



ENGLAND RUGBY SAFEGUARDING HANDBOOK

Procedures and Guidance for Clubs and Organisations in Rugby Union in England

Forward from Vivien Rimmer, Head of Safeguarding

Safeguarding is at the heart of everything we do at the Rugby Football Union (RFU). This document has been developed to support our Clubs, Referees Societies, Constituent Bodies, and everyone involved in the game by setting out clear expectations, procedures and practical guidance on safeguarding matters.

Our aim is to ensure that everyone understands their role in creating a safe, respectful and inclusive environment. These procedures should be followed at all times, except in truly exceptional circumstances, so that we can work together to protect all those who take part in rugby.

This guidance will help both you and the RFU to uphold our safeguarding policy and deliver on our shared responsibility to keep our communities safe. Throughout the document, you will find key information alongside links to further resources, including full policies and additional guidance to support you in your role, whether in a Club, Referee Society or Constituent Body setting.

This document is underpinned by RFU Regulation 21 and reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring that everyone who plays, watches or is involved in rugby feels safe, listened to and able to enjoy the game.

It also supports our wider vision set out in *Plan 2030: More Than a Game*, as we work together to enrich lives and grow rugby for future generations.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and I would like to thank you for the vital role you play in making our game safer for all.

If you feel someone is at imminent risk of harm, do not delay in calling 999

To refer a matter to the RFU Safeguarding Team, use our [online referral form](#)

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How to use this document

This document is designed to provide support, advice, and practical guidance for all clubs, organisations and their members, to help Club Safeguarding Officers, Constituent Body Safeguarding Managers and safeguarding leads in Referee Societies to champion safeguarding. It also supports everyone involved in rugby in creating safer environments and responding appropriately when concerns arise.

The handbook applies to all participants, volunteers, staff, clubs, referee societies and constituent bodies involved in Rugby Union in England and is underpinned by our core values: **Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline, and Sportsmanship.**

Within this Handbook you will find the following:

Policy Principles are highlighted to show how the Guidance and Procedures align with our core Safeguarding Policy

Resource Links provide additional information and guidance

Mandatory Safeguarding Standards are highlighted throughout this document. They provide clear examples of required and prohibited actions. Although not exhaustive, these standards are non-negotiable and must always be followed

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Real examples of how safeguarding practice can and does make a difference

This Safeguarding Handbook is a living document and will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect statutory and regulatory changes, as well as learning from safeguarding cases across rugby. We encourage members of the rugby community to contribute by sharing useful resources, reporting broken links, and suggesting improvements via safeguarding@rfu.com so that the Handbook remains practical, relevant and supportive for all.

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Values and Expectations

Safeguarding in rugby is not separate from the game itself; it is shaped and strengthened by our core values. Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship underpin everything we do and guide how we create safe, inclusive and positive environments for us all.

These values are more than principles; they set clear expectations for behaviour, helping everyone in the rugby community understand their role in preventing harm, speaking up about concerns, and supporting one another. By bringing these values to life in our everyday actions, we ensure that safeguarding is embedded across the game.

Core Value	What this means in Practice (Expectations)
Teamwork	Lead by example, bring others together, and help everyone feel part of the team. We expect you to keep yourselves and others safe, report concerns and fulfil your role in keeping others safe.
Respect	Actively promote respect for all – opponents, officials, volunteers, and the game itself. Help create an environment where everyone feels able to speak up if they have concerns.
Enjoyment	Inspire a culture of enjoyment where effort, inclusion, and fun matter as much as winning.
Discipline	Model discipline by staying calm, consistent, and committed – even in tough situations. We expect you to follow the procedures, rules and regulations to make sure our sport is a safe place to be.
Sportsmanship	Champion sportsmanship by leading with integrity, humility, and gratitude to all involved. We ask that you look out for others and speak up if behaviour goes against the values of rugby.

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Listening to Children and Valuing Their Voice

Rugby should be a place where children feel safe, valued, respected and heard.

Children are more likely to speak up about worries, concerns or safeguarding issues when they have already experienced that their opinions matter and that adults listen to them. Creating opportunities for children to have a voice should therefore be part of everyday club life, not something that only happens when there is a safeguarding concern.

Clubs should actively seek children's views and involve them in decisions that affect their experience of rugby. This may include asking for feedback on training sessions, tours, events and club activities, involving children in the development of team expectations or codes of conduct, and acting on their ideas where appropriate.

Meaningful participation is more than simply asking children for their opinions. It involves listening to what they say, taking their views seriously and explaining how their feedback has influenced decisions.

Rugby provides unique opportunities for children to develop trusted relationships with coaches, volunteers and other adults. When children know that their views are welcomed and respected in everyday matters, they are more likely to feel confident seeking help, sharing concerns and speaking up about things that worry them, whether those concerns relate to rugby or to their lives outside the game.

Every child should know that their voice matters, that they will be listened to and that their welfare is central to all decisions that affect them.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

A club has described bringing Core Values to life by using their AGM to formally agree their club Codes of Conduct. This has followed Age Grade members being encouraged to give their ideas about what should be included, for adults and children alike.

At the beginning of each season everyone is expected to sign them as part of their membership

Resource Link [RFU National Youth Council](#)

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Responsibilities

Mandatory Standards

- All safeguarding concerns must be reported to the RFU Safeguarding Team
- Clubs and organisations must comply with Regulation 21, the Safeguarding Policy and relevant procedures as outlined in this Handbook

To operate within the legal and regulatory framework, the RFU, its Constituent Bodies (CBs), member clubs and Referee Societies (Societies) and other organisations involved in the delivery of rugby will work together, each with a clear role, to safeguard those who participate in rugby.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026)

Policy Principle

Teamwork “We will work together across the game including clubs, Constituent Bodies, Referee Societies, committee members, staff, volunteers, and members to make sure we are all doing our part to keep rugby free from harm and abuse”

Our organisational and individual duties are set out in Chapter 4 of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026. Primarily, this tells us of the need to ensure that children are protected from harm and that we have arrangements in place that reflect the importance of this. We can achieve this in a variety of ways, including:

- Having clear lines of accountability
- Ensuring we have a senior board level safeguarding lead
- Having a culture of listening to children
- Support and training for staff and volunteers
- Creating a culture of safety, equality and protection in rugby

Resource Link: [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2026\)](#)

RFU Responsibilities

The RFU oversees safeguarding by:

- Appointing a lead officer
- Maintaining an up-to-date safeguarding strategy
- Working in partnership with CBs, Clubs, Societies, statutory agencies and external organisations such as the NSPCC Sport and Sport England
- Managing the DBS infrastructure and processes

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- Coordinating safeguarding through a network of volunteer Club Safeguarding Officers and CB Safeguarding Managers
- Providing training and support for volunteers and staff
- Handling safeguarding referrals in line with regulations
- Taking disciplinary action where rules are breached
- Offering guidance to Clubs, CBs and Societies on safeguarding matters, including communications related to safeguarding incidents

Constituent Body Responsibilities

- CBs are responsible for implementing and overseeing safeguarding within their area by appointing and managing a CB Safeguarding Manager (CBSM) and ensuring safeguarding is represented within their governance structure
- They ensure that clubs delivering activities for children and adults have safeguarding policies aligned with the RFU policy, guidance, procedure and local authority requirements
- Ensure DBS applications for CB staff and volunteers are managed through the RFU DBS process
- Report safeguarding concerns to the RFU Safeguarding Team
- Work with Regional Safeguarding Development Officers for their respective region, including participating in Safeguarding Practice Reviews with at least 10% of their member clubs

Constituent Bodies are a club's first line of support in many circumstances. They will provide mechanisms for regular contact between clubs in their area, supporting best practice and opportunities for Club Safeguarding Officer development.

