NSPCC Sport

Safe use of changing facilities and toilets

Guidance for everyone in sport



Introduction

This guidance has been produced in response to enquiries from individuals and organisations seeking advice about the safe use of changing facilities and/or toilets. These include queries about:

- adults who feel uncomfortable about sharing changing rooms with young children
- activity organisers unclear about the level of supervision they should provide
- unaccompanied children using facilities
- use of single-sex changing rooms by transgender, gender-questioning or non-binary children
- toilets or changing rooms at a venue being used by young people for an event, but which can still be accessed by members of the public (such as at a leisure centre, public park or open space)

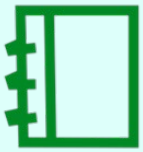
Note: The term 'children' describes any person under the age of 18.

Clubs and other organisations, facilities and those with responsibility for children have a general duty of care towards them.

This guidance is therefore intended as practice guidance to support individuals and organisations to consider issues relevant to their particular context, and to develop and implement policies and procedures that provide a safe environment.

This could include leisure centres, schools, private gyms or public parks and open spaces used for organised activities and events. Also, the context may relate to individual young people or groups, clubs, or organisations hiring facilities for training, competitions, events or festivals – in which case the planning process must include clarity about the third-party hire arrangements and responsibilities.

This guidance has been updated following the publication of the EHCR Code for practice for services, public functions and associations.



Many national governing bodies of sport (NGBs), local authorities and private sports facilities may already have guidance and policies in place, which should be followed in the first instance.

This guidance may be useful in the absence of any other guidance, and to address issues or circumstances not covered in such a policy.

Type of facility

A major consideration in establishing a safe use policy for changing facilities is whether the facilities will be used exclusively by junior teams or adult athletes.

Typically, this would be the case where a club owns, hires or manages its own facility, or has negotiated sole use of a more public facility at a particular time.

The advantage of this type of arrangement is that it reduces the safeguarding risk of children mixing with adults when changing or showering. However, many changing facilities are also used by other adults (sports teams, individual athletes, or members of the public).

All facilities should have a safeguarding policy and procedures for reporting any concerns, and staff and volunteers should familiarise themselves with these. In the case of a public park, for example, the activity organiser should find out who manages the facility and what their relevant policies are.



Supervision in the changing facility

If mixed use of the changing facility by adults and children is unavoidable, at least two members of staff (of the same sex as the children) should supervise the group. It is important that staff and volunteers seek to balance the need for adult supervision with the rights of children to privacy in this context.

Supervision in the changing facility may also be necessary when:

- children are too young to be left alone or change themselves
- leisure facilities have established guidelines that any child below the age of eight years must be accompanied (even if children younger are capable of changing themselves)
- the group includes disabled children who require additional support and assistance with changing (note that this should be undertaken by prior agreement with their parent or professional carer)
- children could injure themselves or access a potential risk such as a swimming pool that is unattended
- there are concerns about bullying, fighting or other harmful

behaviours taking place that need to be managed

- there are concerns about the prospect of photographs being taken in changing rooms

Who should supervise?

If you have decided that children need supervision, staff and volunteers should consider who will carry this out. This task provides access to children in circumstances of increased vulnerability and therefore careful consideration should be given to ensuring that those undertaking this task have been assessed as being suitable to do so.

Consider the following:

- numbers – organisers are recommended to have more than one adult supervising, as this will ensure cover in the event of an accident or incident occurring or if one supervisor is called away
- sex – it's considered good practice to ensure that children are supervised by staff or volunteers of the same sex while changing
- timings – by agreeing a very clear timetable for use of the changing facilities by children, the risks associated to any extended contact between the adults and children are minimised
- carry out safe recruitment practices, including:
- criminal records checks for individuals whose roles make them eligible
    - self-declaration – completion of an appropriate self-declaration form as part of safe recruitment
    - references – these should include a reference from a recent previous employer where they have worked with children
    - role description – provide clear details about the boundaries of their role
    - code of conduct – a document that individuals sign up to that clarifies the standards of behaviour expected of staff and volunteers

For further information, visit our website pages on **safer recruitment**.

Parents as supervisors

Parents are often involved in supervising children during sports activities and outings. Where they are responsible only for their own child (or, by agreement, their relatives' or friends' children), this constitutes a private arrangement outside the responsibility of the activity organisers.

