

# SAFE USE OF CHANGING FACILITIES

## ISSUES TO CONSIDER AND ADDRESS

### ADULTS USING THE CHANGING ROOMS AT THE SAME TIME AS CHILDREN

Ideally, groups of children will have sole use of changing facilities. This reduces any risks and potential vulnerability associated with mixing with adults or other young people (known or unknown to them) when changing and showering. Even when using public facilities, arrangements can be considered to address any potential concerns:

- there may be a separate room or space available for the group
- it may be possible to negotiate specific time slots for the group, and the coaches or volunteers to have exclusive use of the changing rooms
- a team area within the changing facility could be designated and nobody else allowed in that area
- children may opt to change at home before they arrive for the activity\*

\*Children may be self-conscious and anxious about undressing in front of others. Staff and volunteers should offer the option of changing at home as standard practice.

### 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 gender 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
- organisers of groups of children under 8 years must make arrangements for their supervision while changing before and after the activity
- although most children of school age (4 years old) may be capable of changing their clothes, many leisure facilities have established guidelines that any child below the age of 8 years must be accompanied
- the group includes disabled children who require additional support and assistance with changing (note that this must 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 which need to be managed

## 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
- gender – it's considered good practice to ensure that children are supervised by staff or volunteers of the same gender 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:
  - o criminal records checks for individuals whose roles make them eligible
  - o references – including a reference from a recent previous employer where they have worked with children
  - o role description – provide clear details about the boundaries of their role
  - o code of conduct – a document that individuals sign up to that clarifies the standards of behaviour expected of staff and volunteers.

## PARENTS AS SUPERVISORS

Parents are often involved in supervising children during sports activities and outings and can provide valuable support to organisers and coaches. 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 staff and volunteers to make sure they are suitable for the role.

## **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 club 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 club and facility's expectations about supervision of their children, including the use of changing rooms and shower areas.

## **TRANSGENDER AND TRANSITIONING CHILDREN**

There are a number of factors to consider when addressing the needs of transgender or transitioning children and changing facilities. Things to consider are:

- the child's feelings and preference about which gendered changing room they'd like to use
- the privacy of the child
- the feelings and privacy of other children in the same changing room
- practical arrangements such as leaving a child unsupervised
- any risks of bullying or unwanted behaviour towards that child

If a child self-identifies as a gender that differs from the gender they were assigned at birth, they may wish to start changing with other children of the same gender identity or ask for privacy.

Clubs, facilities and coaches must try to make reasonable adjustments to changing arrangements to suit the child's needs and reduce the risk of bullying behaviour or distress.

Reasonable adjustments could include:

- providing a private, separate changing space for the child
- supporting the child with any changes to previous changing arrangements
- educating other children in the team on gender identity and celebrating difference
- arranging for that child to change at a different time to other children or at home

In most cases, children who are able to self-identify as transgender are able to articulate their wishes. Best practice is to consult with both the child and their parents where necessary about any potential changes to arrangements.

# **BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE - CHANGING ROOMS AND SHOWERING FACILITIES**

It is important to think about how your club can effectively meet the needs of all its members, taking into account the facilities that are available and the number of people accessing them. You may decide that players are encouraged to come to games already changed, wearing suitably warm clothing.

This guidance should be discussed at your club.

1. Adult staff/volunteers must not change or shower at the same time as children and young people using the same facilities
2. When children use changing rooms, a risk assessment must be carried out and safety measures put into place
3. For mixed gender activities, separate facilities must be available for boys and girls
4. If a child feels uncomfortable changing or showering in public then no pressure should be placed on them to do so. Instead, they should be encouraged to do so at home

5. If children who require assistance with changing are involved in your club, make sure they and their parents/carers are included in deciding how they will be assisted. Make sure the child or young person is able to consent to the assistance that is offered.
6. The use of mobile phones and/or photographic equipment by club officials, members, parents and young people must be prohibited within areas where children and young people are changing/showering.
7. Where no changing facilities are available children and young people, parents and travelling clubs should be made aware prior to the game and advised to make alternative arrangements and to take appropriate additional clothing.