Club and Referee Society Responsibilities

- Each club/society is responsible for implementing safeguarding at a local level by appointing a club/society Safeguarding Officer (CSO) as the main point of contact for safeguarding concerns
- The club/society should ensure that they support the CSO's involvement in club/society governance, work in line with policy, regulation, procedures and guidance, and complete appropriate safeguarding training
- Clubs/societies must promote good safeguarding practice, ensure safeguarding responsibilities are understood by committee members and volunteers, maintain up-to-



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date DBS checks for those working with children, and publish an accessible safeguarding policy aligned with RFU guidance

- Clubs/Societies are required to report any safeguarding concerns to the RFU Safeguarding Team and ensure the wellbeing of children is prioritised in disciplinary processes
- Clubs, and (Societies when requested) will complete an annual safeguarding audit via the Game Management System (GMS) and participate in Safeguarding Practice Reviews with their Area Safeguarding Development Officer

Resource Links: [Club Safeguarding Policy Template](#)

[Club Safeguarding Audit Help](#)

Club Safeguarding Officer, Constituent Body Safeguarding Manager and Referee Society Safeguarding Officer Responsibilities

Club Safeguarding Officers/Constituent Body Safeguarding Managers and Referee Society Safeguarding Officers have additional responsibilities for championing safeguarding, supported by their committees. Their role is to promote safer environments and support the RFU to manage concerns. With the support of their committee, they are also responsible for ensuring robust safer recruitment processes are in place.

Resource Links: [How do I find my Constituent Body?](#)

[How do I find out more about Referee Societies?](#)

[Club Safeguarding Officer Role Descriptor](#)

Safeguarding Leadership

Policy Principle

Teamwork “We will work together across the game including clubs, Constituent Bodies, Referee Societies, committee members, staff, volunteers, and members to make sure we are all doing our part to keep rugby free from harm and abuse”

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Safeguarding leadership is vital at every level of rugby. From the RFU Board and Council, through Constituent Bodies, Clubs and Referee Societies, leaders play an important role in shaping cultures where safeguarding is valued and embedded in everyday practice.

Effective safeguarding leadership is not simply about compliance with policies, regulations and procedures; it is about creating environments where the welfare of children and adults at risk remains a priority in decision-making, where people feel confident to raise concerns, and where learning and continuous improvement are actively encouraged.

Strong safeguarding organisations are those that listen to children, volunteers, parents and participants, reflect on experience and learning, and are willing to ask questions when practice can be improved. They seek to understand those experiences, recognising that safeguarding practice is strengthened by learning from others, reviewing what works well, and identifying opportunities for improvement. Safeguarding should be a regular consideration within governance, planning and decision-making processes, with leaders taking responsibility for promoting safer cultures, supporting Club, Society and CB safeguarding officers and ensuring that appropriate resources, training and oversight are in place.

Creating safer environments requires partnership and shared responsibility. By working together, listening to different perspectives, learning from safeguarding concerns and good practice, and remaining genuinely curious about how environments can be made safer, the rugby community can continue to strengthen safeguarding throughout the game. Everyone has a leadership role to play in making rugby a place where people feel safe, valued, respected and heard.

Asking Questions and Seeking Advice

Policy Principle

Teamwork “Support and look out for everyone who takes part in Rugby Union, including noticing when something doesn’t feel right and acting on it”

Nobody is expected to have all the answers when it comes to safeguarding. There may be occasions where a volunteer, coach, official, committee member or safeguarding officer is unsure whether something is a safeguarding concern, whether a procedure has been followed correctly, or what action should be taken next. In these circumstances, individuals should seek advice at the earliest opportunity rather than delay action or make assumptions.

Advice can be sought from the Club Safeguarding Officer, Constituent Body Safeguarding Manager or the RFU Safeguarding Team. Individuals should feel confident in asking questions, challenging



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decisions respectfully, and raising concerns where they believe a child, adult at risk, or the wider rugby environment may not be adequately safeguarded.

Creating a culture where people feel able to seek advice and speak up about concerns is an important part of preventing harm and promoting safer environments throughout the game. Concerns raised in good faith will always be taken seriously and should never result in an individual being treated unfairly or disadvantaged for doing the right thing.

Safer Environments

Policy Principles

Teamwork	“Take reasonable steps to keep yourself and others safe”
Respect	“Create an environment where everyone feels able to speak up, including children and young people, if something is worrying them, makes them feel unsafe, or could be affecting others”
Enjoyment	“We will celebrate good practice and those who work hard to keep rugby a safe and enjoyable sport”
Discipline	“Take responsibility for your behaviour and demonstrate self-control to help keep others safe”
Sportsmanship	“When playing, volunteering, working or supporting behave in the right spirit, being honest, fair, and kind to others”

Safeguarding is not just about responding when something has gone wrong. It is also about modelling positive behaviour, noticing when things are not quite right, speaking up for others, and helping to create environments where harm is less likely to occur. We all have a role to make sure everyone knows they have the right not be abused in our sport.

Promoting Safer Environments

Mandatory Standards

- Clubs must clearly communicate to participants how concerns can be reported
- Club Safeguarding Officer contact details must be up to date and clearly communicated on websites, noticeboards etc.

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Communication is central to maintaining safer environments. This includes regular information given to members, parents and key stakeholders that everyone has the right to participate in rugby in a safe environment. Ways of doing this could include:

- Beginning of season communication about expected behaviours in the Codes of Conduct
- Explaining what to do if you are worried or want to report a concern
- Ensuring contact details for Club Safeguarding Officers and CB Safeguarding Managers are known
- Promoting how members can have their voice heard and be involved in decision making
- Highlighting club expectations regarding responsible use of social media
- Working in partnership with parents when considering how important messages will be communicated

Club Safeguarding Officers can also download and print one of the four "Know your rights" posters, to help empower children to understand what behaviour they can expect from adults at their club. We would suggest putting posters where children are likely to see them, i.e. in the toilets, changing rooms or communal areas.

Resource Links: [Know Your Rights Posters](#)
[Rugby Codes of Conduct](#)
[Club Safeguarding Officer Poster](#)

Cyber Safety and Online Communication

Clubs must ensure websites, social media, messaging platforms and online communications are used safely and appropriately, protecting children from harm, bullying, inappropriate content and the misuse of personal information. Staff and volunteers should maintain professional boundaries and follow RFU safeguarding guidance when communicating with young people.

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools is becoming increasingly common within sport and society. Clubs, volunteers and participants should use AI responsibly and be aware of potential safeguarding risks. Images, videos or personal information relating to children should not be uploaded to publicly accessible AI platforms without appropriate authority and consideration of privacy implications. AI-generated or manipulated content, including images, audio and video, may be misleading and



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should not be assumed to be genuine. Where safeguarding concerns arise, individuals should rely on established safeguarding procedures and professional advice rather than AI-generated guidance or assessments.

Resource Links: [Cyber Guidance](#)
[National Crime Agency](#)
[Internet Watch Foundation](#)

Supervision

Mandatory Standard

- No unsupervised one-to-one situations except in exceptional circumstances

To provide a safe environment, clubs should ensure that their volunteers and employees when working with children avoid working in isolation out of the sight of parents or other volunteers. This supervision helps to protect children and the adults that are working with them.

Adult: Child Ratios

There should always be at least two DBS checked adults in charge of any group of children. The RFU recommends a minimum coaching / supervision ratio of adult to children of:

1:10 for children over 8 years old aged at least 9

1:8 for children under 8 years old aged 7 and 8

1:6 for children under 7 years old

If others, such as parents are helping to supervise children, but not directly involved in coaching they should also be recruited safely, including having an RFU DBS check.

It is important to remember that a good risk assessment is vital and that additional adults are often necessary. The following should be considered in your planning:

- Two-adult presence at all times; no 1-to-1 unsupervised.
- Driver never counts toward ratios while driving.
- Ratios apply in each sub-group actually operating, not just across the whole session.

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- Mixed-sex groups: aim for both male & female adults where feasible, especially for travel/overnight.
- Dynamic review: if numbers drop mid-session (injury/late parent), pause or merge to maintain ratios.
- Record the risk assessment on your session plan with agreed final staffing numbers and contingency plan

Policy Principle

Teamwork “Support and look out for everyone who takes part in rugby union, including noticing when something doesn’t feel right and acting on it”

Ensuring that those being coached understand they have the right to express what they are and are not comfortable with is an important part of creating a safer environment.