However, when parents undertake a formal supervisory role at the request of or with the agreement of the organiser, which includes having responsibility for other people's children, the same steps should be taken as for staff and volunteers to make sure they are suitable for the role.

Unsupervised children in sport or leisure

There are potential risks with inadequate adult supervision levels of young children in changing and shower areas.

Parents' (or carers') responsibilities

Parents and carers have a responsibility to ensure that their children are appropriately supervised while they are attending a sport or leisure facility. It is parents' responsibility to judge whether it is safe and appropriate to allow their unaccompanied child to visit a sport or leisure facility. This judgement should be based on:

- their child's general developmental maturity
- their child's awareness of the potential risks
- the level of supervision and care provided within the facility

Parents may wrongly assume that staff will take responsibility for their children within a sport or leisure facility, or within specific areas such as changing rooms. Parents should therefore be informed about the facility's expectations about supervision of their children, including the use of changing rooms and shower areas. Parents should clarify these points before they let their children go to a facility alone.

Facility operators' responsibilities

When children are given access to facilities, operators assume a duty of care for them. The level of responsibility will vary, depending on if the child is:

- alone and unsupervised
- with parents
- attending an activity
- attending an activity staffed by the facility
- attending a school group, club or other activity managed by a third party
- attending a public session

Operators have a responsibility to put in place appropriate safeguarding arrangements, which include promoting and implementing a policy for admitting unaccompanied children. This information should be provided to parents and other users, informing them about the policy regarding unaccompanied children and any rules about the supervision of young children within the facility.

Many facilities currently use the age of eight as a guide (based on sector guidance for an unaccompanied child to attend a swimming pool). In practice, while facilities need to be able to establish a minimum age for admission that is

practical to operate, identifying a child's age can be difficult.

While the facility may set the lower age limit, it is for parents to judge if their child needs to be accompanied.

Facilities should have a process for responding to children below this minimum age of 8 who may arrive, or be left, at the facility alone. Refusing entry or asking an unaccompanied child to leave the centre would raise obvious safeguarding concerns.

Further guidance can be found on our **sport and leisure facilities topic page**.

Third party hirers

Organisations hiring facilities should ensure they are aware of:

- key safeguarding contacts at the facility, should an issue arise
- changing room layouts (for example, single-sex, cubicles or village style)
- whether members of the public have access to the changing facilities and toilets at the same time as the children
- other activities taking place that could impact on the use of changing facilities and toilets
- the particular changing needs of any of the children and young people under their supervision; this may include sex, gender, medical conditions, or disabilities, which could mean special equipment (such as hoists or changing mats) being required

If members of the public will also be using the toilets and changing facilities, make sure that there is staff presence at these points:

- to monitor and ensure that contact between young people and members of the public is appropriate
- to motivate and encourage young people to return to their groups in a timely manner to help young people if they are lost

Processes must be in place for **missing children or found children** who do not belong to the activity or event but who have been found or passed on to facility managers or event organisers.



Mixed-sex teams

Many sports and physical activity providers operate mixed-sex teams at several age group levels, and arrangements to enable the groups to change separately should always be made.

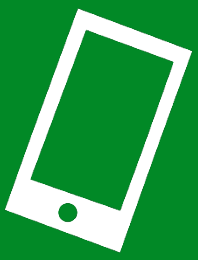
Solutions may include:

- each sex using a different room or facility
- each sex having a distinct time slot
- everybody changing at home before they leave
- each sex having an allocated area of a larger shared facility

Transgender and non-binary children

Using single-sex changing facilities can be a source of stress for transgender and non-binary children. Sport and activity providers should consider how to provide appropriate alternative facilities.

Your policies should reflect that decisions need to be made on a case by case basis, taking into consideration all children's safety



If a child is in immediate risk or harm, call 999.

Otherwise, call the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000

NSPCC Sport

As experts in sport and physical activity, and part of the NSPCC, we offer specialist safeguarding knowledge that people working with children and young people can trust. We help make sure every sporting environment is a place where children can have fun and thrive.

NSPCC Sport provides tailored training and consultancy for professionals, plus practical support and advice for parents and carers. We want to put children at the heart of sport and physical activity, and make sure they feel respected and protected every time they play.

Great safeguarding builds a caring culture. It's a whole-team effort.

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Photography by Abbie Tayler-Smith. Illustrations by Baxter & Bailey. J20255203.