

If your child is interested in attending a sports club or other group activity, it is important to visit and find out how the group operates. It is best to visit a standard group activity session so you can see what the staff are doing and whether the children seem happy.

**Questions you may want to ask a sports coach or group leader include:**

### **Is the club affiliated to any sports governing body and/or club accreditation scheme?**

Clubs who are affiliated and have achieved a certain level of accreditation (e.g. ClubMark) have already had to evidence their commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment for children and young people. Where clubs are affiliated with a national body, parents and carers can be reassured that any concerns they feel have not been addressed satisfactorily at the club can also be taken to the lead safeguarding officer for the national body for further advice.

### **Does the organisation have a safeguarding policy?**

Sports clubs and other organisations should have a safeguarding policy, with a clear procedure for dealing with concerns or risks of abuse. You should be advised how you can access the policy and how often it is updated.

### **Who can you contact at the club if you or your child have a concern?**

All clubs should have an identified person who leads on safeguarding within the club. This person may be called a Safeguarding Officer, a Child Protection Officer or similar and their role is to oversee the implementation of all safeguarding measures at the club and to listen and advise on any concerns that emerge. This person should be made known to all club members and their contact info widely accessible.

### **Are staff trained and do they have police checks? (referred to as DBS checks)**

All clubs should have taken all necessary measures to ensure their coaches and volunteers are the right people to be working with children and young people. These processes should include interviews, references and Disclosure and Barring Checks (DBS) – often known as police background checks – for eligible coaches/volunteers working with children. Coaches and volunteers should also undertake appropriate safeguarding training and refresh this regularly. Your child's coach should have a recognised qualification to clarify they are qualified and have the technical competence in the sport or activity at the right level. Coaches need to be competent to deliver and oversee the sport or activity safely. Some sports also licence their coaches. Such licencing schemes usually require coaches to evidence that their coaching qualification, safeguarding and first aid training and other key areas are up to date. This can be a good way of knowing that your coaching team are regularly updating their knowledge and practice.



### **Is there a written code of conduct for coaches and volunteers?**

There should be a written code of behaviour (or conduct) showing what is required of staff, volunteers and participants. Avoid organisations that do not have a commitment to address bullying, shouting, racism, sexism or any other kind of oppressive behaviour. Any unacceptable behaviour should be challenged and dealt with in a professional manner by the organisation.

### **What is the staff ratio?**

Find out what the recommended supervision ratios are for your child's chosen activity. You can do this by referring to the organisation responsible for the sport or activity. It's always recommended that more than one member of staff or volunteer is present when in charge of young people. You may also want to consider whether there is a mix of both male and female staff and volunteers.

### **Are you required to sign any consent forms, or provide emergency contacts, and your child's relevant medical details?**

As part of your child's registration, are you asked to complete a consent form? This should ask for your permission to undertake certain activities, emergency contacts, key medical information (allergies, asthma, etc.) and whether there are any other issues the club needs to know about in order to help your child get the most out of their participation.

### **Does the club operate within a safe environment?**

Find out a little about how the club operate to ensure that they are operating in a safe way. It is important to identify that the organisation ensures that no staff/volunteer members are left alone and isolated when in charge of the young people. Also check out their procedures around issuing medicines or first aid, do they have a procedure for recording accidents and injuries

and does the environment look safe and free from obvious hazards or dangers. Ask to see the organisation's Health and Safety Policy.

### **What are the boundaries around club relationships and communication with children and young people?**

All clubs should have clear guidelines about appropriate relationships and social activities between coaches, volunteers, participating young people and their families. They should also have clear guidance for all about how the club will/will not communicate with participants. It is not acceptable for coaches or volunteers to directly contact young people via personal social media accounts or phone numbers and a safe club will use alternative methods to ensure everyone is protected. Find out who in the club you can speak to if you have concerns about boundaries not being observed.

### **Are there clear procedures/arrangements for who can collect my child at the end of the session?**

Find out if there are written procedures for collecting children and that you are confident they ensure your child's safety.

### **What to do if your child tells you something inappropriate has happened**

It is important that you listen to what your child says and believe what they are saying, reassuring them that it is not their fault.

Find out the club's guidelines for recording and reporting concerns and follow them. Speak to the club child protection or welfare officer.

Call the Police on 999 if you think your child is in immediate danger.

If you're worried about a child or young person or think they're being abused, even if you're unsure, you can also call 01752 668000 and ask for the Gateway Team or email [gateway@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:gateway@plymouth.gov.uk).

The Gateway service is made up of multi-agency professionals who can give you advice, information and support. You can also contact the NSPCC if you want to talk to someone about your concerns and get advice.

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), based in Children and Young People's Services, should be informed if you have any concerns where it is believed that a person working with children has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they would pose a risk of harm to children.

You should also contact the Police on 999 if you believe that a crime has been committed.

Please note that this leaflet is not exhaustive, but it should enable parents and carers to establish some of the important features of any club or society. Parents should always use their own judgement in making the final decision on whether or not a club or society is a safe place to leave their child/children.

#### **Useful Contacts**

Plymouth City Council Gateway  
01752 668000

Local Authority Designated Officer  
01752 307144

NSPCC  
0808 800 5000

SwimLine  
0808 100 4001

NSPCC Child Protection in Sport  
[www.thecpsu.org.uk](http://www.thecpsu.org.uk)



**A parent's guide to  
choosing a sports,  
leisure or general  
activities club for  
their child**

