have been abused. When a child protection referral is made to the Social Services, staff have a legal responsibility to investigate the allegation. This may involve talking to the child and its family, and gathering information from other people who know the child. Enquires may be conducted jointly with the Police Child Protection Unit.

The Social Services and Police will provide advice and take responsibility for any action, which is deemed necessary.

Records and Information

Any information passed to the Social Services or the Police must be as accurate and helpful as possible and it will be useful if a detailed record, including the following can be provided: -

- The nature of the incident or allegation made.
- A description of visible injuries or bruising, if any.
- A detailed description of the child's account of how the injuries or bruising occurred.
- Any times, dates, or locations of the incident, or other relevant information.
- A clear distinction between what is fact, hearsay or opinion.
- Details of persons who may have witnessed the alleged incident.

Wherever possible, referrals made by telephone to the Social Services or Police should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours. Keep a record of the member of staff to whom the concerns were passed, together with the time and date of the call.

Belated Allegations of Abuse

It is possible that allegations of abuse may be made some considerable time after the event. Where such a belated allegation is made, the Senior Coach must notify P(W)WSC Child Protection Officer who will in turn report the matter to the Social Services Department or the Police Child Protection Unit. This is necessary because it is possible that other children may have been abused or may be at risk from the alleged perpetrator.

P(W)WSC and the Social Services adopt a policy that anyone who has previous criminal conviction for offences related to abuse is automatically excluded from working with children.

P(W)WSC also have a requirement that all instructors, coaches/candidate coaches, officials, and others having substantial access to children within the confines of the sport of water skiing must prior to any appointment, declare any previous convictions on the appropriate application form.

Confidentiality

If a child indicates that he/she does not wish others to be informed about the allegations, you should carefully and tactfully explain the reasons why it may be in

the interests of everybody if the matter is referred to the appropriate person or department (i.e. Social Services or Police)

If the child still wishes that the matter were not disclosed to others, it is important that the child feels that the opportunity to confide in you remains.

The person to whom the disclosure is made is presented with a great responsibility and it is advisable that you seek advice on how to deal with the issue, from Social Services or Child Help Line.

Every effort must be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned, including the person against whom any allegation is made. False allegations are of great concern not only because of the personal distress caused to the suspect and his/her family but also since the media may seek to exploit the issue to their fullest benefit. Their actions may erroneously destroy the career of a fallaciously accused coach. Even the suspect needs to be protected until sufficient evidence is gathered to substantiate Police charge(s) against him/her.

False accusations, which are published may also be defamatory. However, this would not apply to instances of alleged abuse which are reported in good faith to the Police or Social Services when there are reasonable grounds for suspicion.

Irrespective of the findings of the Social Services or Police enquires, Welsh Water Ski Association will assess all individual cases to decide whether the suspected person should be suspended or reinstated or be subjected to disciplinary proceedings; and how such action can be sensitively handled.

Above all else, the welfare of the participants will remain paramount. P(W)WSC will also endeavour to provide appropriate support to children, parents, Instructors, Coaches, Officials, Staff and volunteers who are affected by an abuse situation.

Good Coaching Practices

All children have the right to be safe and to be treated with dignity and respect. A good and caring coach will continually reflect upon their own coaching style, philosophy and practices to ensure the safety and well being of the athletes at all times.

False allegations of abuse are rare but can be damaging to the accused coach and the sport. The following guidelines will help to safeguard the participants, Instructors, Coaches, Officials, Staff and volunteers of P(W)WSC.

The Role of the Parent or Guardian

A good coach will develop a strong trusting bond with his/her water skier, and indeed, could become a confidante; and this is essential in a successful coach water-skier relationship. However as a parent or guardian you should ensure that:-

- The club or ski centre has a policy in place that ensures that the children and participants are protected and kept safe from harm.
- Where the Club has procedures in place through which you can voice any concerns that you may have.
- Coaches and volunteers/assistants are carefully recruited and suitably qualified. The Coach in charge must have a minimum qualification of British Water Ski Instructor, and a Ski Boat Driver Award (or equivalent) and a current First Aid qualification.
- Your children are encouraged to talk to you about their training, and ensure

that they know how to voice their concerns if they are not happy about any situations that may arise.