It can sometimes be difficult for coaches, particularly those working with children, to recognise what constitutes good practice, especially as expectations and coaching approaches continue to evolve. There is also an increasing recognition of the need to reduce traditional coach–player power imbalances, so that players feel able to speak up and have their views heard.

With this in mind, we have developed guidance to support coaches in promoting safe, positive, and player-centred environments.

Resource Links: [Encouraging Positive Behaviours](#)
[Neurodiversity Resources](#)

Shared Responsibility

Policy Principle

Teamwork “Take reasonable steps to keep yourself and others safe”

We want to support everyone involved to understand that we all have a role to play in keeping ourselves and others safe. Parents play a key role in keeping our sport going, but with that comes a responsibility to abide by our values. We have put together guidance to support parents with their understanding of their role in creating a safer rugby environment.

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Resource Link [Parental Attendance at Rugby](#)

Positive Touchline Behaviour

Mandatory Standards

- Children should never be subjected to criticism, humiliation, excessive pressure or negative comments from the touchline.

The behaviour displayed by coaches, team managers, parents, carers and spectators on the touchline plays a significant role in creating a safe, positive and enjoyable environment for everyone involved in rugby. Children and young people are strongly influenced by the behaviour of the adults around them, and the messages they receive from the sidelines can have a lasting impact on their confidence, wellbeing and enjoyment of the game.

Policy Principle

Sportsmanship “Treat teammates, opponents, coaches, officials and volunteers with respect and fairness, even when things do not go your way”

Creating a positive touchline environment is therefore an important safeguarding responsibility. By maintaining high standards of behaviour, clubs can often prevent concerns from escalating into disputes, disciplinary issues, poor player experiences or safeguarding incidents.

Positive touchline behaviour is closely linked to the RFU Core Values of **Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship**. These values apply not only to players on the field, but to everyone involved in the game.

We ask all spectators, coaches, volunteers and parents to:

- Support and encourage all players, regardless of ability or team.
- Respect the decisions of match officials.
- Allow coaches to coach and referees to referee.
- Applaud effort, commitment, teamwork and good sportsmanship.
- Help create an environment where children feel safe to learn, make mistakes and enjoy rugby.
- Demonstrate respect towards opponents, volunteers and fellow spectators at all times.

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Behaviour that intimidates players, officials, coaches, volunteers or other spectators is inconsistent with the values of rugby and may give rise to disciplinary or safeguarding concerns.

Clubs are encouraged to actively promote positive touchline behaviour throughout the season, including through welcome information, codes of conduct, match day reminders and visible leadership from coaches and club officials. A strong and consistent approach helps create a culture where everyone understands what is expected and feels confident in challenging behaviour that falls below those standards.

Resource Link: [Codes of Conduct](#)

Physical Contact when Coaching

Policy Principle

Teamwork “Take reasonable steps to keep yourself and others safe”

Positive relationships between coaches and players are central to the development and enjoyment of children in rugby. In most coaching situations, techniques should be demonstrated using another adult rather than a child. However, there may be occasions where limited physical contact is appropriate to support learning, demonstrate a technique, or promote safety.

Any coaching contact should be necessary, appropriate and proportionate to the situation. Coaches should explain what they intend to do and seek the child's agreement before making physical contact. This does not apply in emergency situations where immediate action is required to prevent injury or harm.

Coaching contact should always be respectful of the child's age, stage of development and personal boundaries. Physical contact should never be intrusive, unnecessary or capable of being misinterpreted. Coaches should remain mindful that even well-intentioned contact may make some children feel uncomfortable and should be responsive to this at all times.

Coaching contact is distinct from physical intervention. It is intended to support learning, development or safety and does not involve restricting or controlling a child's movement in response to behavioural or safety concerns.

Resource Links: [Coaching Training and Resources](#)
[Contact when Coaching](#)



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Physical Intervention

Policy Principle

Discipline “Take responsibility for your behaviour and demonstrate self-control to help keep others safe”

Physical intervention occurs when an adult intentionally uses physical contact to limit, direct, control or prevent a child's movement in order to manage an immediate risk of harm. This may range from guiding a child away from danger to more restrictive action required to prevent injury.

Physical intervention is rarely necessary in a rugby environment and should only be used where it is necessary to prevent a child or adult at risk from being injured, injuring another person, or being exposed to immediate harm.

The welfare of the child is paramount. Physical intervention must never be used as a form of punishment, to assert authority, to secure compliance, or for the convenience of staff or volunteers.

Where physical intervention becomes necessary, adults should consider their own safety and, wherever possible, seek to manage the situation through verbal instruction and de-escalation before resorting to physical contact. Any intervention must be the minimum necessary to manage the immediate risk and should cease as soon as that risk has passed. Adults must remain calm and in control of their actions and must not strike, retaliate or use unnecessary force. Contact with intimate areas of the body should always be avoided and, wherever possible, contact with the head and neck should also be avoided.

All incidents involving physical intervention must be reported to the Club Safeguarding Officer at the earliest opportunity and recorded in accordance with club procedures. Any concerns regarding the appropriateness of an intervention must be referred to the RFU Safeguarding Team through the online referral process.

The adult involved is responsible for demonstrating that the intervention was necessary, reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances and for justifying the level of force used.

Resource Link: [Physical Intervention in Rugby](#)



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Field of Play

Policy Principle

Sportsmanship “We will promote positive behaviour and help everyone understand what good sportsmanship looks like in rugby”

Rugby's Core Values of Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship underpin behaviour both on and off the field of play. Everyone involved in the game has a responsibility to model these values and contribute to a safe, positive and enjoyable environment for children.

Discipline on the field of play is the responsibility of the players. The management of the game and the application of the Laws of the Game are the responsibility of the referee and match officials. Coaches, team managers, parents and spectators must respect the authority and decisions of match officials at all times and should actively encourage players to do the same.

Experience has shown that adult involvement in incidents on the field of play is rarely necessary and can escalate situations that would otherwise be managed appropriately by players and match officials. Coaches, team managers, parents and spectators must not enter the field of play without the permission of the referee and must not involve themselves in disputes or incidents between players.

The only exception is in the most exceptional circumstances where immediate action is necessary to prevent serious injury or a significant risk of harm. Such situations are expected to be extremely rare. The existence of a disagreement, confrontation, breach of discipline or concern about refereeing decisions does not justify adult intervention.

Entering the field of play without the permission of the referee may result in disciplinary action.

RFU Regulation 19.3.18 provides that, in addition to the power to issue an Interim Suspension Order (ISO), the RFU Head of Discipline, or a person with delegated authority, may provisionally suspend an individual for up to four weeks where that individual has entered the playing area without the permission of the referee and is subject to a disciplinary or safeguarding investigation arising from the incident. There is no right of appeal against such a decision.

Resource Link: [Collaboration Between Safeguarding and Discipline](#)

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Tours

Mandatory Standards

- Any rugby activity that involves an overnight stay is considered a Tour in Age Grade rugby. Clubs must seek advice from their Constituent Body to ensure compliance with any local approval requirements.
- Clubs must ensure appropriate safeguarding, supervision and welfare arrangements are in place before a tour takes place, including risk management, parental consent, accommodation arrangements and emergency planning.
- Clubs undertaking overseas tours, hosting incoming tours or playing out of union must obtain any approvals required by the Constituent Body, RFU and host Union before participating.

Tours are a long-standing tradition of rugby and are often a highlight of a young person's rugby experience.

Policy Principles

- Teamwork** “We will work in partnership with others, both within rugby and beyond the sport, to help create safer environments for children”
- Enjoyment** “Have fun, make friends and feel part of a great sport, no matter who you are”

Clubs, volunteers, parents and Constituent Bodies all have a role in ensuring tours are properly planned, appropriately supervised and delivered in a way that safeguards children and promotes their welfare. The welfare of the child is paramount in all decisions relating to tours.

