



## Best Practice Guidelines for Coaching Children and Young People's Activities: Staffing/Supervision Numbers and Ratios

### Joint Guidance by sports coach UK and the Child Protection in Sport Unit December 2010

sports coach UK and the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) have jointly provided these best practice guidelines as a direct response to a significant number of enquiries from coaches and coach employers/deployers requesting guidance on coach/supervision numbers and ratios.

Many governing bodies of sport and other coach-employing/deploying organisations have issued specific supplementary guidance on minimum coach-to-participant supervision ratios (and a range of other factors linked to the welfare and safety of participants), and these should be adhered to. The application of the guidance in this document may enhance existing practice requirements.

It is important to ensure that, in planning and running sports activities for children and young people, consideration is given to providing an appropriate staffing/supervision ratio of adults to participants, regardless of the environment in which the activity is taking place. This will minimise any risks to participants, enhance the benefits they draw from the activity, reassure parents/carers, and provide some protection for those responsible for providing the activity in the event of concerns or incidents arising.

Due to the number of potential variables, it is not possible to recommend 'one size fits all' guidance to cover all activities involving children and young people. There are, however, a number of key principles that are recommended as good practice.

It is the responsibility of those commissioning, planning or providing sessions/activities to ensure that those running the activity meet the minimum standards for deployment (MSDs) published in 2010; ie they:

- hold an appropriate qualification
- comply with minimum age requirements
- have relevant insurance cover
- have been through effective recruitment checks (including an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau or Disclosure Scotland disclosure)
- have signed up to the relevant:
  - code of conduct
  - equality policy
  - participant welfare policy<sup>1</sup>
  - agreed<sup>2</sup> health and safety policy.

Many sports have a system to allow under-18s to receive coaching or refereeing awards. However, although there are positive roles these young people can play in supporting the delivery of activity, they should not be given full responsibility for managing a group of children. Coaches under the age of 18 years can only supplement appropriately qualified adult coaches who have overall responsibility for supervising the activity.

sports coach UK is currently encouraging and supporting the development of additional training guidelines, beyond the core MSDs, to reflect the specific needs of individual sports, coaching populations, programmes, locations and responsibilities of the coach being deployed. Until further guidance can be provided on these additions, we would suggest coaches receive training in:

- safeguarding and protecting children in sport
- equity in their coaching
- how to coach disabled people in sport.

<sup>1</sup> In the context of coaching children, a safeguarding/child protection policy is the appropriate participant welfare policy.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'agreed' refers to the potential challenge where more than one policy may apply within a deployment setting (eg school and governing body of sport). Under these circumstances, an agreement needs to be reached as to which policy should take precedence.



Whatever the recommended ratio of adults to participants is, a minimum of two adults should be present. This ensures at least basic cover in the event of something impacting on the availability of one of the adults during the activity (eg in the event of a participant requiring the attention of an adult during the activity following an accident, or an accident befalling one of the adults).

We recognise that this guidance represents recommended best practice, rather than a legal requirement on organisations, but suggest that its implementation will contribute to ensuring activities are positive, progressive and safe.

In the planning of all activities, and regardless of any other assessments that may be required (eg of equipment or for health and safety purposes), a risk assessment should be undertaken that specifically informs decision making about appropriate supervision levels.

Key factors to assess include:

- age of children
- additional supervision/support needs of some or all participants (eg due to disability)
- competence/experience of participants for the specific activity
- nature of activity (eg climbing or swimming sessions may require higher levels of supervision than an aerobics class)
- nature of venue (whether closed and exclusive, or open and accessible to members of the public).

While the risk assessment or organisational requirements may well indicate the need for an enhanced level of supervision and staffing for a particular

activity, the CPSU and sports coach UK suggest that the following guidelines are considered as minimum requirements for any activity:

### **Children under eight years old:**

One adult to eight participants (with a minimum of two adults) – this is based on the government's guidance for the provision of out-of-school care for children under eight years old (Ofsted [2001] *Out of School Care: Guidance to the National Standards*).

### **Children over eight years old:**

One adult to ten participants (with a minimum of two adults).

### **Parents/Carers**

Although the CPSU and sports coach UK encourage parents/carers to accompany children to activities, we do not recommend those planning or providing activities include parents/carers in supervision calculations, unless the parents/carers are acting in a formal volunteering or other capacity during the activity. In these circumstances, this should mean that those parents/carers meet all appropriate requirements in terms of:

- appropriate checks
- clarity about their role
- who has overall responsibility for the group
- what is acceptable practice.

It is worth re-emphasising that it is the responsibility of the 'employer'<sup>3</sup> of the coach to establish and clarify the minimum supervision/ratio requirements and ensure that the coaching environment is set up appropriately, regardless of whether the coach is deployed in environments hosted by others (eg supplying a school with a coach).

## **For further information, please contact either:**

sports coach UK  
114 Cardigan Road  
Headingley  
LS6 3BJ  
Tel: 0113-274 4802  
[www.sportscoachuk.org](http://www.sportscoachuk.org)

Child Protection in Sport Unit  
For home country contact details, refer to  
[www.thecpsu.org](http://www.thecpsu.org)

<sup>3</sup> The employer, in this regard, may include traditional employing organisations (eg schools or local authorities), as well as other organisations, including voluntary sports clubs, leisure trusts, charities, private coaching providers or governing bodies of sport.