The Role of the Club Seeking to Appoint a Coach or Official

The vast majority of Instructors, Coaches, Officials, helpers are committed, dedicated people who are motivated to work within the sport for commendable reasons. However it is important that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that unsuitable people or people with an inappropriate motivation are prevented from working with children. The following procedures should be adopted and applied consistently when appointing staff in either a voluntary or paid capacity:-

- All Instructors, Coaches, Officials, or helpers should complete an application form that is designed to elicit information about an applicant's past career - including any gaps in involvement or employment, and to establish any criminal record. Failure to disclose such information should result in exclusion from employment, the club or organisation.
- Neither P(W)WSC or British Water Ski are able to request Police checks but it is recommended that the individual making the application should seek a personal Police/Social Service report to present to the club officials/employer.
- It is recommended that at least two references are provided by the applicant, including one from his/her GP (the applicant will have to authorise the GP to give the reference) and if it is possible, one relating to previous work with children. These must be checked.
- Requests, in writing on formal headed paper, for confirmation from British Water Ski of applicable qualifications, or of any known reason for not employing/appointing that person as a Coach/Official.
- A check should be made with the following organisations that maintain information about individuals who are deemed unsuitable to work with children.

In England and Wales

Department of Health Consultancy Index

In Scotland

The Scottish Office (Social Services Sources Group)

In Northern Ireland

The DHSS Pre - Employment Consultancy Service

Recommended Club Policy and Procedures

Good regulatory procedures as described above may help to deter potential abuse perpetrators, but each Club, Ski Centre or organisation should implement a policy which ensures that children are protected and kept safe from harm. The policy should be well publicised and all Instructors, Coaches, Volunteers and Officials should be issued with a copy of the policy, be aware of its contents, and sensitive to potentially abusive situations.

Senior Coaches and Senior Officials/managers should act upon any concerns about abuse and should provide appropriate support to those who report concerns. A well-established complaint procedure should be in operation in all Clubs, and the children and parents the subject of a coaching regime should have easy access to this procedure, and be issued with a copy of the local Child Protection Policy.

The Role of the Instructor, Coach, Official or Volunteer

The implementation of good coaching practices will reduce the potential for abusive situations occurring and will simultaneously help to protect Instructors, Coaches Officials and volunteers. The following guidance is provided as an example of that good practice:-

- Always be publicly open when working with children. Avoid situations where a coach and an individual child cannot be observed.
- Care should be taken when providing manual support to a child and British Water Ski recognised/advised techniques for support should be used.
- Wherever possible in changing rooms or toilets, parents or guardians should be responsible for attiring young children, working in pairs to supervise groups of children.
- Wherever possible, mixed teams of water-skiers should be accompanied by a male and a female member of staff or chaperone.
- In residential situations never enter the bedroom of a child without another adult.
- Never spend excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others.
- Avoid taking children alone on car journeys, no matter how short without first consulting the parents.
- Never take children to your home or other secluded place unaccompanied.

Where these situations are unavoidable, they should only occur with the full knowledge and **prior** consent of the Senior Coach/Official in the Club or the child's parents.

If you accidentally hurt a child, or the child becomes distressed in your presence or misunderstands / misinterprets something you have said or done, you should report the incident to a senior colleague and make a brief written note of it. Inform the parents of any such incidents.

You Should Never:

- 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 - even in fun.
- Allow children to use inappropriate language, or let such language go unchallenged.
- Personally verbally abuse, punish, or demean a child.
- Dismiss allegations made by a child, or allow them to go unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Do things of a personal nature for a child they can do for themselves, unless you have been requested to do so by the parents or do so with the utmost propriety.
- Depart from the premises until you have supervised the safe dispersal of the children.

Adherence to good coaching practices and open communications by Clubs, Centres, Staff Parents and Children, underpinned by a rigorous Child Protection Policy, should ensure that a safe and enjoyable environment is established and sustained within the sport of water skiing.

Further Useful Information, Guidance and Advice on Child Protection Issues

Executive Officer
British Water Ski
The Tower
Thorpe Road
Chertsey Surrey
KT16 8PH
Tel 01932 570885

Child Line UK
Freepost 1111
London
N1 0BR
Tel 0800 1111

Director of Coaching
British Water Ski

Home Office
(Disclosure of Criminal
Backgrounds)

National Training Site
The Tower, Thorpe Road
Chertsey Surrey
KT16 8PH
Tel 01932 570885

F2 Division, Room 531
50 Queen Anne's Gate
London
SW1H 9AT

The NSPCC National Centre
42 Curtain Road London
EC2A 3NH
Tel 020 7825 2500 Helpline 0808 800 5000

Notes

- Your local police station will advise you on how to contact the local Police Child Care Unit.
- Your local telephone directory will provide the contact number for the local Social Services Department.