



Safeguarding Children – Policy and Procedures

Note: Changes to the requirements for PVG checks legislation effective April 2025 mean that each organisation (i.e. each Highland games) is responsible for ensuring that all regulated roles are identified and PVG checks undertaken where necessary. Games should keep a record of their decision-making process so even if there are few/no roles identified as needing PVG checks, that decision can be justified if challenged in future.

Policy Objectives

Everyone who takes part in highland games is entitled to participate in an enjoyable and safe environment. To ensure this, the RSHGA is committed to establishing and implementing policies and procedures to ensure a safe highland games environment.

Observing best practises in highland games benefits everyone- the sport's governing bodies, events, athletes, officials, teachers, parents, carers and coaches. Most importantly, it ensures that children who choose to participate in highland games have a safe and fun experience.

Our objective is to build a safer future in highland games for all children (In Scotland this extends until the individual's 19th birthday).

All children are entitled to a duty of care and to be protected from abuse. Abuse can occur anywhere; with over a thousand people participating and helping with highland games, there is a possibility that there are some individuals abusing their power over children.

The RSHGA is committed to devising, implementing and updating policies and procedures to promote best practice when working with children to ensure that everyone in the sport understands and accepts their responsibilities to safeguard children from harm and abuse. This means taking action to report any concerns about their welfare. It is not the responsibility of the RSHGA to determine whether or not abuse has taken place, this is the domain of child protection professionals.

Policy Statement

RSHGA aim to provide (and encourage their member events provide) a duty of care to protect all children and safeguard their welfare, irrespective of age, disability, gender, ethnicity, gender identity religion or belief and sexual orientation.

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- All children have the right to protection from abuse
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse and poor practice will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- All individuals involved in highland games understand and accept their responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate body.

In order to meet this obligation all Highland games bodies will:-

- Provide and enforce procedures to safeguard the wellbeing of all participants and protect them from abuse.
- Ensure all children who take part in highland games are able to participate in a safe and fun environment.
- Respect and uphold the rights, wishes and feelings of children.
- Recruit, train and supervise staff/volunteers to adopt best practise to safeguard and protect young people from abuse, and themselves from false allegations.
- Require staff/volunteers to adopt and abide by their Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, Codes of Conduct and the relevant grievance, investigatory and disciplinary procedures.
- Respond to any allegations appropriately and implement the appropriate complaints, child protection, disciplinary and appeals procedures.
- Review policies regularly.

Terms and Abbreviations

CPLO Child Protection Lead Officer for RSHGA (Also the Welfare Officer)

CRBS Central Registered Body in Scotland

ISA Independent Safeguarding Authority

CPSU Child Protection in Sport Unit (NSPCC)

CPiS Child Protection in Sport Service in Scotland (Children 1st)

A Child is anyone under the age of 18, though for safeguarding purposes this extends to their 19th birthday. 'Children' therefore means children and young people throughout. The fact a child has reached 16 years of age, living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody, does not change his or her status or entitlement to protection under the Children Act 1989.

Disabled children may be more vulnerable and at greater risk of all forms of abuse. The presence of multiple disabilities increases the risk of both abuse and neglect. Some of the common factors that can lead to increased vulnerability include social isolation, communication and learning difficulties or disability, lack of understanding of boundaries, need for assistance with personal care and more likely target for bullying and abuse. Children with disabilities have the same rights to protection as any other child and people working with these children need to be especially alert to the signs and symptoms of abuse and have strategies in place to ensure all children are able to raise concerns*.

* Safeguarding Disabled Children: Practice Guidance (DCSF 2009)

Best Practice, Poor Practice and Abuse

Introduction

To provide everybody with the best possible experience and opportunities in highland games it is important that everyone operates within an accepted ethical framework and demonstrates exemplary behaviour.

This section will help you identify what is meant by best and poor practice and some of the indications of possible abuse. Guidance on what to do if you are concerned about poor practice or possible abuse is also provided in this document.