Effective planning and partnership working are essential to ensure tours are safe, enjoyable and well managed. Clubs should engage with their Constituent Body at an early stage of planning and ensure that safeguarding, supervision, welfare, approval and insurance requirements are fully considered before any tour takes place.

Resource Link: [Trips Tours and Overnight Stays Guidance](#)



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Changing Rooms and Showering

Mandatory Standards

- Adults and children must never use the same changing or shower facilities at the same time.
- Children must not enter adult changing rooms while adults are changing, showering or otherwise in a state of undress.
- Mobile phones, cameras and any recording or photographic devices are prohibited from being used in changing rooms and washroom facilities.
- No child should be pressured to change or shower with others if they are uncomfortable doing so.

Changing rooms and shower areas can present increased safeguarding risks because children may be in a state of undress and may feel particularly vulnerable. Clear arrangements help protect children's privacy, reduce the risk of inappropriate behaviour, and ensure that adults are not placed in situations that could be misinterpreted. Clubs must therefore ensure that changing and showering arrangements prioritise the welfare, dignity and safety of children at all times.

Policy Principle

Respect: "...Act with respect and consideration towards others at all times, recognising and valuing differences"

Adults, be they players or match officials and children must never use the same changing or shower facilities at the same time. This helps maintain appropriate boundaries and reduces the risk of children feeling uncomfortable or exposed. Where 17-year-old children are playing in the adult game, they remain legally children and should be offered separate changing and showering facilities or alternative arrangements made if these are requested.

With the exception of 17-year-olds participating in adult rugby, children must not enter adult changing rooms when adults are changing, showering, or otherwise in a state of undress. Clubs are responsible for ensuring that children are not exposed to adult nudity and that changing room environments remain safe, appropriate and respectful of both children's welfare and adults' privacy.

Adults should not enter children's changing rooms unless absolutely necessary. This should only occur in situations such as addressing poor behaviour, responding to injury or illness, or in an emergency where delaying entry could place a child at risk of harm. Limiting adult access helps protect children's privacy and reduces the risk of misunderstandings or allegations.



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Where supervision is required in changing rooms, or where coaches or managers need to carry out tasks in that environment, two adults who are appropriately vetted for regulated activity and of the same gender as the children should be present. This provides transparency, protects children, and safeguards adults from being alone with children in a sensitive setting.

For mixed-sex activities, separate changing and shower facilities should be provided for boys and girls. This supports dignity, privacy and comfort for all participants. If adults and children must use the same facilities on the same day, a clear timetable should be established so that groups use the facilities at different times. This avoids overlap and helps maintain appropriate separation.

No pressure should be placed on children who feel uncomfortable changing or showering with others. Some children may prefer to change at home for personal, cultural, religious or wellbeing reasons. This choice should always be respected, and children should not be made to feel excluded for doing so.

Where a child has a disability or additional needs that require assistance with changing or showering, arrangements should be agreed in advance with the child and their parent or carer. This ensures that support is provided in a way that respects the child's dignity and preferences. Before any assistance is provided by someone other than a parent or carer, appropriate consent should be obtained from the parent/carers and, where appropriate, from the child themselves.

Resource Link: [Safeguarding Considerations for Changing Rooms](#)

Transportation

Mandatory Standard

- Adults must ensure that children are comfortable with travel arrangements and remain alert to any signs that a child is unhappy or anxious, taking appropriate action.
- Any transportation arrangements must be via prior agreement with parents/carers
- Exceptional circumstances must be recorded, with a second club official informed.

Travel to and from rugby activities can present safeguarding risks, particularly where children are transported by adults who are not their parents or carers. Clear arrangements help ensure children travel safely, reduce the risk of children being alone with adults, and provide reassurance to parents and carers about how transport is managed.



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Policy Principle

Respect “Create an environment where everyone feels able to speak up, including children and young people, if something is worrying them, makes them feel unsafe, or could be affecting others”

Clubs should develop and communicate a transport policy to parents and carers, for example through welcome packs and club websites. This should make clear that, in most circumstances, responsibility for transporting children to and from training, matches or meeting points rests with parents and carers, not the club. This helps avoid confusion about supervision responsibilities and ensures children are not left without appropriate arrangements.

Where parents or carers make informal travel arrangements between themselves, this is a private agreement made at their own discretion. Clubs should not manage or take responsibility for these arrangements, but should encourage parents to prioritise safety and clear communication.

Where a club hires transport from a reputable commercial provider, such as a coach company, the club may reasonably expect that vehicles are properly maintained and drivers are appropriately licensed and insured. However, children should never travel unaccompanied and appropriate ratios should be maintained. A responsible adult from the club should travel with the group to provide supervision, manage welfare needs, and act as a point of contact for parents and carers. The contact details of this adult should be available to parents and carers in case of emergency.

Where a club formally arranges transport using minibuses, people carriers or similar vehicles, additional safeguards should be in place. Drivers should hold a valid driving licence and be appropriately recruited in line with safer recruitment and vetting procedures. Appropriate insurance and breakdown cover should be in place. These measures help ensure that children are transported by suitable individuals and that appropriate safeguards are in place if difficulties arise.

Vehicles used should be suitable for the number and age of passengers, with working seat belts for all occupants and appropriate child seats where required. This ensures children travel safely and in line with legal requirements.

Parents and carers should provide consent for transport arrangements and be given the driver's contact details. Drivers should also have access to emergency contact information for each child, including mobile numbers. This supports effective communication and allows swift contact if plans change or an incident occurs.

Children should not normally be transported alone with a single adult who is not their parent or carer. This reduces safeguarding risks and protects both children and adults from situations that could be



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uncomfortable or open to misunderstanding. If exceptional circumstances mean a child is unavoidably alone in a vehicle with an adult, the child should sit in the rear seats where possible, and parents/carers should be informed.

Children should be comfortable with transport arrangements. Adults should remain alert to any signs that a child is unhappy or anxious and take appropriate action. Ensuring children feel safe and able to raise concerns is an important part of safeguarding during travel.

Use of Imagery, Video, VEO and Live-Streaming

Mandatory Standard

- Images and footage of children should be positive and reflect our Core Values

The RFU recognises that photography, video recording, VEO and, in some cases, live-streaming are now a normal and positive part of the game. These tools support player development, enable families to watch matches, celebrate achievements and promote the values of rugby. Their use is welcomed, provided appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the welfare and dignity of children. Clubs should ensure that recording is transparent and based on appropriate consent, with participants and spectators aware that filming may take place. Recording should be for legitimate rugby purposes, focus on the activity, avoid private areas such as changing rooms or medical spaces, and ensure any commentary remains appropriate and respectful.

Images and footage of children should be positive, reflect the RFU Core Values, and avoid identifying personal information or content that could embarrass, ridicule or place a child at risk. Where images or recordings are published or shared, including via websites, social media or live-streaming platforms, this should be done by authorised individuals and in line with safeguarding principles. Parents, carers and spectators may take images to celebrate participation, but this should be done openly and respectfully. If any child, parent/carer or participant requests that an image or recording is removed, this should be respected and actioned as soon as reasonably possible.

Resource Links: [Photography and Use of Imagery Guidance](#)
[VEO and Live-Streaming Guidance](#)



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Drinking Games and Drinking Culture

Mandatory Standard

- Clubs must not organise or promote drinking games involving children

Adult attitudes towards alcohol and drinking habits can influence children and young people. Introducing drinking games within the children's game, including those involving soft drinks, can normalise drinking behaviours and contribute to a culture that may encourage excessive or unhealthy attitudes towards alcohol as children get older. The RFU does not support the promotion of drinking culture in this way and considers it important that such activities are actively discouraged in youth rugby.

While drinking games using soft drinks may appear harmless, some children report feeling uncomfortable participating but lack the confidence to opt out for fear of being ridiculed or excluded. Similar concerns have also been raised by adults who feel pressured to participate in drinking games within the adult game. Parents and carers may also feel uncomfortable with these activities but may be reluctant to raise concerns with their club.

