

# **Fun Gymnastics Child Safeguarding Guidelines**

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## Forward

The development of this Child Safeguarding Guidelines is based on the rules and regulations laid down By Sports Ireland Child Safeguarding Guidelines. We recognises the commitment of Sport Ireland to ensure that young people are safeguarded in their participation in all programmes delivered by its staff. It is essential that we as company take steps to ensure that the early experiences for children in our activities are positive and enjoyable, irrespective of their ability, gender, social or ethnic background.

## Policy Statement

Fun Gymnastics is fully committed to safeguarding the well being of its members. Every individual in Fun Gymnastics should at all times, show respect and understanding for customer rights, safety and welfare and conduct themselves in a way that reflects the principles of the organization and the guidelines contained in the Sport Irelands Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport.

## Section 1: Fun Gymnastics Centre Child Safeguarding Policy

We at Fun Gymnastics are committed to follow the child-centred approach laid down by Sport Irelands Child Safeguarding Guidelines for all services and programmes operated by us the staff of Fun Gymnastics for the benefit of children.

All staff/members of Fun Gymnastics who are involved in activities involving children are guided by what is best for children. Children's activities will be conducted in a safe, positive and encouraging atmosphere. Standards of excellence will extend to personal conduct.

### Definition of 'Child'

According to the guidelines lay down by Sport Ireland a "**child**" is defined as a person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or has been married.

Taking a **child-centred** approach means to:

- Treat all children equally;

- Listen to and respect children;
- Involve children as appropriate;
- Provide encouragement, support and praise (regardless of ability);
- Use appropriate language (physical and verbal);
- Have fun and encourage a positive atmosphere;
- Offer constructive criticism when needed;
- Treat all children as individuals;
- Respect a child's personal space;
- Use age-appropriate teaching aids;
- Lead by example;
- Be aware of child time limitations e.g. school/exams when scheduling activities;
- Create an atmosphere of trust;
  
- Respect and be aware of differences of ability, culture, religion, race and sexual orientation and membership of the Traveller Community;
- Endeavour to provide equality/diversity training for employees in relation to cultural differences;
- Use all information in respect of children only for the purpose for which it is given, subject to child safeguarding concern.

The management and staff/members of Fun Gymnastics agree to provide a safe environment where the welfare of the child is paramount. All staff are encouraged to become familiar and adhere to the Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children by implementing procedures covering:

- Appropriate recruitment and selection of employees and volunteers;

- Implementing the Garda Vetting Procedure for all relevant employees and volunteers;
- Appropriate management, supervision and training of employees;
- The reporting, investigation and recording of incidents and accidents complaints made against Fun Gymnastics and its employees/volunteers;
- The reporting of suspected or disclosed abuse;
- Circulation of information to employees, volunteers, parents/guardians and participants on our activities and what can be expected of Fun Gymnastics in relation to those activities;
- Allegations of misconduct or abuse by employees.

Fun Gymnastics, have created an environment so children are listened to, given a sense of belonging, and kept safe; parents are supported and encouraged; and employees and volunteers who work with children and young people are supported and protected. In order for us to meet these aims Fun Gymnastics now follow the framework for good practice and a code of behaviour that is set out by Sport Ireland.

# Good Practice Framework

Fun Gymnastics aims to work within the following framework for good practice by:

- Providing policy training for employees and volunteers in line with these guidelines;
- Registering each child for day long or long term activities or projects (name, address, phone, special requirements, attendance, emergency contact & parental consent). It is suggested that registration forms be established for relevant service points;
- It will be noted that it is not possible to cover all open or public events e.g. concerts, play day's, playgrounds;
- Complying with Data Protection Policy in respect of personal and sensitive data regarding children and their parents/guardians subject to child safeguarding concerns;
- Making parents/guardians, children, visitors and facilitators aware of these child safeguarding guidelines;
- Having procedures in place for accident/injuries or emergencies as laid down by Fun Gymnastics.
- Reporting/recording any incidents and accidents to person in charge;
- Being inclusive of children with special needs;
- Reporting any concerns to the Child Safeguarding Liaison Officer and following reporting procedures;
- Encouraging children to report any bullying concerns and worries and be aware of anti-bullying policy as appropriate to the service;
- Evaluation of work practices where contact with children occurs on a regular basis;
- Reviewing and updating policies and procedures regularly;