Best Practice

Best practice means: -

- Being open and conducting all interactions with children in a public place and with appropriate consent.
- Avoiding situations where you are alone with one child
- If you have to meet or coach one child ensure it is conducted in an open environment, and where full consent and emergency contact details have been provided.
- If you are travelling alone with a child gain appropriate consent, avoid consistently having one child alone with you in the car and never sharing a room on your own with a child,
- Challenging bullying, harassment, foul or provocative language or controlling behaviour that could upset individuals or reduce them to tears.
- Never ignoring bullying by parents, coaches or children. Listening to and supporting the person being bullied.
- Maintaining an appropriate relationship with children; this means treating people fairly, with respect and avoiding favouritism.
- Being friendly and open and ensuring that relationships are appropriate for someone in a position of power and trust.
- Respecting all athletes and helping them to take responsibility for their own development and decision making.
- Avoiding unnecessary physical contact. In certain circumstances physical contact is perfectly acceptable and appropriate, as long as it is not intrusive or disturbing to the athlete and that consent for contact has been given by the individual and appropriate parental consent.
- Being qualified and insured for the activities you are undertaking and, where necessary, that any licence remains valid. Ensure that your practice is appropriate for the age and development stage of each athlete.

Adopting best practice not only ensures the individuals welfare, it also protects you from possible wrongful allegations. Children very rarely make false allegations. If they do it is usually because they are confused or covering up for someone else's behaviour and hoping their action might scare the real abuser into stopping.

Poor Practice

The following are examples of poor practice and should be avoided:

- Engaging in rough, physical or sexually provocative games including horseplay.
- Shouting comments at athletes when they are not working hard enough.
- Using harassing and discriminatory language such as 'you run like a girl'
- Engaging in an intimate relationship with one of his/her athletes.
- A group of athletes ganging up on a new athlete and refusing to talk to him/her.
- A coach taking a group of children away to a weekend event on his/her own.

The list above is not exhaustive and many other examples exist. If any of the following incidents should occur you should report them immediately to another colleague, make a written note of the

event and inform parents and/or appropriate adults of the incident and inform the event's Welfare Officer and the RSHGA Welfare Officer.

- If you accidentally hurt a child athlete
- If a child appears distressed in any manner
- If a child appears to be sexually aroused by your actions
- If a child misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.

Abuse

Abuse can occur wherever there are children

There are four main types of abuse:

- Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.
- Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express his/her views, deliberately silencing him/her or 'making fun' of what he/she says or how he/she communicates. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, which especially applies to when a child shares a protected characteristic e.g. racist, sexual or homophobic bullying or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

[Note: under the Equality Act 2010, harassment is a criminal offence based on what are the nine protected characteristics (which are: age, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion/belief, pregnancy/maternity, marriage/civil partnership and gender identity)]

- Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration or non-penetrative acts including kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children
- Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment); protect a child from physical and

emotional harm or danger; ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Disabled children are vulnerable to abuse and are at least three times more likely to be abused than non-disabled children. Those working with them must be aware of this and willing to acknowledge their concerns. There can be a tendency to make allowances for families with sick or disabled children. Practitioners may over identify with the child's parents/carers and be reluctant to accept that abuse or neglect is taking or has taken place, or seeing it as being attributable to the stress and difficulties of caring for a disabled child. When suspecting abuse, practitioners should always ask: "Would this be acceptable if the child were not disabled?"

Recruitment, selection and training.

All reasonable steps will be taken at all levels within the sport to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working in highland games, especially with children.

- All applicants who have or are seeking to undertake a supervised role or responsibility in relation to children in highland games must complete a self-declaration form to establish whether they are known to any Children's Social Care (social services) as being an actual or potential risk to children or whether they have ever had action taken against them (criminal/civil/disciplinary) that might indicate that they are unsuitable to work with or have responsibility for children. This should be considered the first step in safeguarding.
- All applicants who have or are seeking to undertake a role and responsibility in relation to children (regulated position) in highland games must complete a criminal record check (Disclosure Scotland) please refer to the separate advice on criminal record checks. Clubs should remember that these procedures should be applied to people who are already involved in the club and subsequently take on a role which gives them greater access to children (for instance a parent taking on a volunteering role within a highland games).
- A minimum of two written references will be taken up. Where the applicant is to work with children at least one reference will be associated with former work with children, young people. Referees (not relatives) should provide written references that comment on the applicant's previous experience of, and suitability for, working with children and permission to clarify information with referees. Ideally one reference should be from paid employment or education and the other reference should be in a sporting capacity, ideally in a role similar to the one they are applying for. If an applicant has no experience of working with children then they will be given appropriate and valid training.
- Any former involvement with highland games.

