

Managing Challenging Behaviour

1. Purpose of Document

Staff, volunteers and coaches may have to deal with challenging behaviour from children and young people from time to time. This is a shared responsibility between everyone - the organisers, the parents and the children themselves.

This guidance aims to inform all these parties about the roles they play in dealing with difficult behaviour. At the centre is the need to remember that children's safety is paramount- so that everyone in fencing can enjoy the activities in which they are involved.

Clubs and organisations should identify measures they can put in place to promote good practice among staff, organisers and parents, and good behaviour in young fencers. .. Young fencers should understand that if their behaviour goes beyond what is acceptable, or threatens others' safety, event organisers or staff will take action to intervene in accordance with these measures, for the safe of everyone's wellbeing.

This guidance note identifies good practice, outlines strategies and sanctions that can be used (as well as those that must never be used) and encourages a proactive approach to help children manage their own behaviour.

Guidance for dealing with difficult behaviour is based on the following principles:

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- All those involved with young fencers (including other children and parents) should be provided with clear guidelines about expected standards of conduct, and the process for responding to unacceptable behaviour.
- Children must never be subjected to any treatment that could be considered to be harmful, abusive, humiliating or degrading.
- Some young people will exhibit challenging behaviour as a result of medical conditions, and may require specific or additional guidance. These, and any other unique needs, should be discussed with parents/carers and the child when planning an activity, and extra support provided if needed.
- Fencing can make a big difference in improving life for children and young people, so every child should be supported to participate, wherever possible. Only in exceptional circumstances, when the safety of the child or other children can't be maintained, should a child be excluded from activities.

2. Planning

Good practice requires activities to be planned around the group as a whole, but also to take individual needs into consideration. There should be procedures to enable organisers to establish whether members of the group have, or are likely to have, difficulty with the tasks, the other participants or the environment.

Where there are potential risks, strategies to manage these risks should be agreed in advance. The appropriate number of adults needed to safely manage a session should be established, taking into account the potential need to respond to challenging behaviour to safeguard other members of the group.

When a child's behaviour has been identified as requiring extra support or specialist expertise, this should be discussed with parents/carers and where appropriate, the young person. The club should seek to work in partnership with parents, and where necessary external agencies, to ensure the child can participate safely.

3. Agreeing acceptable and unacceptable behaviours

Everyone – staff, coaches, volunteers, children and parents – should be involved in developing a Code of Conduct that agrees acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and the sanctions that may be applied in response to a breach of the code. This can be agreed at the start of the season, in advance of a trip away or as part of a welcome session. Evidence suggests that when children are involved in the preparation of a Code of Conduct, they arrive at a very sensible and working set of rules and there is more 'buy-in' from the participants. British Fencing asks all members to sign up to their Code of Conduct as a condition of membership. Clubs or other events may wish to develop their own and for their members to sign up when they join

4. Managing Challenging Behaviour

Responses should always be proportionate to the actions, imposed as soon as is practicable and fully explained to the child and their parents. In dealing with children who display disruptive or challenging behaviour, organisers might consider the following options:

- **Time out** – from the activity, group or individual work.
- **Reparation** – making amends.
- **Restitution** – giving something back.
- **Behavioural reinforcement** – rewards for good behaviour, consequences for negative behaviour.
- **De-escalation of the situation** – talking things through.
- **Increased supervision** by staff/volunteers.
- **Increased involvement** of parents.
- **Use of individual 'contracts' or agreements** for future or continued participation.
- **Sanctions or consequences**, e.g. missing an outing.
- **Seeking additional support** by working with other agencies, e.g. referral for support to Children's Social Care, discussion with the child's key worker if they have one, speaking to the child's school about management strategies, etc. **Note: all of these require parental consent unless the child is felt to be 'at risk' or 'in need of protection'.**
- **Exclusion**, temporary or permanent.

The following should **NEVER** be permitted as a means of managing a child's behaviour:

- Physical punishment or the threat of such.
- Refusal to speak to or interact with the child.
- Being deprived of food, water, access to changing rooms or toilets, or other essential facilities.
- Verbal intimidation, ridicule or humiliation.

The needs of any child for whom sanctions are frequently necessary should be reviewed. This review should involve the child, their parents and in some cases others who provide support or services. If a child continues to be disruptive, or presents a danger to themselves or others, they may have to be suspended or barred from the group or club activities.

5. Physical Intervention

The use of physical intervention should always be avoided unless it is absolutely necessary to prevent a child injuring themselves or others, or causing serious damage to property.

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Physical contact to prevent something happening should always be the result of conscious decision-making, not a reflexive reaction. Before intervening, the member of staff should ask themselves, 'Is this the only option to manage the situation and ensure everyone's safety?' If you do have to physically intervene, do so in the least restrictive way possible to prevent the child from being hurt, and do so only after all other strategies have been exhausted. Studies show that, where this is the case, children and young people understand and accept the reasons for the intervention.

Where possible adult witnesses should be present

In the event that physical intervention is needed, the following must always be considered:

- Contact should be in line with good practice and never be made in a way that could be interpreted as sexual. BF have published guidance on physical contact
- Any form of physical intervention should achieve an outcome that is in the best interests of the child showing the behaviour.
- Organisers should consider the circumstances, and the risks associated with employing physical intervention compared with the risks of not doing so.
- The scale and nature of physical intervention must always be proportionate to the behaviour of the young person and the harm or damage they might cause.
- All forms of physical intervention should employ only a reasonable amount of force – the minimum force needed to avert injury to a person or serious damage to property – applied for the shortest period of time.
- Organisers should never employ physical interventions that present an unreasonable risk to children or staff/volunteers.
- Physical intervention should **NEVER** be used as a form of punishment.
- Physical intervention should **NOT** inflict pain.
- Where children are identified as having additional needs or behaviours that are likely to require physical intervention, this should be discussed with parents or carers.

Any physical intervention that does happen should be reported and recorded as soon as possible using the Incident Report Form and passed to the Club Welfare Office or Child Protection Officer.

6. Views of the Child

Coaches, staff and volunteers should meet with the child and his or her parents following any incident of physical intervention. This way everyone involved has an opportunity to talk calmly about what happened. The child's ongoing needs and their continued safe participation in the activity should also be discussed. The parents and child should be made aware of the club's policies for managing challenging behaviour. Experiencing or witnessing physical intervention can provoke strong feelings in young people. Even a child who wasn't directly involved might be fearful that something similar will happen to them in future. It can be beneficial to explain the outcome of this discussion to other children, or anyone else involved in the incident.

7. A Policy for Managing Challenging Behaviour

It is in everyone's best interest for the fencing club or organisation to have a policy around managing behaviour, or procedures incorporated into a broader child protection policy. The guidelines should clearly set out:

- the standard of conduct expected from coaches, staff, volunteers and participants;
- how the organisation will respond to unacceptable behaviour;

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- how the organisation will respond to 'high risk' behaviour;
- the circumstances in which children will be restrained;
- guidance, information or any support or training available to coaches, staff and volunteers;
- circumstances in which external agencies will be contacted, for support or in response to concerns;
- a process to agree what will happen after an incident. Clubs must have arrangements in place to check on the wellbeing of those involved, guidance on recording information and who should be informed, and a system for recording and monitoring incidents.