- Keeping parents/guardians informed of any issues of concern regarding their children as appropriate to the service i.e. formal organised activities e.g. sports events;
- Ensuring appropriate, to the service, supervision (including a minimum of two adults) depending on age, abilities and activities involved;
- Not ignoring concerns;
- Not letting a problem get out of control;
- Ensuring that there are adequate insurance arrangements in place to cover all relevant activities;
- Not photographing/filming or otherwise recording or permitting the photographing /filming or otherwise recording of children without the written consent of the parent/guardian;
- Not displaying images of children without the written consent of the parent/guardian;

## Fun Gymnastics - Child Liaison Officer

Fun Gymnastics has appointed Child Liaison Officer(s) as the advocates for children's issues in sport. They are the link between children and adults and are responsible for monitoring and reporting to centre management on how the activities, structures, policies etc laid down by the centre are impacting the child as a customer of Fun Gymnastics.

The role of the Child Liaison Officer is to promote awareness of the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sports within the centre, among young members and their parents/guardians. This could be achieved by:

Promote awareness of the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sports within the club, among young members and their parents/guardians. This could be achieved by:-

- the production/distribution of information leaflets
- the establishment of children's/age group specific notice boards
- regular information meetings for the young people and their parents/guardians
- to influence policy and practice within the clubs in order to prioritise children's needs
- Establish contact with the National Children's Officer at governing body level.
- To ensure that children know how to make concerns known to appropriate adults or agencies.
- To encourage the appropriate involvement of parents/guardians in the club activities. To act as advisory resource to sports leaders on best practice in children's sport
- To monitor changes in membership and follow up on any unusual dropout, absenteeism or club transfer by children or sports leader

- Keep records on each member on file, including junior members, their contact details and any special needs of the child that should be known to leaders.
- Ensure each member signs an annual membership form that includes signing up to the code of conduct
- Ensure that all clubs rules and regulations include:
  - complaints, disciplinary and appeal procedures
  - an anti bullying policy
  - safety statement
  - rules in relation to travel with children
  - supervision and recruitment of leaders



## Section 2: Code of Behaviour in relation to Children

### **Inappropriate Behaviour – Checklist for Employees/Volunteers**

As a service operated by Fun Gymnastics, we at Fun Gymnastics agree the following behaviours are inappropriate as lay down by Fun Gymnastics in their Child Safeguarding Guidelines.

- Avoid spending excessive amounts of time alone with children;
- Avoid taking children on journeys alone in a car where possible and never without the consent of the parent/guardian;
- Where possible employees should avoid being in a one to one situation with a child;
- Do not use/allow offensive or sexually suggestive physical conduct and/or verbal language;
- Do not single out a particular child (for unfair favouritism, criticism or ridicule);
- Do not allow/engage in inappropriate touching of any form;
- Do not hit or physically chastise children;
- Do not socialise inappropriately with children e.g. outside of structured organisational activities;

Where physical contact is an inherent part of an activity, it is important to seek consent of child/young person in relation to physical contact (except in an emergency or a dangerous situation); avoid horseplay or inappropriate touch; check with child/young person about their level of comfort when doing touch exercises i.e. games may involve holding hands and it is about ensuring that this is done openly and within safe and comfortable limits for the child or young person;

Not revealing personal information about children in any way, subject to child safeguarding concerns;

## **Considerations for the Health and Safety of Children**

All staff/member of Fun Gymnastics will take the following points into consideration when working with children to ensure the Health and Safety of the child.

