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CHILD PROTECTION IN GYMNASTICS

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Child Protection Policy

This document encompasses a child protection policy and a code of ethics for all members of Ayrshire Acro.

Introduction

It is the policy of Ayrshire Gymnastics Trust to ensure that every child, young person or vulnerable adult who takes part in the sport of gymnastics should be able to participate in an enjoyable and safe environment. In addition they should be protected from neglect, bullying, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Any actions and comments made whilst dealing with young people should always be well considered and should never give rise to misinterpretation.

Key Principles

The key principles that underwrite this policy are:

- Anyone under the age of 16 years should be considered as a child for the purposes of this document
- All children's welfare is paramount
- All children, whatever their age, culture, ability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- Adults working with children are also provided protection and aware of the best practice so they can be protected from wrongful allegations
- Working in partnership with children and their parents/carers is essential for the protection of the child;

Ayrshire Gymnastics Trust recognises the statutory responsibilities of Local Authority Social Work Services to ensure the welfare of children and it is committed to complying with Local Area Child Protection procedures.

Types of Abuse

All forms of abuse involve the elements of a power imbalance, exploitation and the absence of true consent, whether they concern acts of commission or acts of omission. There has been growing awareness that the abuse of children can take many forms.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless and unloved, inadequate, or valued in so far as they meet the needs of another person. It may involve causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation of

children. Some level of emotional abuse is present in all types of ill treatment although it may exist alone.

Emotional abuse in sport

- Exposing children to humiliating, taunting or aggressive behaviour or tone
- demeaning childrens' efforts by continuous negative feedback
- failure to intervene where a child's self confidence and wroth are challenged and undermined

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failure to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical treatment.

Neglect in sport

Lack of care, guidance, supervision or protection, which may be caused by:

- Exposing children to unnecessary cold or heat
- Exposing children to unhygienic conditions, lack of food, water or medical care
- Non-intervention in bullying or taunting

Physical abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise harming a child.

Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy whereby a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes ill health in a child is also abuse.

Physical abuse in sport

Bodily harm caused by lack of care, attention, or knowledge, which may be caused by:

- Over training or dangerous training of athletes
- Over playing an athlete
- Failure to do a risk assessment of physical limits or pre-existing injuries or medical conditions
- Administering, condoning or failure to intervene in drug use

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in inappropriate ways.

Sexual abuse in sport

- Exposure to sexually explicit inappropriate language, jokes or pornographic material
- Inappropriate touching
- Having sexual activity or relationship
- Creating opportunities to access children's bodies

Photographic material

The inappropriate use of photographic material taken at sporting events may constitute abuse, and all those involved within the sport should be aware of this.

Inappropriate behaviour

Bullying occurs if someone regardless of age persecutes, intimidates or is sarcastic to another. All forms of bullying, both verbal and physical from other children is also a form of abuse and there is a requirement for all within the sport to ensure that there are sufficient mechanisms to allow children to report instances of bullying.

There is also the abuse of trust, where young people are indoctrinated with attitudes to training, drugs and cheating or social, political and religious views which are unacceptable, to the young, the community, or the rules of the sport.

Identifying abuse

Dealing with child abuse is rarely straight forward. In some cases the disturbed behaviour of the child, or an injury, may suggest that the child has been abused. In many situations, however, the signs will not be clear-cut and the decisions about what action to take can be difficult.
(See appendix 1)

Roles

For effective implementation of this policy all gymnastics coaches must work in partnership, each with a role to ensure the protection of the children in their care.

Ayrshire Gymnastics Trust has:

- Appointed a safeguarding officer
- Accepted that all staff working with children have a responsibility in this area
- Prepared staff to respond to any indication of abuse
- Staff ready to alter bad practice
- Implemented SG (Scottish gymnastics) and BG (British gymnastics) recommendations relating to this area
- Trained staff to maintain confidentiality of the child and the person against whom the allegation has been made
- Ensured all staff has a current PVG

The role of the safeguarding officer within the club will be as follows:

- To ensure all club helpers/officials/coaches complete a self declaration form and PVG form
- To send all forms to SG if required for disciplinary
- To receive advice on reports from other club members

- To initiate action, ensuring all appropriate persons have been contacted

Everyone has a responsibility to maintain awareness and openness with regard to child protection issues.