Recruitment selection and induction of volunteers

Interviews and induction

Where formal interviews are used they will be conducted according to accepted good practice in human resource management. All staff will undergo a formal or informal induction process in which they complete a profile to identify training needs and aspirations.

Training

All staff and volunteers who work with children will be expected to undertake relevant training on a three yearly basis in child / safeguarding procedures and sources of education and training. For all coaches and volunteers with roles in relation to children this should include attendance at a recognised direct delivery safeguarding workshop.

Monitoring and appraisal

All staff should be given the opportunity to receive regular feedback through observed practice, appraisal or informal feedback to identify training needs and to set goals. Concerns about misconduct, poor practice or abuse, however will be acted on as they arise. Appropriate support will be offered to those who report concerns/incidents or complaints.

Complaints Appeals and Disciplinary procedures

RSHGA has disciplinary and appeals procedures, which are available as separate documents to this policy.

Responding to Disclosure, Suspicions and Allegations

Introduction

While it is not the responsibility of the RSHGA or its member events to decide whether a concern constitutes abuse, it is their responsibility to report any concerns about the welfare of a child .These concerns may arise due to:

- An individual disclosing that they are being abused.
- The behaviour of an adult towards a child.
- A number of indicators observed in a child over a period of time.

How to respond to a disclosure

Don't

- Probe for more information than is offered.
- Speculate or make assumptions.
- Show shock or distaste.
- Make comments about the person against whom the allegations have been made.
- Make promises or agree to keep secrets.
- Give a guarantee of confidentiality.

All suspicions and disclosures must be reported appropriately. It is acknowledged that strong emotions can be aroused particularly in cases of possible sexual abuse or where there is a misplaced loyalty to a colleague.

Safeguarding Children - Welfare Officers

To ensure that appropriate action is taken if there is a disclosure, statutory referral from the police, children's services, adult services or suspicions,

- RSHGA has trained a committee member to act as the designated child protection lead officer (CPLO), this role is also the Welfare Officer.

- All highland games members and other affiliated bodies are recommended to comply with the guidance contained in this document.

Reporting procedures

Any person with information of a disclosure, allegation or concern about the welfare of a child must immediately report this in one of the following ways.

If you are part of the RSHGA governing body you should immediately inform the RSHGA Welfare Officer.

If you are part of a highland games event, you should immediately inform the event's Welfare Officer, who should then share the referral with the RSHGA's Welfare Officer. Where there is no event Welfare Officer, the RSHGA Welfare Officer should be contacted directly.

If you are working in schools you should inform the head teacher or the Local Authority designated Officer (LADO) who can be contacted via Children's Social Care who will follow normal Local Authority procedures will be applicable.

If you are working in a local authority facility, you should inform the Local Authority's Sports Development Officer or the manager of the facility who will follow Local Authority procedures.

In any other situation or if the designated person is not available, if the concern is about that person or no action is taken, you should contact the RSHGA Welfare Officer.

Where there is a complaint of abuse against an employee or volunteer there may be three types of investigation:

- Criminal: in which case the police are immediately involved
- Safeguarding children: in which case the social care services (and possibly the police) will be involved
- Disciplinary or misconduct, where it relates to officials

Civil proceedings may also be initiated by the alleged victim of misconduct or abuse, or his/her family, or by persons wrongly accused.

Guidelines on the retention of records relating to possible future investigations may be found from local authority sources; however records should be securely kept in an approved format for up to three years at least.