- Do not leave children unattended/unsupervised;
- Ensure that children are not in contact with any dangerous materials;
- Provide a safe environment and where feasible ensure another employee/volunteer is present;
- Be aware of and comply with all Fun Gymnastics policies on Safety, Health and Welfare at Work;
- Ensure that you are familiar with and comply with Fun Gymnastics procedures, in relation to accidents and dangerous occurrences.
- Familiarise yourself with and where necessary comply with the emergency evacuation procedures particular to the location in which you are located and brief the children in your care on what they are to do/where they must go in an emergency;
- Be familiar with the particular risks associated with the activity and/or location at which you are based. Read and understand the Parent and Ancillary Health and Safety Statement for that location;
- When undertaking a risk assessment take account of a child's natural curiosity and include appropriate precautions to safeguard a child's potential exposure;
- For any further advice in relation to health and safety issues you should contact the Health & Safety Advisor.

## Consideration for Children with Special Needs or Disabilities

All Staff/Members of (club name) will adhere to national legislation including Disability Act 2005, and Equal Status Acts 2000-2007 in relation to children with disabilities or special needs to ensure access to Fun Gymnastics services and activities.

### General Supervision

As laid down in Sport Ireland's Child Safeguarding Guidelines, Employees/volunteers of Fun Gymnastics shall endeavor to ensure that there are adequate adult/child ratios. The appropriate ratio will depend on the nature of the activity, the age of the children and any special needs of the group. A general guide may be 1:12 for under 12 years of age and 1:14 for over 12 years of age (good practice is a minimum of two or more adults). There shall be at least one adult of each gender with mixed parties. This ratio may not be appropriate at service points as distinct from organized activities.

- Employees/volunteers shall endeavour to avoid being left alone with children;
- If an adult needs to talk separately to a child this should be done in an open environment in view of others whilst offering the child confidentiality;
- Employees should not be left alone with children at the end of an activity;
- Times for start and finish of
- parents/guardians presents a potentially difficult situation, and employees/activities should be clearly stated;
- Late collection of children by volunteers shall attempt to contact the child's parent/guardian on their contact number;
- Use an alternative contact name/number agreed with the child's parent/ guardian if necessary;
- Wait with the child with another employee member/volunteer present where possible;
- Make it clear to parents/guardians that it is not the Authority's responsibility to transport children home on behalf of parents/guardians who have been delayed;

### **Employees/volunteers shall not:**

- Take the child home or to another location without permission from a parent /guardian;
- Send the child home with another person without permission from a parent/guardian;
- Leave a child unaccompanied.

## **Fun Gymnastics Dealing with Challenging or Disruptive Behaviour**

As described in Sport Irelands Child Safe Guarding Guidelines, Disruptive behaviour is unacceptable, and disruptive children will be asked by employees to behave. Disruptive behaviour will be reported to parent/guardian. If a child continues to be disruptive s/he will be advised that s/he is causing a disturbance and given a warning. A warning letter may be sent to the parent/guardian stating that further disruptions may result in withdrawal of facilities or services to the child. If a child is in danger to themselves or others further action may be required i.e. parent/Gardaí to be contacted.

When dealing with a disruptive child, it is recommended that where possible more than one employee or volunteer be present. Instances of disruptive behaviour that require the intervention of the employee, and which put at risk the safety and well being of others, must be documented. The report shall describe:

- The programme or activity running at the time;
- What happened;
- Who was involved;
- Where and when it happened;
- What was said, if significant;
- Any injury to person or property;

- How the situation was resolved;

## **Section 3: Reporting Child Safeguarding & Welfare Concerns**

### **Recognising Child Abuse**

Child abuse can often be difficult to identify and may present in many forms. Early detection is important and individuals working with children should share their concerns about child safeguarding or welfare with the Child Liaison Officer in Louth County Council. This is the recommended first point of contact. Fun Gymnastics Child Liaison Officer is available for supported if required.