To ensure that children, parents and volunteers do not feel pressured or excluded, and to avoid normalising drinking games, clubs should not organise or promote drinking games of any kind within youth rugby environments, including those involving non-alcoholic drinks. Clubs are encouraged instead to use inclusive, age-appropriate and positive ways for children to socialise, celebrate achievements and build team cohesion.

Clubs are expected to promote a healthy and responsible approach to alcohol and create environments that prioritise the welfare and wellbeing of children. This is particularly important where activities take place on licensed premises. Clubs should be mindful of the objectives of the Licensing Act 2003, including the protection of children from harm.

Safeguarding in this context extends beyond preventing underage drinking. It includes creating a safe and respectful environment for all, especially children and young people. This involves being alert to behaviours such as hazing and initiation rituals, drinking games, and the use of non-alcoholic drinks to simulate or encourage drinking culture, and taking steps to prevent these practices within rugby settings.



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Safer Recruitment

Mandatory Safer Recruitment Procedures

The following safer recruitment procedures are mandatory and non-negotiable. For more information on this, including breaches and sanctions related to non-compliance, please refer to RFU Regulations 21.7 and 21.10.

- Clubs must ensure RFU DBS checks are completed for all eligible roles
- Individuals awaiting DBS clearance must be supervised appropriately
- Where a DBS certificate has 'content' the applicant must step down from regulated activity until they receive notification from the RFU Safeguarding Team that they are cleared to resume their roles
- Any arrest, police investigation or safeguarding concern relevant to an individual's suitability must be reported to the RFU Safeguarding Team
- Recruitment decisions should always place the welfare of children and adults at risk at the centre of the process

Safer recruitment is the set of practices designed to ensure that staff and volunteers who work or volunteer with children or adults at risk are suitable for a role, helping to deter or prevent individuals who may pose a risk from gaining access to children or vulnerable persons. This includes robust vetting, criminal records checks, seeking references, and maintaining a culture of vigilance within recruitment processes. Having a criminal record will not necessarily exclude an individual from being cleared by RFU, with each application considered on a case-by-case basis.

Policy Principle

Enjoyment "We will make sure that everyone who works or volunteers in rugby is suitable to help create a safe, positive and enjoyable environment"

Safer recruitment is one of the most effective ways of preventing harm and creating safe environments within rugby. It is not simply about completing DBS checks; it is a process that helps clubs and organisations make informed decisions about who is suitable to work or volunteer with children and adults at risk. Effective safer recruitment includes setting clear expectations, assessing an individual's suitability, obtaining appropriate references, undertaking safeguarding training and ensuring ongoing oversight once a person is appointed to a role.



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Those who work or volunteer with children are in positions of trust and are expected to act as positive role models at all times. Clubs should consider not only an individual's skills and experience, but also whether they demonstrate the values, behaviours and judgement necessary to provide safe and enjoyable rugby environments.

DBS Checks

Mandatory Standards

- All those aged 16 or over in Regulated Activity in Rugby must apply for a DBS Disclosure Certificate processed through the RFU Safeguarding Team

DBS checks are an important element of safer recruitment, but they are only one part of the process and should never be relied upon in isolation. A DBS check provides information available at a specific point in time and must be supported by appropriate recruitment, supervision and safeguarding practices.

The RFU requires DBS checks to be completed for individuals undertaking eligible roles involving children or adults at risk. Individuals awaiting DBS clearance must be appropriately supervised, and any disclosure containing information will be managed through the RFU DBS Case Management Process before the individual can undertake relevant activity.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Following attendance at an In Touch Course, a club has “drawn a line in the sand” in relation to recruitment. They now have a clear process:

- Discussion
- Application
- References
- DBS
- Appointment
- Mentoring and Support

They described being imaginative with references and taking things like on-field discipline and displaying of Core Values around the club into consideration.

Resource Links: [DBS FAQs](#)

[How to Apply for a DBS Check](#)

[DBS Case Management Process](#)

[Volunteer Application Form](#)

[Government Update Service Guidance](#)



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The Importance of Good Role Models in Rugby

Policy Principle

Enjoyment “We want to ensure that rugby feels fun, inspirational and meaningful for all, especially children who are the lifeline of the sport”

Those working or volunteering with children in rugby are in positions of trust and are expected to act as positive role models at all times. Their behaviour, attitudes and conduct both within and outside the rugby environment can influence children and contribute to the culture of the game. As part of safer recruitment, the RFU, in line with statutory safeguarding agencies, considers not only an individual's skills and experience, but also their suitability to work with children. Clubs should therefore explore suitability throughout their safer recruitment processes, including application, interview, references and ongoing review. This helps ensure that individuals appointed to roles involving children demonstrate appropriate values, behaviour and judgement, and are able to provide safe, respectful and positive environments for all participants.

Position of Trust

Mandatory Standards

- Adults in positions of trust must maintain professional boundaries
- Sexual relationships with 16 and 17 year olds in a position of trust context are illegal

In 2022, the law was updated to recognise sports coaches and others responsible for children's development in sport as being in positions of trust. It is a criminal offence for any adult in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with a young person aged 16 or 17, as well as with those under the age of 16.

Matters where an offence or breach has been alleged will be treated very seriously and may result in action under RFU Regulation 21, including barring individuals from attending rugby clubs and removing them from their role. On being notified that someone in a position of trust is involved, or suspected to be involved, in a sexual relationship with a child, the RFU Safeguarding Team will report the matter to the police and relevant statutory agencies

Resource Link: [NSPCC Sport Position of Trust Guidance](#)



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Training

Mandatory Standards

- Introduction to Safeguarding eLearning must be completed before all DBS applications
- CSOs must complete In Touch Course
- There must be at least one person in attendance with each age group that has completed Play it Safe

Providing appropriate safeguarding training is an important part of creating safer environments in rugby. Training helps volunteers, coaches, match officials and safeguarding officers recognise concerns, understand their responsibilities, maintain appropriate boundaries and respond effectively when concerns arise.

The RFU provides safeguarding training through **England Rugby Learning**, which brings together eLearning, virtual workshops and face-to-face learning opportunities. Clubs should ensure that individuals undertake training appropriate to their role and responsibilities.

Policy Principle

Discipline “We will ensure that those involved in rugby understand their safeguarding responsibilities and maintain the knowledge and confidence required to fulfil their role effectively”

The RFU safeguarding training pathway consists of three levels:

Introduction to Safeguarding (eLearning)

This introductory safeguarding awareness course is designed for anyone working or volunteering with children in rugby. It provides a foundation understanding of safeguarding, including recognising concerns, identifying potentially abusive situations and understanding how to report concerns appropriately.

Completion of the **Introduction to Safeguarding** eLearning is mandatory before an individual can apply for an RFU DBS check and before participating in England Rugby Coaching or Refereeing Award Courses.

Play it Safe

Play it Safe is a face-to-face safeguarding workshop for coaches, volunteers and match officials who work with or have responsibility for children within rugby. The course explores practical safeguarding



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issues, encourages discussion of real-life scenarios and helps participants understand how to create safe, positive and player-centred environments.

There must always be at least one person per age group present who has completed Play it Safe. Play it Safe should be updated every three years.

Clubs should, where possible regularly host courses for their Age Grade volunteers. Courses can be requested directly with our [Safeguarding Tutors](#).

In Touch

In Touch is the RFU's safeguarding workshop for Club Safeguarding Officers. Attendance is mandatory for anyone undertaking the role and should be completed before, or within three months of, appointment. Attendance is also encouraged for any club officer and committee member to develop a better understanding of their organisational safeguarding responsibilities. Delivered remotely via Teams by the RFU Safeguarding Team, the course provides more detailed guidance on safeguarding responsibilities, creating safer cultures, safer recruitment and managing concerns. It also provides an opportunity for Club Safeguarding Officers to share learning and ask questions relating to safeguarding practice within rugby. The In Touch course qualification is valid for three years.

Further Information

Detailed information on safeguarding courses, training requirements and booking arrangements can be found through **England Rugby Learning** and the RFU safeguarding webpages.

