

## Relationships with members aged 17 and under

The relationship between coaches, teachers or members of staff who hold a position of trust and responsibility and members of the organisation under 18 must be professional and appropriate at all times. In some situations, legislation may reflect this requirement.

However, the importance of the relationship between a coach and a member must never be forgotten. Not only does it develop a child's sporting potential and self-esteem, but it also allows them to develop an appropriate and trusting relationship with a responsible adult. Research of child safeguarding cases in our sports has shown that it is this relationship that has enabled many children to disclose their concerns.

The coach/member relationship is a complex one for both parties. It is important that the coach acknowledges that children often develop feelings for people in positions of trust, often identified as "a crush" or "hero worship". In the case of a sports coach, this may result in admiration of the coach's previous achievements, e.g. as a national level athlete, representative of their country. If this should happen to you, always inform the Welfare Officer to note the matter, and ensure that concerns are discussed and managed in an open and transparent manner. The Welfare Officer will be able to advise you on how to manage the issue and any action to take, if required. You and the Welfare Officer will be able to deal with such situations ensuring you and the child are safe from harm or allegation.

Coaches may develop stronger relationships with some children than with others. It would be unrealistic not to acknowledge that it is possible to like one person more than another. However, the professional nature of the coach's position requires them to never favour one member or group of members over another. If one member requires more attention for reasons identified by the coach (e.g. the member is preparing for a national level event) then that is totally acceptable,

but such preferential treatment or extra attention must be justifiable as being necessary for a member's professional development, and should not be to the detriment of other members.

Some coaches have considered it acceptable to give rewards to members who do well, and it is acknowledged that in the vast majority of cases, gifts were given with no ulterior motive other than to reward success or improvement.

However, as outlined in Section 2.1 on grooming (pages 32-33), the giving of gifts or favours can be identified or misconstrued as part of the grooming process. Our clear advice to coaches is to not give members gifts in any form. It is recommended that if a coach feels that a member has attained a level of achievement that should be rewarded, then it is the organisation that should recognise that, on the coach's recommendation, and that any reward, gift or recognition given is then from the organisation and not one individual.

Where a coach does wish to carry out a rewards system, they should inform the relevant personnel within the organisation to make them aware of this, and provide details of the infrastructure around it. This may protect the coach from potential allegations of favouritism or grooming. In all cases, the reasoning behind creating the rewards system, and the justification for awarding a reward to an individual should be done on an open and transparent basis, for the sake of all concerned.



It is important that coaches adhere to the Swim England Code of Ethics and follow good practice as outlined in the accompanying coaches Code of Conduct, to ensure their behaviour towards their members is appropriate. All coaches are in a position of trust over children and must act professionally at all times. If an action you take could be deemed to be unprofessional and inappropriate, then do not take that course of action.

### Relationship of trust

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 states: "It is an offence for a person aged 18 years or over to involve a child under that age in sexual activity where he or she is in a specified position of trust in relation to that child. This includes those who care for, advise, supervise or train children and young people."

This does not currently apply in law to swimming, para-swimming, diving, high diving, artistic swimming, water polo and open water swimming teachers or coaches (though this may change following lobbying) but Swim England has adopted this policy into Swim England's Codes of Conduct and the Swim England Code of Ethics, and any relationship of this nature may result in disciplinary action.

Swim England adopt the Home Office guidelines which recommend the principle that people in positions of trust and authority should not have sexual relationships with under 18-year-olds in their care. The power and influence a coach or teacher has in a professional relationship with a child cannot be underestimated. In addition to this, the child's success or failure and team selection may be dependent on the coach. It is vital for all coaches and teachers, as well as other volunteers, to recognise the responsibility they have and ensure that they do not abuse that position of power and trust.

Therefore, the position of Swim England is that no sexual relationship should exist between members under 18 years of age and their coach or teacher, and that the relationship between coach and member must be appropriate at all times.

Please note that children aged 16/17 years can legally consent to some types of sexual activity. However, in almost all provisions of legislation (under the Children Act 1989) they are still classified as children.