Everyone must be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be being abused.

If a child hints at or tells you that he or she is being abused, it must be handled very sensitively, and in the following way:

- Stay calm and listen – give the child time to say what she or he wants;
- Do not ask leading questions or details, or make suggestions;
- Do not stop the child recalling significant events, but do not make him or her repeat the story unnecessarily;
- Reassure the child, but do not promise to keep it a secret;
- Explain what needs to be done next;
- Record the discussion as carefully as possible.

The information shall then be passed on in accordance with the procedures outlined below.

The primary responsibility of the person who first suspects or is told of abuse is to report it to the Child Safeguarding Liaison Officer of Fun Gymnastics. Again, this is the recommended

first point of contact with Fun Gymnastics Child Liaison Officer available for supported if required.

The guiding principles in regard to reporting child abuse may be summarized as follows:

- The safety and well-being of the child must take priority;
- Reports should be made without delay;
- The principle of natural justice shall apply, as appropriate;
- A person is innocent until proven otherwise however any measures necessary to protect a child must be taken;
- The principle of confidentiality shall apply, whereby only those who need to know should be told of a suspicion/allegation/disclosure of abuse and the number that need to be kept informed shall be kept to a minimum.

### **Steps to be taken by an employee who knows about or suspects child abuse**

- An employee/volunteer who knows or suspects that a child has been or is at risk of being harmed has a duty to convey this concern to Fun Gymnastics Child Safeguarding Liaison Officer without delay;
- Fun Gymnastics Child Safeguarding Liaison Officer will, if appropriate, report the information to the Health Service Executive, who in turn, notifies An Garda Síochána;
- In an emergency, a report must be made directly to An Garda Síochána;

- The person who first encounters a case of alleged or suspected abuse is not responsible for deciding whether or not abuse has occurred. That is a task for the Health Service Executive or An Garda Síochána;
- Under no circumstances should any individual member of employee or volunteer attempt to intervene or deal with the problem of abuse alone.

**The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern.**

- Specific indication from the child that (s)he was abused;
- An account by a person who saw the child being abused;
- Evidence, such as an injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way;
- An injury or behaviour which is consistent both with abuse and with innocent explanation but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse. An example of this would be a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indications of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour;
- Consistent indication, over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.

Observations should be accurately recorded and should include dates, times, names, and locations.

Any Fun Gymnastics employee/volunteer who suspects child abuse shall not interview the child or the child's parents/guardians in any detail about the alleged abuse.

All actions taken and outcomes should be recorded.

The Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse "reasonably and in good faith" to designated officers, the HSE or any member of An Garda Síochána. This means that, even if a reported suspicion of child abuse proves unfounded, a plaintiff who took an action would have to prove that the reporter had not acted reasonably and in good faith in making the report.



## **Section 4: Dealing with Complaints/Allegations against Employees and Volunteers**

### **Allegations of a general nature**

Allegations of a general nature (not related to the alleged abuse or neglect of a child) which are made against Fun Gymnastics, its employees or volunteers must be investigated, dealt with and managed by Fun Gymnastics in accordance with clubs/company Complaints Procedure.

Employees/volunteers are required to co-operate with investigations by or on behalf Fun Gymnastics in accordance with the Complaints Procedure.

### **Allegations against an Employee or Volunteer**

Where an allegation of abuse of a child is made against an employee or volunteer of Fun Gymnastics, the reporting procedure must be dealt with and managed by (club name), guided by Fun Gymnastics Child Safeguarding Liaison Officer. The investigation of suspected child abuse is the responsibility of the statutory authorities i.e. Health Service Executive/An Garda Síochána and will not be undertaken by Fun Gymnastics Child Safeguarding Liaison Officer or other Fun Gymnastics employee/volunteer. Where such an allegation is made against an employee, or volunteer contact and consultation with the Health Service Executive and An Garda Síochána will take place as soon as reasonably practical.