Resource links: [Safeguarding Courses webpage](#)
[Register for England Rugby Learning](#)
[Arranging a Play it Safe Course](#)



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Recognising Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation

Being able to recognise the signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation is essential to protecting children in rugby. All coaches, volunteers, officials and staff involved in Rugby should be alert to indicators that a child may be in need of help or protection. Abuse can take place in person, within rugby environments, at home, in the community, or online. Technology may also be used to facilitate abuse that takes place online.

If anyone involved in rugby is unsure about a concern, they should always speak to their Club Safeguarding Officer (CSO) or their Constituent Body or report directly to the RFU Safeguarding Team.

Mandatory Standards

- All safeguarding concerns must be reported
- Immediate danger = call 999
- Never assume someone else will act
- Participants must cooperate with safeguarding investigations

Forms of Abuse and Neglect

Abuse is a form of maltreatment of a child. A child may be abused or neglected through the infliction of harm or by the failure to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused by adults or by other children. This may occur within families, communities, sporting environments, or online.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Within a rugby context, this may include inappropriate physical punishment, unsafe training practices, or deliberate harm disguised as coaching.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child that causes severe and adverse effects on their emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless, inadequate, or valued only for performance or achievement. Emotional abuse may include excessive pressure to perform, humiliation, bullying, intimidation, or unrealistic expectations. Emotional abuse is present to some degree in all forms of maltreatment but may also occur on its own.



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Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. This may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration or non-penetrative acts, or non-contact activities such as involving children in sexual images, encouraging inappropriate behaviour, or grooming. Sexual abuse can take place online or be facilitated by technology. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males; females and other children can also be abusers. Sexual abuse by other children is a specific safeguarding concern known as child-on-child abuse.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of their health or development. This may include failing to provide appropriate supervision at rugby activities, exposing children to unsafe environments, ignoring medical needs, or failing to respond to emotional wellbeing.

All staff and volunteers should recognise that child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation are forms of abuse.

Resource link: [NSPCC - Keeping Children Safe: Types of Abuse](#)

Safeguarding Issues

All those involved in rugby should be aware of safeguarding issues that can place children at risk of harm. These may include, but are not limited to:

- bullying, including cyberbullying and discriminatory behaviour
- pressure related to performance or selection
- initiation rituals, hazing and coercive group behaviours
- inappropriate relationships between adults and children
- substance misuse (drugs or alcohol)
- unexplained absences from training or matches
- serious violence or criminal exploitation (including county lines)
- radicalisation
- sharing of nude or semi-nude images or videos (youth produced sexual imagery)

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- online abuse or grooming
- transport and supervision concerns

These issues can arise both within and outside rugby environments.

Child-on-Child Abuse

Children can abuse other children. This can happen at any age and may occur during rugby activities, travel, tours, social events, or online. All coaches, volunteers and officials should recognise indicators of child-on-child abuse and know how to respond appropriately.

Child-on-child abuse may include:

- bullying (including cyberbullying and discriminatory bullying)
- abuse within intimate relationships between young people
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, or harmful initiation practices
- sexual violence, including assault or unwanted physical contact
- sexual harassment, including sexual comments, jokes, or online behaviour

Concerns about child-on-child abuse should always be taken seriously and responded to in line with the RFU safeguarding procedures.

Resource Links: [NSPCC Free Resources Directory](#)
[Barnardo's Child Exploitation Advice](#)

Safeguarding Those with Additional or Increased Vulnerabilities

Policy Principle

Respect “...act with respect and consideration towards others at all times, recognising and valuing differences”



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Some children may be more vulnerable to harm or abuse due to personal circumstances, barriers, or inequalities they experience. This can include, but is not limited to, disabled children, those with additional needs, and children who identify as LGBTQ+.

These children may face increased risks, such as social isolation, discrimination, communication barriers, or reduced access to trusted support. As a result, concerns may be harder to identify, and they may be less likely to report worries or be heard.

It is essential that all those involved in the game recognise these additional vulnerabilities and take a proactive, inclusive approach to safeguarding. This includes ensuring environments are welcoming and accessible, listening carefully to each child's voice, and responding in a way that reflects their individual needs and experiences.

Safeguarding practice should always be child-centred, with a focus on equity; recognising that some children may need greater understanding, support or adjustments to ensure they are equally safe and able to enjoy rugby.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

A CSO has undertaken a fantastic piece of work with a child, their parent and coaches to put together a support plan. The 7-year-old has Autism and ADHD and needed some additional support to access rugby safely. The plan highlighted cues for coaches such as "Safe Hands" when reminders were needed, explained parental roles and positive interventions that were successful, such as stickers. Feedback from all has been incredibly positive.

Resource Links: [Neurodiversity in Rugby](#)

[NSPCC, Understanding Risk and Vulnerability Factors](#)

Adults at Risk

While this Handbook primarily focuses on safeguarding children, the RFU recognises that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and that adults at risk may also require support, protection and appropriate safeguarding measures. Many of the principles set out in this Handbook, particularly those relating to creating a safe, inclusive and respectful culture, promoting rugby's Core Values,

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responding appropriately to concerns, and ensuring the welfare of all participants, are equally relevant when working with adults at risk.

The Care Act 2014 underpins the RFU's approach to safeguarding adults and informs the development of our safeguarding policies and procedures. It sets out the responsibilities of local authorities in keeping adults with care and support needs safe from abuse or neglect.

The RFU is committed to safeguarding adults at risk and ensuring they are able to participate in rugby in a safe, positive and enjoyable environment. All members, staff and volunteers should be aware of their responsibilities in relation to adults at risk and should raise any concerns in accordance with the Club's safeguarding procedures, seeking advice from and reporting concerns to the RFU Safeguarding Team.

Resource Link: [RFU Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures](#)
[Ann Craft Trust Useful Information](#)
[The Care Act 2014](#)

Management of Concerns

Creating safer environments depends on people being willing to act when something does not feel right. Safeguarding concerns are not always clear-cut and can range from poor practice and boundary concerns through to allegations of abuse or situations involving significant risk of harm. Whatever the concern, the welfare of children and adults at risk must remain the primary consideration. Rugby expects everyone involved in the game to share concerns, seek advice when unsure, and support a culture where safeguarding concerns are taken seriously. The following section sets out what to do when concerns arise, how information should be shared, and how the RFU Safeguarding Team works with clubs, Constituent Bodies and statutory agencies to manage concerns appropriately.

**Where a child or adult is in immediate danger or requires urgent medical attention,
Participants must call 999 immediately before notifying the RFU.**

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Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse

The Government has announced plans to introduce a statutory duty requiring certain individuals working with children to report known or suspected child sexual abuse. At the time of publication, the detailed provisions are not yet in force and this Handbook will be reviewed when the legislation comes into effect.

The purpose of the proposed duty is to ensure that concerns relating to child sexual abuse are recognised, reported and acted upon without delay. While the legal requirements will apply to individuals undertaking relevant roles with children, the principles are already reflected in RFU Safeguarding Policy, Regulation 21 and the expectations set out throughout this Handbook. All safeguarding concerns must be reported promptly and individuals should never assume that somebody else will take action.

For most volunteers, coaches, match officials and club safeguarding officers, following the reporting procedures outlined in this Handbook will help ensure that concerns are escalated appropriately. The RFU Safeguarding Team acts as the lead safeguarding function for rugby union in England and is responsible for assessing concerns, determining next steps and, where appropriate, making referrals to statutory safeguarding agencies, including children's social care and the police.

If you are unsure whether information meets the threshold for reporting, seek advice from the RFU Safeguarding Team **immediately**. It is always better to report a concern and seek guidance than to delay action where a child may be at risk of harm.

Resource Link: [NSPCC Factsheet – Mandatory Reporting](#)

What To Do If You Have Concerns

Anyone involved in rugby should maintain an attitude of “it could happen here.” The welfare of the child is always the priority.

Mandatory Standards

- If you have concerns about a child:
- Act immediately
- Do not assume someone else will take action
- Share the concern with your Club Safeguarding Officer (CSO)
- In an emergency, contact the police or children's social care directly



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The RFU Safeguarding Team will normally decide the next steps, including whether to refer the concern to statutory agencies. Individuals may be asked to provide information to support safeguarding assessments.