Dealing with Concerns and Allegations

While RSHGA & Event Welfare Officers should have received training they are not safeguarding children experts and it is not their responsibility to determine whether or not abuse has taken place. If there is any doubt about whether or not the alleged behaviour constitutes abuse, the concern must be shared with professional agencies that will be responsible for subsequent action.

Any suspicion that an individual has been abused by a volunteer or employee within highland games should be reported to the RSHGA Welfare Officer who will take appropriate steps to ensure the safety of the individual in question and any other individual who may be at risk. This will include the following:

- the RSHGA Welfare Officer will refer the allegation to the appropriate social care services department who may involve the police or go directly to the police if out of hours.

If the RSHGA Welfare Officer is unavailable, you should take responsibility and seek advice from either the NSPCC helpline (0808 800 5000), Children 1st (0141 418 5674) in Scotland the duty officer at local children services department or the local police child protection unit. Telephone numbers are in the local telephone directory.

- The parents of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from the social care services department.
- the RSHGA Welfare Officer will also notify the RSHGA's directors who will decide how to deal with any media enquiries.
- the RSHGA Welfare Officer and/or a RSHGA Director can impose an interim suspension based on the risk to the child, an assessment of the seriousness of the allegation and the need to ensure a full investigation can be instituted.
- Accreditation may be withdrawn from any highland games event venue if it is considered that the use of the venue continues to offer any form of threat to children
- the RSHGA Welfare Officer will also make a full report to the RSHGA Directors. Irrespective of the findings of the Children's Social Care (social services) or the Police, the RSHGA will assess all individual cases and determine if the person can be reinstated and how this can be handled sensitively. This decision must be made on the available information, which could suggest on the balance of probability; it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of the child is paramount.
- Where the RSHGA or event has an obligation to its insurer to advise them of allegations / actions raised this needs done within the timescales detailed in the civil liability policy.

In circumstances where RSHGA does not have jurisdiction to deal with the individual, the RSHGA Welfare Officer will act as the link person between the sport and the social care services and/or the police and pass on all the information to the relevant governing body/organisation with disciplinary jurisdiction.

Where the police or social care services make a statutory referral and invite a highland games official to a case conference or professional meeting then the RSHGA Welfare Officer must be informed as soon as possible to determine whether to attend and represent the governing body at the meeting and support the individual.

Anyone who has a previous criminal conviction for offences relating to abuse is automatically excluded from working with children. These decisions will be dealt with by the Independent Safeguarding Authority for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in Scotland this will be the role of the Central Barring Unit. This is reinforced by the details of the Protection of Children Act (1999) and set out in Schedule 4 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act. The Protection of Children (Scotland) Act (2003) and the Protection of Vulnerable Groups are applicable in Scotland.

Poor Practice

If the allegations are against an employee or volunteer and after consideration are clearly about poor practice, the allegation will be dealt with by the RSHGA and member event under their disciplinary procedures as a misconduct issue.

Dealing with Bullying

The same procedures should be adopted when dealing with allegations of bullying.

Disciplinary and Appeal Procedures

RSHGA general disciplinary policy will apply in these cases where the individual involved is in scope for the RSHGA disciplinary procedures – this document is available separately.

Records and Confidentiality

Always follow the reporting procedure set out above. Use of the referral form will assist you to collect and collate the required information. Your reports should be factual and include where possible

- The referrer's and/or the child's name, address and date of birth
- The date and time of the incident.
- The facts about the allegation or observation.
- Your factual observations e.g. describe the behaviour and emotional state of the alleged victim, and note any marks, bruising or other injuries.
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what happened using the exact words if possible.
- Details of any witnesses
- Any times, dates or other relevant information.
- Any action that was taken as a result of the concerns.
- A clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
- A copy of this information must be sent to the RSHGA Welfare Officer.

Confidentiality should be maintained at all times. Information should be handled and disseminated on a *need to know basis only*.

Information will be stored securely in line with data protection laws with access available only to the RSHGA Welfare Officer, RSHGA Directors where they need involved, and any statutory body that is entitled to them (e.g. Local Authority, Police).

