

Involving young people in mixed aged sport or activity

Background

This guidance is for anyone involved in planning or delivering mixed aged sports or activities for children or young people. Mixed aged activities involve young participants competing with or against adults, or with or against children of different ages. Activity organisers have a responsibility to promote the safety and welfare of participants, and this extends to assessing the potential risks associated with mixed-aged activities.

The guidance covers key questions and considerations in deciding if the planned activities pose any unnecessary risk to young participants.

Sport-specific NGB guidance

Many national 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 specific 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 have addressed this issue and produced clear guidelines to promote the welfare of young people engaged in mixed-age activities.

Event organisers and activity providers should as a minimum comply with relevant NGB guidance appropriate to the planned activity.

Key issues to consider and address

Regardless of a young person's size or sports ability, their status and potential vulnerability as a young person should not be ignored.

As well as more obvious factors such as the physical implications of mixed age participation, there are several other specific issues that need to be considered when mixed aged activities involving children, young people or adults are considered.

These should be discussed and agreed with the young person, their parents and the event organiser or 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 appropriate or safe to make judgments based solely on a young person's age. 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 different 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 in a way that adults may not. For example, 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.

Supervision

- Ensure that adequate arrangements have been made for the young person to be supervised by an appropriate person, such as a chaperone before, during and after the sports event – including non-competition free time.

Changing and showering arrangements

- 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 other young people or adults, no pressure should be placed on them to do so. Arrangements should cater for the needs of the young person. Consider separate changing or 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.

Travel and sleeping arrangements

- When events are held away from the club or base, or involve overnight stays, arrangements need to be made to ensure the well-being of the young person.
- Basic issues such as food preferences (particularly for travel abroad) may need to be discussed, and information regarding allergies, medication and how the medication needs to be stored and administered should be shared between the parent and the adult supervising the young person.
- Consideration should be given to young people sharing rooms with others of similar ages, including ensuring same sex sleeping arrangements where possible and adequate supervision (such as, if there is no option but to have adults sharing sleeping accommodation with young people, ensure there are at least two adults, and more than one young person and that this is communicated with parents in advance).

Codes of conduct

- All other participants, coaches and staff should understand the implications of young people being involved in the activity.
- All adults and young people should sign up and agree to codes of conduct that cover issues like appropriate language, responsibilities, and behaviour (such as, alcohol and smoking)}
- It is good practice to include information regarding the **update to the Positions of Trust legislation** which states that it is illegal for an adult in a position of trust to have a sexual relationship with young people aged 16 or 17..

Raising any concerns

- It should be clear to the young person and all other parties how any concerns can be raised and with whom. This should be communicated clearly, ideally in multiple ways, such as on a website, a contact sheet, and within the code of conduct or event itinerary. You should encourage young people to save these numbers and contacts to their mobiles.
- This should include contact details for someone at the event or activity with safeguarding responsibilities as well as external contacts, such as national safeguarding leads or ChildLine on **0800 1111**.