

## Duty of Care

Sports organisations have a duty of care towards children and young people. This briefing paper aims to clarify what that duty means and to provide some guidance about what can be done to demonstrate that this duty is being met.

In order to fulfil its duty of care a sports body needs to take *reasonable* measures in the circumstances to ensure that individuals will be safe to participate in an activity they are providing or is under their auspices.

When children and young people are involved in organised sports activities and are to any extent under the care and/or control of one or more adults, the adult(s) have a duty to take reasonable care to ensure their safety and welfare.

A duty of care may be imposed by:

- common law or statute
- contract
- acceptance by an individual

There is no general duty of care upon members of the public towards the public at large. However there is a duty of care if there is a formal relationship, for example between a club and a club member, or a coach and an athlete.

The duty occurs in two ways:

A **Legal** Duty of Care

A **Moral** Duty of Care

The **Legal Duty of Care** has a strict definition. An example of this is in Health and Safety procedures.

These provide clear guidance about what reasonable steps should be taken to reduce hazards related to activities, substances or situations.

Given the health and safety considerations, it is generally accepted that a sports organisation or individual (e.g. coach) owes a duty of care to its members. However, it is also recognised that accidents can and do happen, and that it is not possible to predict every situation.

Liability for failing to meet the legal duty of care would only arise if an incident occurs and it can be proved that the risk was foreseeable but no action had been taken to avoid it.

## Children and young people in a club or sports activity

Children and young people are owed a higher duty of care and those working with children and young people must reflect this. The responsible person must be prepared for children to be less careful than adults. This is even more significant if a child is known to have learning difficulties or a medical condition which may make them more vulnerable than other children.

Any person in charge of children and young people involved in a sports club or activity has a duty of care. The duty when children are involved in a sports club is reasonably straightforward. This level of responsibility can be termed as acting 'in loco parentis'. This is not necessarily referring to the child's actual parent; what a parent may allow, the sport may choose not to. For example, a parent may say that their child can stay out until midnight but a reasonable parent, or the sport, may not.

If supervision falls below the standards of a reasonably prudent parent and a child is hurt as a result, those responsible may be held to be negligent. Those managing or supervising children and young people in a club setting should consider what steps they may need to take to demonstrate they are providing a reasonable standard of care.

Examples of this could include:

- Keeping up to date registers of attendance
- Keeping up to date records of contact details
- Maintaining appropriate supervision ratios
- Maintaining up to date information on specific medical conditions - allergies, asthma, epilepsy
- Ensuring that first aid provision is available at the venue
- Ensuring those responsible for supervising the children and young people have been through appropriate recruitment and selection processes.

Those responsible for sports activities should think of themselves like an employer and carry out a risk assessment for their activities. This must include elements related to duty of care and health and safety. It is not necessary to complete an assessment on each individual activity or session if this occurs on a regular basis. An annual or seasonal assessment would be sufficient. If, however, potentially dangerous equipment is used as part of the activity then this equipment must be checked before the start of every session.

The **Moral Duty of Care** is more correctly a responsibility for safety and welfare. Members of staff have a responsibility for those children and young people, and other staff, who are under their control.

To determine if the duty of care has been breached, the ordinary civil law of negligence would be applied. The question is whether the accused, has failed to reach the standard of a reasonable person.

In specialist sports activities the qualified instructor has a duty of care for all those taking part whatever their age or position. The key point here is that the individual delivering the activity, whatever their status, should be appropriately trained and authorised.

Within sports organisations the duty of care should begin by ensuring the activity is authorised by the sport and the relevant instructors are qualified for the task. The next step will be to manage the activity in a safe manner throughout. This is best explained as what is considered to be reasonable.

For more information on the Duty of Care please contact the relevant sport's governing body.