Support for Victim, Accused and Reporter

RSHGA acknowledges the difficulty in reporting concerns and will fully support and protect anyone who in good faith (without malicious intent), reports his or her concern about a colleague's practice or concerns about the welfare of a child.

RSHGA will take appropriate steps to ensure that the victim (and parents, appropriate adults) is provided with appropriate professional support, including details of professional safeguarding organisations.

RSHGA will also ensure through the appropriate allegation, disciplinary and appeals procedures that the accused is offered appropriate support.

REFERRAL FORM

Your name and contact details:

Your position:

Your knowledge of and relationship to the child

Child's name:

Child's address:

Child's date of birth:

Date(s), time(s) and location(s) of incident(s):

Nature of the concern/allegation:

Observations made by you or to you (e.g. description of visible bruising, other injuries, child's emot etc):

NB Make a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay

Exactly what the child said and what you said (Remember, do not lead the child– record actual deta on a separate sheet if necessary):

Actions Taken so far:

External agencies contacted:

Remember to maintain confidentiality (on a need to know basis)-only share if it will protect the child. Do not discuss the incident with anyone other than those who need to know.

A copy of this form must be sent to the RSHGA Welfare Officer, email:
welfareofficer@rshga.org

A YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO CHILD PROTECTION

You have rights – Sport should be fun. You should feel safe and enjoy your sport. You can't do this if you feel unhappy – if someone is bullying or abusing you.

When do you know if something is wrong?

Something is wrong if someone:

- Constantly teases you, shouts at you or calls you names
- Threatens, hits, kicks or punches you
- Makes suggestive remarks or tries to pressurize you into sexual activity
- Damages or steals your belongings
- Touches you, or does anything in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable
- Does anything that makes you feel lonely, worried, unsafe, hurt or embarrassed!

If you are being bullied or abused it is not your fault. If this is happening try to:

- Be firm and tell the person to stop – make a lot of noise to attract attention

- Get away from the situation quickly, go to a public place to find help or call the police (999)
- Tell your parents / carers , the RSHGA Welfare Officer or an adult you can trust what has happened as soon as possible, so they can help you
- Keep a record of the date, time and place, what happened, how you felt and the name of anyone who may have seen what happened
- Call the 24 hr free telephone helplines [**Childline 0800 1111, NSPCC 0800 800 5000**]

Keep trying if you can't get through straight away

Keeping Safe

To keep safe always:

- Tell someone you can trust so they can help you
- Trust your instincts about the people you meet
- Avoid being alone or with just one other person
- Travel with a friend, avoid traveling in someone else's car by yourself
- Avoid going to other people's homes by yourself
- Carry a mobile phone, a phone card or some spare change

If any of the above happens to you, do not wait for it to happen again, act immediately

Has it happened to you? Don't keep it to yourself

If you think you are being abused, or have been in the past, it's really important to tell an adult you trust. This isn't easy. You may feel worried about what will happen if you do. Here are some other reasons why you may not want to tell anyone:

- the abuser may have told you to keep quiet and not to talk to anybody
- they may have threatened you about what might happen to you or your place in the team if you tell
- they may have made threats about your friends or family
- they may have said "No one will believe you" or "No one will do anything if you tell"
- you may feel guilty that you didn't stop the abuse happening
- the person may be someone who everyone in your sport looks up to - perhaps including your parents
- you may not want to let your parents down
- you may even think the problem will go away if you ignore it.

Don't let any of these things stop you getting help. By telling someone, you can stop the abuse.

You'll also be helping to protect other children from the abuser.

Getting help

- Tell an adult you trust as soon as possible. This could be: a parent or someone else in your family; another member of staff at your athletics club; a teacher or school counsellor; your doctor or school nurse.
- Contact one of the [child protection helplines](#) . They will know who can help you in your area.
- Make sure you are not alone again with the person who has tried to harm you.
- You can contact the RSHGA Welfare Officer by emailing **welfareofficer@rshga.org**

Children have the right to enjoy sporting activities in safety. The work of Child Protection in Sport is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Convention spells out how people should treat you. If you would like to know more, [see what the Convention says about your rights](#) .

For further help and advice, visit www.childline.org.uk