Safeguarding children and young people – a short guide for club members

What is Safeguarding?

Safeguarding is the action taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18 under the Children Act 1989, which also states that children's welfare is paramount.

What's the difference between Safeguarding and Child Protection?

The term Child Protection is normally used to describe the process of protecting an individual child identified as either suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect.

In boating terms, you might think of safeguarding as doing a risk assessment, following good operating procedures, checking boats, equipment, weather and tides, making sure everyone wears a lifejacket or buoyancy aid, while child protection would be carrying out a rescue or calling the coastguard or RNLI.

What has safeguarding got to do with me?

Government guidance makes it clear that 'Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility'.

All children, irrespective of sex, age, disability, race, religion or belief, sexual identity or social status, have a right to be treated with respect and protected from physical, sexual or emotional harm or neglect.

Anyone who has a negative experience of sport at a young age is less likely to become a regular long-term participant. It's important for the future of your club and the sport as a whole that children and young people have an enjoyable experience, both on and off the water. All club members have a part to play in making that happen.

Isn't it the responsibility of parents and the people who run the club's junior programme?

Of course parents are responsible for their children's welfare and conduct. Those with specific roles that involve teaching, coaching or supervising children should be suitable people who have received appropriate training. But all adults should contribute to the club's overall duty of care, be aware of their club's safeguarding policy, and know what to do if they are concerned about a young person.

What do I need to do?

The main thing is to treat children and young people with respect – as you would expect them to behave towards you. Follow your club's code of conduct. On the water, race in accordance with the RYA Racing Charter which encourages fair, enjoyable and safe racing for all, in compliance with the rules, and states that 'foul or abusive language, intimidation, aggressive behaviour or lack of respect for others and their property will not be tolerated'.

For your own protection, avoid putting yourself in a situation that could be misinterpreted:

- Try to avoid using the changing room when there are children there, or if it's unavoidable make sure you're not the only adult in the changing room.
- Don't give a child a lift in your car, unless it's with their parents' full knowledge and consent.
- Think very carefully before contacting a young person via mobile phone, e-mail or social media. In general stick to group communications. If it's essential to send an individual message, where possible copy the communication to a parent and only communicate about organisational matters.

I sometimes do safety boat duty. Is it OK to physically handle a child?

Of course it's fine to handle a child in an emergency situation, whether it's rescuing them from the water or giving first aid. Try to tell the child what you're planning to do before you do it, and make a written record of the incident at the earliest opportunity.

Will I have to have a criminal record check?

You should not be asked to apply for a criminal record check unless you are involved in running activities specifically for children and young people on a regular basis. If you only do occasional safety boat duty, or provide cover for general club racing, it is unlikely that you would be eligible for a check.

What should I do if I'm concerned about a child or young person?

A concern may involve the behaviour of an adult towards a child at the club, or something that has happened to the child outside the club. Children may confide in adults they trust, in a place where they feel comfortable. An allegation may range from verbal bullying, to inappropriate contact online, to neglect or emotional abuse, to physical or sexual abuse.

If you are concerned about a child, it is not your responsibility to investigate further, but it is your responsibility to act on your concerns and report them.

Listen to and make a record of anything the child tells you or that you have observed. Don't ask questions, but make it clear that you will need to tell someone else in order to help them. Pass the information to your club's Welfare/ Safeguarding/Child Protection Officer who will follow your club's procedures. Their details should be available on the club notice board or website. If you're not sure who it is, or they are not available, you can call one of the numbers below for advice. If you believe the child is at immediate risk of harm, call the Police.

Useful contact numbers
NSPCC 24-hour helpline
Tel: 0808 800 5000   E-mail: help@nspcc.org.uk

ParentLine Scotland
Tel: 0800 028 2233 (9am – 9pm Mon – Fri)
E-mail: parentlinescotland@children1st.org.uk

RYA Safeguarding Manager
Tel: 023 8060 4104   E-mail: safeguarding@rya.org.uk

Where to find more information

RYA guidance and procedures
www.rya.org.uk/go/safeguarding

General guidance
www.nspcc.org.uk
www.thecpsu.org.uk
www.safeguardinginsport.org.uk (Scotland)

Advice and information on online safety
www.nspcc.org.uk/shareaware
www.net-aware.org.uk

RYA Racing Charter
www.rya.org.uk/racing/Pages/RacingCharter.aspx