

9. Facilities

Introduction

The following are guidelines recommended by Sport Ireland to assist Clubs when assessing or reviewing their facilities with regard to providing a safe environment for children and young people.

The following aspects should be taken into account when accessing facilities:

- Type of Facility.
- Adults using the changing rooms at the same time as children.
- Supervision.
- Who should supervise?
- Parents as Supervisors.
- Unsupervised children in sport or leisure facilities.
- Parents' (or carers') responsibilities.
- Facility Operators Responsibilities.
- Mixed Gender Teams.

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 eight years should make arrangements for their supervision while changing before and after the activity. Although most children of school age (four years old) may be capable of changing their clothes, many leisure facilities have established guidelines that any child below the age of eight years must be accompanied.
- The group includes disabled children who require additional support and assistance with changing (note 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 troublesome behaviours taking place which need to be managed.

Who should supervise?

If the club have decided that the children and young people need supervision, staff/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.

- 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 is considered good practice to ensure that children are supervised by staff/volunteers of the same gender while changing.
- Timings - by agreeing a very clear timetable for use of the changing facilities by children, the supervising adults and any coaches or officials respectively, the risks associated to any extended contact between the adults and children are minimised.
- Carry out safe recruitment practices.

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 parent/ carer/s.
- Attending an activity.
- Attending an activity staffed by the facility.
- Attending a school group or club.
- 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 facility's policy regarding unaccompanied children using the facility, and any rules about the supervision of young children within the facility (particularly in changing/ shower areas where potential safeguarding risks are increased). Many facilities currently use the age of eight as a guide. In practice, while facilities need to be able to establish a lower threshold for admission that is practical to operate, identifying an age for this purpose is difficult given variations in children's physical, psychological and emotional development. While the facility may set the lower age limit, it is for parents (who know most about their children and have primary responsibility for their welfare) to judge if their child needs to be accompanied even if older than this limit.