Responding to complaints and alleged or suspected incidents

Abuse may become apparent in a number of ways:

- Through observation
- A child may tell you
- A third party may have an incident, or may have a strong suspicion
- You may have a suspicion

If an allegation is brought to your attention:

STEP 1 LISTEN AND REASSURE

DO:

- Stay calm
- Reassure the child that they are not to blame and confirm that you know how difficult it must be to confide
- Listen to what the child says and show that you take them seriously
- Keep questions to a minimum
- Ensure that you clearly understand what the child has said so that you can pass in onto the appropriate agencies
- Consult with the identified child protection person, ensuring that you communicate all the information accurately
- Maintain confidentiality-complete a CP incident form record and sign and date it

DON'T:

- Rush into inappropriate action
- Use open ended questions .i.e. those where more than a yes/no response is required
- The law is very strict and child abuse cases have been dismissed if it appears that the child has been led or words and ideas have been suggested
- Make the child repeat the story unnecessarily
- Make promises you can't keep by explaining that you may have to tell other people in order to stop what is happening whilst maintaining maximum possible confidentiality

STEP 2 RECORD

If the allegation is ABUSE, follow these steps:

- Make a full report of any allegations or suspicions on paper
- Pass the report on the CP unless they are involved in the complaint, in which case pass straight onto SG
- SG will then involve the local authority social work department or police if necessary

If the allegation relates to POOR PRACTICE, follow these steps:

- Make a record of the allegations
- Inform SG so they can investigate further if necessary

Misconduct/Allegation Reports

Record what the child has said, and/or your concerns, legibly and accurately. Details should include:

- The child's name, address and date of birth
- Date and time of incident(s) and/or nature of allegation(s)
- Your observations e.g. describe the behaviour and emotional state of the child and/or other bruising injuries
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened
- Any action that you have taken as a result of your concerns, e.g. comments made to the child and whether or not the parents/carers have been contacted
- Record whether the person writing the report is expressing their own concerns, or passing on those of someone else
- Sign and date the report
- Keep a copy of the report

STEP 3 INVOLVE THE APPROPRIATE PEOPLE

Once you have completed your report you must ensure that the safeguarding officer in the club has been informed so a decision can be made as to the more appropriate action. This person must forward the report to SG indicating whether further action is required.

If you are unhappy with the safeguarding officer's handling of the incident or the allegations are made specifically against this individual, you should contact the head coach immediately, and make a record of this. This person is Tracy Wilson. She will then contact SG/social services/police immediately. A record of the name, and designation of the official informed, together with the time and date of the call should be kept in case future contact is required.

Promoting good practice

By promoting good practice throughout the club and in the wider context of the sport, it is possible to reduce situations of the abuse of children. The club should have a policy that ensures children are protected and kept safe from harm.

All staff will be formally disclosed by SG. Please see head coach, Gemma Thomson for more information on this.

Use of photography and video recorders

There has been an increase in the misuse of sports photography and video recording within the sporting area. To reduce the risk of abuse to children, parents will sign on enrolling their child to the club, whether they would like their child photographed or video for display purposes.

Bullying

Ayrshire Gymnastics Trust promotes an anti-bullying policy and will investigate any incident and decide an appropriate action, whilst ensuring that children are able to report the instance of bullying (either to themselves or team members) to someone in authority, preferably the CPC.

Code of practice for coaches and officials

Adherence to good coaching practices, aligned with open communication with parents and children, should ensure that a safe and enjoyable environment is established and sustained. The duty of care commences from the point of receipt of the child to the point of return to the parent/guardian and the duty of care is non transferable.

Recommended good practice:

(‘We’ refers to ‘Ayrshire Gymnastics Trust’ and its staff)

We will always be publicly open when working with children to avoid situations where a coach and an individual child or vulnerable adult cannot be observed.

We will take care when providing manual support (spotting). Recognised/advised techniques for spotting should be used to avoid inappropriate contact.

Where possible parents/carers should be responsible for young children in the changing rooms

We will treat all participants with respect and dignity

We will always place the safety and welfare of the participants as the highest priority

We will behave in an exemplary manner and be a role model for excellent behaviour

We will keep up to date with our qualifications, knowledge and technical skills

We will only work within the level of our competence and qualifications

We will treat all young people equally, with respect and dignity and put their welfare first, before winning

We will recognise the stage of psychological and physical development of the individual and avoid excess training or competition

We will motivate the participants through positive and constructive feedback

We will create a safe and enjoyable training environment

We will obtain written consent from parents/carers to act as a reasonable parent if the need arises for the administration of emergency first aid and record this

We will maintain a written report of any incident or injury together with any subsequent treatment and complete an accident report form thereafter

Practice to be avoided:

- Spending excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others
- Taking children to your home where they will be alone with you
- Sharing a room with a child

The above should be avoided except in emergencies. If cases arise where these situations are unavoidable, they should occur with the full knowledge and consent of someone in charge in the club and/or SG, and the child’s parents. E.g. a child sustains an injury and needs to go to hospital, or a parent fails to arrive to pick up a child at the end of a session.