Policy Principle

Teamwork “Report any worries or concerns, for yourself or others, especially if someone’s behaviour makes your or others feel unsafe or could cause harm or fear, because, in our sport, everyone is welcome, whoever you are”

It is essential that children receive the right help at the right time. Early identification and action can prevent concerns escalating and help protect children from harm. Reviews into serious safeguarding cases consistently highlight the risks of failing to act on early warning signs. Everyone involved in rugby has a responsibility to share concerns and support a safe environment for all children.

Resource Link: [Sharing Concerns](#)

Receiving and Dealing with Concerns

When a Participant, Club or Organisation receives a safeguarding concern, from any other participant or statutory agency then the RFU Safeguarding Team must be informed, and no further action is to be taken unless to address an immediate risk, or you are instructed to do so by RFU. If you are worried or unsure, you should contact the Safeguarding Team to seek advice.

When someone shares a concern with you, whether this is about something that has happened to them or someone else, it is important to:

- Stay calm
- If a child or adult at risk has disclosed it to you directly, re-assure them that they are not to blame
- Keep questions to a minimum, avoid leading questions or suggesting answers
- Try not to interrupt the child or adult
- Do not make any promises of confidentiality or outcome. It is almost certain that you will have to share this information with someone
- Make brief notes, as accurately as you can, at the earliest opportunity



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For the RFU Safeguarding Team to assess the concern, it is important to clearly state in your referral to us

- **What:** The concern is – how has it been reported to you. Includes if the person is from another organisation or agency.
- **Who:** The person raising the concern, the adult at risk, and any other relevant people, such as carers or next of kin. The person who is reported to be causing harm.
- **When:** When did the incident happen. When was the concern raised to you?
- **Where:** The location of the incident.
- **Other information:** Any immediate risks, action taken, other agencies involved.

In summary:

- Report the facts provided to you, not opinion
- What you witnessed if you are reporting
- Provide the direct contact details of the person reporting to you
- Provide the details required on the Referral form e.g. RFU IDs
- Outside of the RFU Safeguarding Team consider and justify whether at that stage it is proportionate or appropriate to share with others

Allegations About Staff and Volunteers

Mandatory Standards

- All allegations or concerns about the behaviour of staff, volunteers, coaches, officials or other adults working with children must be reported to the RFU Safeguarding Team without delay.
- Clubs must not investigate safeguarding allegations themselves unless specifically instructed to do so by the RFU Safeguarding Team.
- Confidentiality must be maintained and information shared only with those who need to know.



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When concerns are raised about the behaviour of an adult working or volunteering in rugby, it is important that clubs respond calmly and appropriately.

Concerns may relate to poor practice, breaches of professional boundaries, behaviour that could present a risk of harm, or allegations that require referral to statutory agencies.

The role of the club is to ensure that any immediate risks are managed, record the information received, and report the concern to the RFU Safeguarding Team. Decisions about safeguarding investigations, referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), and any safeguarding risk management measures will normally be coordinated by the RFU Safeguarding Team. Further information is set out in sections below.

Participants should avoid discussing allegations unnecessarily, undertaking fact-finding enquiries, or making assumptions about the outcome of a case.

The welfare of children remains the primary consideration throughout the process.

Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO)

A Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is a statutory safeguarding role within every local authority. The LADO is responsible for overseeing and managing allegations or concerns about adults who work or volunteer with children. This role is set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children and is part of the local authority's duties under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004.

When a safeguarding concern or allegation is made about any adult working or volunteering with children in a sports setting, the same statutory LADO process applies as in any other sector.

The RFU has a legal duty to follow this process.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

An Age Grade Rugby Coach resigned from their position due to “A malicious allegation that was being investigated by the Police”

The CSO needed advice on what to do with this information and rightly shared the matter with the RFU Safeguarding Team immediately via the online webform.

The Safeguarding Team were able to liaise with statutory agencies who advised the serious nature of the matter under investigation.

Safeguarding measures were implemented which restricted the former coach's involvement whilst the investigation continued.



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How the RFU Responds to Concerns

Policy Principle

Discipline “We will make it easy for people to raise safeguarding concerns, be they big or small, and ensure the right people and processes are in place to respond to them”

To ensure that all safeguarding concerns are managed in a manner that is proportionate, transparent, and consistent with RFU Regulation 21, the RFU Safeguarding Team assesses each case according to its nature, seriousness, and level of associated risk.

This tiered case-management approach ensures that the RFU responds to safeguarding concerns in a way that is risk-led, proportionate, and consistent with national safeguarding expectations, while ensuring clubs understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

Issues that involve poor practice, breaches of codes of conduct, or behaviour that does not present an immediate safeguarding risk (Lower-Level Concerns) may be managed locally only where the RFU Safeguarding Team explicitly delegates this. These cases may result in guidance, education, or other proportionate management actions.

Where concerns indicate a potential risk of harm, require fact-finding, or involve matters that cannot safely be addressed at club level, the case will be managed directly by the RFU Safeguarding Team. This may include requests for information, interviews, or coordination with external agencies such as the police or the LADO.

Concerns that indicate significant safeguarding risk or behaviour that may place children or adults at risk may be referred to the Safeguarding Case Management Group (SCMG) for formal consideration under powers granted to the SCMG under RFU Regulation 21 i.e. Interim or Indefinite Bars.

When the RFU Safeguarding Team concludes an investigation involving the Club or any of its Participants, the RFU will determine the next steps including referral to the Safeguarding Case Management Group (SCMG) or an education outcome. The Club must understand and support the outcome, and the Club has key responsibilities in managing communication, compliance, and oversight.



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Lower Level, Poor Practice and Early Intervention

A lower-level concern, sometimes called poor practice, is any behaviour by an adult that is inconsistent with a code of conduct, even if minor and not reaching the harm threshold to refer on to statutory agencies including the LADO.

Lower-level does not mean “insignificant” and it aligns with the RFU’s recognition that poor practice or minor breaches are meaningful early indicators that require action. It does not in any way dismiss, minimise, or invalidate how the behaviour has been experienced or perceived.

1. They help identify inappropriate behaviour early
2. They reinforce clear professional boundaries
3. They prevent escalation to harmful behaviour
4. They build a transparent, safeguarding-first culture
5. They protect both children and volunteers

These behaviours sit on a continuum that may range from thoughtless actions to behaviour that could, in some circumstances, be intended to enable abuse if left unchecked. Early intervention helps maintain safe environments and prevents the development of harmful behaviours.

All Participants, Clubs and Organisations must support early intervention, which may include advice, reflective conversations, education, or proportionate management action (as appropriate with RFU safeguarding advice and support).

Clubs are encouraged to use our reporting form to notify us of these types of concerns. Although there may be no need for RFU Safeguarding Team intervention, we can offer advice and record the issue centrally in case it needs to be referred to again.

The Role of the CSO/CBSM During Investigations

You may be contacted by the RFU Safeguarding Team to provide support while a case is being managed. This could include sharing local knowledge, helping to confirm contact details, and supporting the implementation of any safeguarding measures.

You may also be asked to help keep those involved updated. We recognise that this can be a distressing time, and we will work with you to identify and support the needs of those affected.



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Guidance is available for individuals who have had a concern raised about them, which you can use to help keep them informed and supported throughout the process.

Resource Link: [Information for those who have had a concern raised against them](#)

Safeguarding and Discipline

It is often difficult to determine when dealing with a particular incident in rugby whether it is a disciplinary issue, a safeguarding issue, both or neither. This is why it is important for those involved in reports of safeguarding concerns consult closely with the RFU Safeguarding Team and the Club Discipline Officer.

The key principle to be considered by all individuals when determining what type of incident has occurred should be *“If in doubt, notify the RFU and ask for advice.”*

Resource Link: [Collaboration Between Safeguarding and Discipline](#)

Complaints

Safeguarding concerns can be complex, distressing, and emotive for those involved. While the RFU aims to ensure that processes are fair, open, and transparent, outcomes may not always meet everyone’s expectations. For this reason, a complaints procedure is in place for anyone who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the safeguarding work conducted by the RFU.