Fun Gymnastics will, as a matter of urgency, take any necessary protective measures that are proportionate to the level of risk and will balance its obligations to its employee with its obligations in respect of the best interests of children.

When an allegation is made against an employee, the following steps shall be taken:

- (i) The first priority shall be to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk. The employer should as a matter of urgency take any necessary protective measures. These measures should be proportionate to the level of risk.
- (ii) Action shall be guided by the agreed internal procedures i.
- (iii) The relevant employing person will be informed as soon as possible;

- (iv) The follow up on an allegation of abuse against an employee shall be made in consultation with the Health Service Executive and An Garda Síochána. An immediate meeting shall be arranged with these two agencies for this purpose;
- (v) When pursuing the question of the future position of the employee, the Child Safeguarding Liaison Officer of Fun Gymnastics shall advise the person accused of the allegation and the agreed procedures shall be followed;
- (vi) Fun Gymnastics shall take care to ensure actions taken by them do not undermine or frustrate any investigations being conducted by the Health Service Executive or An Garda Síochána.

Employees/volunteers may be subjected to erroneous or malicious allegations. Therefore any allegation of abuse will be dealt with sensitively and support will be offered to employees including counselling where necessary. However, the primary goal is to protect the child while taking care to treat the employee/volunteer fairly.

## **Section 5: Confidentiality**

All information regarding concerns of child abuse shall be shared only on "a need to know" basis in the interests of the child. No undertakings regarding secrecy can be given. Ethical and statutory codes concerned with confidentiality and data protection provide general guidance. They are not intended to limit or prevent the exchange of information between different professional employees that have a responsibility for ensuring the safeguarding of children. Giving information to others for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality.

Anyone who receives information from colleagues about possible or actual child abuse must treat it as having been given in confidence, subject to above. Any breaches of confidential information may be regarded as a disciplinary matter, subject to above.

Records should be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act, within an agreed filing system and be available only to those directly involved and within the confines of the obligations and duties of the Data Protection Act, 2003.

## **Section 6: Recruitment and Selection**

Fun Gymnastics are responsible for the employment of staff for classes and have a procedure for the vetting of employees and volunteers working with children/vulnerable adults. This procedure has been determined by An Garda Síochána and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. It applies to both new employees and those who are being re-assigned to a post that will involve interaction with this category of client and existing staff who have interaction with this category of client who have no previous Garda clearance.

All applicants for appointment or engagement will be required to supply information in writing on the prescribed Garda Vetting Form. This will include personal details, past and current work/volunteering experience and any qualifications or skills relevant to the post. Photographic identification may also be required.

Applicants for employment or reassignment will be required to make a declaration relating to previous criminal records.

When a candidate is being considered for appointment or is being placed on a panel, the completed Garda Vetting Form will be sent to the Garda Central Vetting Unit by the Louth County Council's Authorised Signatory as appointed under the Garda Vetting Procedure.

Volunteers may be required to supply information in writing on the prescribed Garda Vetting Form with a view to being vetted by An Garda Síochána. This requirement will be determined through liaison with Louth County Council's Authorised Signatory. The Authorised Signatory should seek advice on the possibility of vetting volunteers through the Garda Vetting Unit.

All candidates being considered for employment will be subject to reference checks. It is the policy to gain at least two recent employment references from those who have knowledge of the individual's recent career in a professional context.

## **Section 7: Further Information**

Further information on child safeguarding and welfare is available from Fun Gymnastics Child Liaison Officer.

## **Fun Gymnastics Child Admission Policy**

The aim of Fun Gymnastics child admission policy is to protect those deemed most at risk entering the centre and its outdoor facilities. This policy is implemented in partnership with parents and it ensures the ongoing enjoyment of the facility by children. It balances the level of risk for children using the centre and its facilities and the benefits to be gained by such use.

