

'KEEPING KIDS SAFE'

A PARENTS GUIDE TO CHILD PROTECTION IN HOCKEY

Hockey can have a very powerful and positive influence on people – especially young people. Not only can it provide opportunities for enjoyment and achievement; it can also develop valuable qualities such as self-esteem, leadership and teamwork. These positive effects can only take place if sport is in the right hands – in hands of those who place the welfare of all young people first and adopt practices that support, protect and empower them.

The reality is that abuse does take place in sport and in some cases coaches/helpers have been convicted. However, much positive work is in progress, including England Hockey guidelines in this leaflet, to ensure that a safer sport environment is created for all young people. These guidelines will help you as parents to be aware of the good practice that you should expect in relation to your child's involvement in hockey.

The guidelines are also relevant to carers of disabled adults involved in hockey and Zone Hockey. Although all adults and children, regardless of impairment, may be vulnerable at certain times of their lives, disabled people are sometimes even more vulnerable and therefore their risk of abuse is higher.

WHAT SIGNS MIGHT REGISTER CONCERN?

Everyone has a moral and even legal responsibility to support and care for young people/disabled adults, not only while they are on the club premises but also if they suspect abuse is taking place elsewhere. There are physical and behavioural signs that might raise concerns about the welfare or safety of young players.

ACCEPTABLE PRACTICE, POOR PRACTICE OR ABUSE?

Is it OK to push young players so hard that they are physically sick?

This may be deemed acceptable if it occurs occasionally with elite players. However, it may constitute poor practice and even abuse, if it occurs frequently and/or is accompanied by distress.

Some examples include:

- ◆ unexplained bruising or injuries and reluctance to talk about them
- ◆ unexplained changes in behaviour – becoming aggressive, withdrawn or unhappy
- ◆ something said by a young player or peer
- ◆ a change observed over a long period of time (e.g. the player losing weight or becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt)
- ◆ sexually explicit behaviour and language

These signs are indicators, not confirmation of abuse. However, if you notice any of these signs regularly or more than one sign, you should record and report your concerns.

Abuse may result from various causes through the misuse of power by adults or peers:

- ◆ **Neglect** (e.g. lack of food, warmth, supervision, attention, love and affection). In hockey, this may result from a failure to ensure players are safe, free from risk of excessive cold, heat or injury.
- ◆ **Physical abuse** (e.g. hitting, shaking, squeezing, biting, burning). In hockey, this may result if the nature or intensity of the training is inappropriate for the capacity of the player; or where drugs or alcohol (specifically with U18's) are advocated or tolerated.

- ◆ **Sexual abuse** (e.g. any form of sexual behaviour between an adult and a young person or the use of pornographic material). In hockey, this may be the result of coaches or older players involving young/disabled players in any form of sexual activity (e.g. sexual language, touching or relationships).
- ◆ **Emotional abuse** (e.g. wherever there is any other forms of abuse as well as the withholding of love or affection, overprotection, frequent use of shouting or taunts). In hockey, this may occur if players are subjected to constant criticism, bullying (by coach, parents or peers), taunting or unrealistic pressure to perform to high expectations.

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOUR CHILD IS DISTRESSED BY ANOTHER PERSON'S BEHAVIOUR?

In some cases it is hard to distinguish between poor coaching practice and abuse. Coaches are responsible to do everything within their power to ensure their coaching practice is beyond reproach.

If you are worried, remember it is not your responsibility to decide if abuse is taking place **but it is your responsibility to act on your concerns and do something about it.** If your child tells you about someone's behaviour (e.g. an adult or another young person) which he/she finds disturbing, always:

- ◆ stay calm and reassure the child – ensure he/she is safe, feels safe and does not feel to blame for what has happened
- ◆ listen carefully, show and tell the child that you are taking what is being said seriously
- ◆ be honest, explain you will have to tell someone else to help stop the behaviour that is distressing
- ◆ make a note of what was said as soon as possible after the event
- ◆ maintain confidentiality – only share the information on a need-to-know basis, and if it will help the child
- ◆ gain medical attention immediately if required and if appropriate contact the police or social services

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEONE'S BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS YOUR CHILD/CHILDREN?

WHO IS DRIVING YOUR CHILDREN HOME?

Remember to check with the club/organisation what arrangements have been made for your children's travel. Ensure you know who your children are travelling with and that you are happy with this. Ideally you should be asked to give written consent for your children to travel with club officials.

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO ASK FOR HELP

If you were abused in the past, you can still seek help to deal with how you feel. There are many confidential help lines and organisations in the telephone book. Please find the courage to call – especially if the perpetrator is still involved in sport and has access to other young and vulnerable people.

It is your responsibility to act if you are concerned about the behaviour of an adult towards a child or if you feel a child or disabled adult is being bullied:

- ◆ Always follow the EH child protection guidelines.
- ◆ Report your concerns with full details to the senior person in charge at the club/organisation (or someone you can trust) – it is then the responsibility of that person in charge to act.

- ◆ If the person in charge is not available, the concerns are about him/her, or you do not feel appropriate action has been taken; you must contact the social services or the police. Both organisations have specialist units trained to deal with these situations and their numbers are in the telephone book.

AS PARENTS/CARERS YOU SHOULD EXPECT 'BEST PRACTICE' FOR YOUR CHILD'S INVOLVEMENT IN HOCKEY

CAN YOU PROMISE NOT TO TELL ANYONE?

If you suspect your child is being abused, you will have to report your concerns in order for the abuse to be investigated and stopped. Never make promises you cannot keep.

SHOULD I REPORT MY CONCERNS STRAIGHT AWAY?

If you are concerned about the welfare or safety of a child, you must report your concerns to the EH Child Protection Officer or an expert. If you are unsure what to do or need re-assurance, seek advice from the NSPCC (0800 800 500), the police or social services.

And... 'Best Practice' means that coaches, officials and helpers:

- ◆ always put the welfare of each player first
- ◆ treat all young/disabled persons equally, and with respect and dignity
- ◆ build balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empower players to share in the decision-making process
- ◆ work in an open environment
- ◆ adhere to the EH Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct
- ◆ do not subject players to bullying, humiliating comments or sarcasm
- ◆ maintain appropriate boundaries to prevent intimate and sexual relationships developing with players (avoiding horseplay, sexually suggestive comments and action)
- ◆ make sport fun and enjoyable, and promote fair play
- ◆ keep up to date with coaching/officiating knowledge, skills, qualifications and insurance

CAN TOUCHING EVER BE APPROPRIATE?

Some hockey coaching techniques may require physical contact or support. The player's permission should always be asked first (e.g. Would you mind if I take your arm and show you what I mean? Remember touching can be okay and appropriate, as long as it is neither intrusive nor disturbing.



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