Resource Link: [RFU Safeguarding Complaints Policy](#)

Clubs should have a clear and accessible process for managing complaints relating to club activities, conduct, membership, or the way concerns have been handled locally. Complaints should be listened to respectfully, responded to promptly, and managed in line with the club’s constitution, policies, and disciplinary procedures. Wherever possible, concerns should be addressed informally at an early stage, whilst ensuring appropriate records are maintained.

It is important to distinguish between a complaint and a safeguarding concern. Where information suggests that a child or adult may be at risk of harm, or that a safeguarding policy may have been breached, the matter must be dealt with through safeguarding procedures and referred to the Club Safeguarding Officer and/or the RFU Safeguarding Team as appropriate.



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Complaints relating to a club's internal processes, decisions, or membership matters will generally remain the responsibility of the club and may not be considered by the RFU unless they fall within the RFU's regulatory remit.

Key practice points for clubs

- Have a clear complaints process that is easy for members, parents, carers, volunteers, and staff to access.
- Acknowledge complaints promptly and explain the next steps.
- Maintain accurate and confidential records.
- Keep communication professional, respectful, and proportionate.
- Distinguish between complaints, disciplinary matters, and safeguarding concerns.
- Seek advice from the RFU Safeguarding Team where there is uncertainty about whether a matter constitutes a safeguarding concern.



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Additional Links, Guidance and Information

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

The RFU is committed to creating environments free from sexism, misogyny, harassment, and abuse. Clubs are encouraged to promote respectful cultures, challenge inappropriate behaviour, and ensure concerns are reported and addressed appropriately.

[RFU Toolkit – Tackling Sexism and Misogyny](#)

Age Grade Rugby Codes of Practice

The Age Grade Codes of Practice provide practical support and best practice to those delivering the Age Grade game. The codes cover a number of topics ranging from playing and training frequency to the grouping of players and key information on player welfare.

Player Welfare

We know it can get confusing, but Player Welfare, which includes things such as Rugby Safe, First Aid, Headcase, Female Health and Wellbeing are managed by a dedicated Player Welfare Team.

NSPCC Sport

Formally known as the CPSU (Child Protection in Sport Unit) NSPCC Sport offer a wealth of guidance and advice. There is also a dedicated safeguarding in sport newsletter that you can sign up to.

Ann Craft Trust

The Ann Craft Trust is a national charity that exists to minimise the risk of abuse of adults. They support organisations to safeguard adults and minimise the risk of harm.

UK Coaching

UK Coaching is the professional body for coaches in the UK, providing learning, guidance and resources to help coaches create positive, inclusive and participant-centred experiences across sport and physical activity.

TEAMWORK RESPECT **ENJOYMENT** DISCIPLINE **SPORTSMANSHIP**



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[Internet Matters](#)

Internet Matters provide safety advice alongside practical tools and resources to help children stay safe and thrive online.

[Childline 0800 1111](#)

A free, private and confidential service where anyone under 19 can talk about anything. They are contactable 24 hours a day online and on the phone.

[Anti Bullying](#)

Helpful advice and practical tips from the NSPCC in managing issues associated with Bullying.

Legislation and Statutory Guidance:

[Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)

[Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)

[Children Act 1989](#)

[Children Act 2004](#)

[Care Act 2014](#)

[Sexual Offences Act 2003 \(Abuse of Position of Trust\)](#)

[Online Safety Act 2023 - Government Explainer](#)



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Glossary

Abuse

A form of maltreatment of a child. Abuse may involve inflicting harm or failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused by adults or by other children. Abuse can occur within families, communities, or in rugby environments, including training, matches, tours, travel, and online communication linked to rugby activities.

Child

Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. This includes all players, participants, volunteers and individuals involved in age-grade or adult rugby, such as 17 year olds playing up.

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)

Where an individual or group takes advantage of a child and coerces, controls, manipulates or deceives them into criminal activity. This may occur within or outside rugby environments and may involve peer influence or adult perpetrators.

Child Protection

Part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. It refers to action taken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm. In rugby this may involve referral to statutory agencies following concerns identified within a club or rugby activity.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

A form of sexual abuse where a child is manipulated, coerced or forced into sexual activity in exchange for something such as status, money, gifts, or perceived acceptance. This may occur online, within peer groups, or through relationships formed in sporting or social environments.

Controlling or Coercive Behaviour

A pattern of behaviour intended to dominate, manipulate or control a child. Within rugby this may include intimidation, isolation from teammates, pressure related to performance, or inappropriate influence by adults or peers.

County Lines

A form of criminal exploitation where children are used to transport drugs or money between locations. Children involved in sport may be targeted due to travel, independence, or peer networks.



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Domestic Abuse

Any incident or pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between individuals aged 16 or over who are personally connected. Children may be directly affected or impacted through exposure to domestic abuse at home.

Emotional Abuse

Persistent emotional maltreatment that adversely affects a child's emotional development. In rugby this may include humiliation, excessive criticism, unrealistic expectations, bullying, intimidation, or pressure to perform.

Extra-Familial Harm

Harm that occurs outside the family, including within peer groups, schools, community settings, and sports environments such as rugby clubs, tours or competitions.

Extra-Familial Contexts

Settings outside the home where children spend time and may be exposed to risk, including rugby clubs, changing rooms, travel, accommodation, online groups and social activities. May sometimes be referred to as Contextual Safeguarding.

Extremism

Vocal or active opposition to fundamental values including democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect. Children may be vulnerable to radicalisation within community or online settings.

Family Group Decision Making

A structured process that brings family members together to make decisions about safeguarding and welfare. Rugby organisations may be asked to contribute information to support this process.

Financial Exploitation

The exploitation of a child for financial gain. This may include coercion to hand over money, pay for activities, or exploitation linked to travel, events or social activity.

Harm

Ill-treatment or impairment of health or development, including physical, emotional or psychological harm.



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Kinship Care

Care provided by relatives or family friends. Rugby clubs should recognise that children may attend with carers other than parents.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The officer responsible for managing allegations against adults who work with children. Concerns about coaches, volunteers or officials should be referred via safeguarding procedures.

Maltreatment

All forms of physical or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or exploitation resulting in harm or potential harm to a child.

Neglect

Persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or emotional needs. In rugby this may include inadequate supervision, unsafe environments, ignoring injuries, or failure to ensure appropriate welfare arrangements.

Parent/Carer

A person with parental responsibility or who provides care for a child. In rugby this may include parents, guardians, kinship carers or delegated responsible adults.

Parental Responsibility

The legal rights, duties and authority a parent or carer has to make decisions about a child's welfare, upbringing and participation in activities. This includes giving consent and being responsible for the child's wellbeing.

Physical Abuse

A form of abuse involving physical harm. In rugby this may include inappropriate physical punishment, unsafe training practices, forced participation when injured, or deliberate harm.

Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children

Safeguarding means:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of health or development
- ensuring safe and effective care



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- taking action to enable best outcomes

This applies to all rugby environments including training, matches, tours, travel and online activity.

Safeguarding Case Management Group (SCMG)

This was previously known as the Referral Management Group (RMG).

The SCMG is the RFU-appointed group responsible for making decisions about safeguarding risks and suitability relating to Participants, Clubs, or Organisations.

The SCMG will consider cases referred to it by the RFU Head of Safeguarding and, where the appropriate conditions are met, impose Interim and Indefinite Bars. They will also decide, in DBS cases, whether to clear Participants to work in Regulated Activity or Other Activity.

Safeguarding Concern

Any worry about a child's welfare, behaviour, wellbeing, or safety within or outside rugby activity.

Safeguarding Partners

Local agencies responsible for safeguarding children (local authority, police and health). Rugby organisations may share information with these partners when concerns arise.

Significant Harm

The threshold that justifies statutory intervention to protect a child. This may result from a single incident or accumulation of concerns

Version Control

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1.1				