Fun Gymnastics staff cannot and should not be expected to replace the care and supervision of a parent. All staff are trained (*or will be within their first 6 weeks of employment*) to identify when adult / child ratios in the centre may be a cause for concern and the appropriate steps are followed.

In Ireland a child is legally defined as being under the age of 18. However children under 8 years of age have been identified within Ireland as being most at risk. This could be due to the fact that their judgement of dangerous situations may be poor. For this reason the following restrictions are recommended to be implemented in this centre as being best practice which will clearly define how particular age groups should be catered for in the centre environment.

### **Minimum recommendations for Non-Programmed Activities**

- Children aged 1-5 must be accompanied by a responsible adult in the centre at all times.
- Children aged 6-12 must be accompanied by a responsible adult who must remain in view of the child.
- Children aged 13 and upwards may be unaccompanied.

### **Minimum recommendations for Programmed Activities**

For all Fun Gymnastics activities, the age is something that is always considered, depending upon the nature of the activity and obtaining parent / guardian permission. The following will steer facility operators to look at the factors which will help to control risks. They will also provide guidance in arriving at a practical and positive policy for child safety. It is impossible

to arrive at a finite set of guidelines that would cover the many types of centre's now being built for public use.

It is also impossible to account for the varying abilities and the physical and psychological development found in children of similar ages.

A full risk assessment will be required before the Child Admission Policy for the facility is defined. This will have to consider factors such as centre design and layout, general staffing levels and their experience.

The above factors, when considered in the light of the Risk Assessment findings, will help sports centre staff determine the appropriate child/adult ratios. As with all Risk Assessments regular reviews must be undertaken. For the purposes of these guidelines the health and safety of children must be paramount to all centre procedures and rules.

**Some general guidelines are as follows:**

- All children, as defined for the purposes of these guidelines, should be under constant staff or parental supervision within the facility.
- Operators may outline specific rules for younger children and those with special needs.
- For example, a policy for children aged five and under, should be enforced during open leisure swimming times. This should state that children under five may only enter the centre under strict supervision. The minder must supervise the child from a safe distance i.e. be able to maintain visual contact with the child at all times. This policy may not apply during structured sessions e.g. camps, after schools.

Any changes to the facility's recommended ratios should be explained and justified in the centre's written operating procedures.

Children's use of changing rooms: Issues sometimes arise for other users when a child of the opposite sex has to share the dressing room with the person minding them. This is best eliminated by the provision of other changing options. Other guidelines in this respect are as follows:

- Fun Gymnastics management should train their staff to be aware of people behaving in an inappropriate and suspicious manner. Once trained, staff should be able to intervene directly for the protection of the child.
- All centre facilities should have appropriate reporting and intervention strategies in place to ensure protection of children from suspicious persons.
- The overwhelming consideration in all circumstances has to be the safety of the child.

The Child Admissions Policy shall be implemented on completion of a thorough risk assessment and after consultation with users. It should then be displayed at the main points of public access to the facility.

The admission policy should cater separately for specific groups of children, such as schools, children's parties and club groups. Special consideration must also be made for those with special needs and their carers.

Factors, which might be altered for such groups are as follows:

- Ratio of carer to children.
- Numbers of staff on duty.
- Limiting use of the centre to designated areas.
- Age requirements may also be altered.

A thorough Risk Assessment will indicate specific requirements and highlight any alterations, which might be made for the different category of user.

## **Fun Gymnastics Child Admissions Policy**

### **Facilities**

All children aged 12 and under must be accompanied by an adult while on our premises or using our facilities. Only children signed in through our camps and after school programmes may be permitted on the premises as they will be in the supervision of our camp leaders/coaches.

### **Toilets**

All children aged 12 and under must be accompanied by an adult at all times.

### **Changing Rooms**

Changing rooms must be allocated male and female. All mixed groups must use appropriate changing rooms. When other adult groups are using the changing rooms at the same time than alternative changing facilities should be used, i.e. Gallery Room, Studio. Under no circumstance should children and adults share a changing room.