Practice which should never be condoned:

A coach 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 or vulnerable adult-even in fun
- Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- Allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon
- Do things of a personal nature for a child or vulnerable adult if they can do it for themselves, unless you have been requested to do so by the parents/carers (do so with the utmost discretion)
- Depart from the premises until you have supervised the safe dispersal of the participants
- Abuse your privileged position of power or trust with children or adults
- Cause a participant to lose self esteem by embarrassing them, humiliating or undermining the individual
- Have favourites

Safe practice in unforeseen circumstances

If any of the following incidents should occur, you should report them immediately to another colleague and make a written note of the event, signed and dated. Parents should also be informed of the incident:

- If you accidentally hurt a child
- If a child misinterprets something you have done
- If you have to restrain a child (please note-minimum force must only be used)

It is not possible to establish guidelines for every situation, which may become evident in the sport of gymnastics. Common sense should be used at all times.

Monitoring of the policy

It will be the responsibility of Ayrshire Gymnastics Trust to monitor the policy by:

- Keeping records of cases brought and their outcomes
- Accepting comments from clubs on the ease of implementation and effect of the policy

Appendix 1

ALERTING SIGNS OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL CHILD ABUSE

It is important to remember this is not definitive or exhaustive. Any of these signs or behaviours has to be seen in the context of the child's whole situation and in combination with other information related to the child and his/her circumstances.

There can be an overlap between different forms of abuse.

Signs of possible PHYSICAL ABUSE:

- Unexplained injuries or burns, particularly if they are recurrent
- Improbable excuses given to explain injuries
- Refusal to discuss injuries
- Untreated injuries or delay in reporting them
- Excessive physical punishment
- Arms and legs kept covered in hot weather

- Avoidance of swimming, physical education etc.
- Fear of returning home
- Aggression towards others
- Running away
- Genuine accidental injuries which are common-the nature and site of the bruising relative to the child's age is important
- Bleeding and clotting disorders
- Mongolian blue spots which occur naturally in Asian, Afro-Caribbean and Mediterranean children

When considering the possibility of non-accidental injury, it is important to remember that the injuries may have occurred for other reasons. Among the most important are:

- Skin disorders e.g. impetigo
- Rare bone diseases e.g. brittle bones
- Swelling or dislocation of the eye caused by a tumour
- Undiagnosed birth injury i.e. fractured clavicle

Medical advice must be sought in all cases.

Fictitious order by Proxy/Munchausen syndrome by proxy

Signs of possible PHYSICAL NEGLECT:

- Constant hunger
- Poor personal hygiene
- Constant tiredness
- Poor state of clothing
- Frequent lateness and/or unexplained non attendance at school
- Untreated medical problems
- Low self esteem
- Poor peer relationships
- Stealing

Signs of possible NON-ORGANIC FAILURE TO THRIVE:

- Significant lack of growth
- Weight loss
- Hair loss
- Poor skin or muscle tone
- Circulatory disorders

Signs of possible EMOTIONAL ABUSE:

- Low self esteem
- Continual self depreciation
- Sudden speech disorder
- Significant decline in concentration
- Socio-emotional immaturity
- 'Neurotic' behaviour (e.g. rocking, head banging)
- Self mutilation

- Compulsive stealing
- Extremes of passivity or aggression
- Running away
- Indiscriminate friendliness

Signs of possible SEXUAL ABUSE:

Not all children are able to tell that they have sexually assaulted. Changes in a child's behaviour may be a signal that something has happened.

NB: a child who is distressed may have some of these signs, which should alert you to a problem. It is the combination and frequency of these signs that may indicate sexual abuse. Always seek advice. Try to notice all changes in behaviour. It is important to remember that in sexual assault, there maybe no physical or behavioural signs.

- Lack of trust in adults or over familiarity with adults
- Fear of a particular individual
- Social isolation (withdrawal or introversion)
- Sleep disturbance (nightmares, bed wetting, fear of sleeping alone, needing a night light)
- Running away
- Girls taking over the mothering role
- Sudden school problems
- Reluctance or refusal to participate in physical activity or to change clothes for sport
- Low self esteem
- Drug, alcohol or solvent abuse
- Display of sexual knowledge beyond child's years
- Unusual interest in the genitals of people or animals, e.g. French kissing, or fondling of a parents genital
- Fear of bathrooms, showers or closed doors
- Inappropriate sexual drawings
- Fear of medical examinations
- Development regression
- Poor peer relations
- Over sexualised behaviour
- Compulsive masturbation
- Stealing
- Irrational fears
- Psychosomatic factors e.g. recurrent abdominal or headache pain
- Sexual promiscuity

PHYSICAL/MEDICAL:

- Sleeping problems, nightmares and fear of the dark
- Bruises, scratches, bite marks to the thighs or genital areas
- Anxiety/depression
- Eating disorder e.g. anorexia nervosa or bulimia
- Discomfort/difficulty walking/sitting
- Pregnancy—particularly when reluctant to name father
- Pain on passing urine, recurring urinary tract problem, vaginal infections or genital damage
- Venereal disease/sexually transmitted disease
- Soiling or wetting in children who have been trained
- Self mutilation, suicide attempts
- Itching, soreness, discharge, unexplained bleeding from the rectum vagina or penis

