

## Safeguarding Deaf and Disabled Children in Sport: Personal care responsibilities

### Introduction

This factsheet helps sports clubs and organisations consider personal care responsibilities, such as assistance with changing for disabled young athletes.

### Hannah – 14 year old girl who is a wheelchair user

Hannah is 14 years old and is part of a mixed age, open sports club in which she is included alongside her non-disabled peers. She uses a wheelchair and requires assistance in changing into her sports wheelchair, and sometimes with using the toilet. Although her parents used to stay with Hannah during sessions and would therefore provide this support, increasingly they have been simply dropping her off at the club. This has meant that the coaches have been left with responsibility for providing this assistance to Hannah. The coaches are very uncomfortable with this task.

When this has been raised with Hannah's parents they have given assurances that they will stay with their daughter. However this is not happening and the club staff and volunteers are left to provide this support for Hannah who really enjoys her participation in the sports activities. Matters have come to a head because the parents have already indicated they won't be able to accompany her to this weekend's event some distance away.

### Discussion points

#### ***Whose responsibility is it to provide young participants' intimate care?***

Providing intimate care differs from more sport/activity-related assistance (such as supporting transfer to or from a sports wheelchair), and with all parties' agreement coaches may well appropriately undertake the latter role.

It should be clear to everyone at the club (including young people and their parents/carers) that sports coaches and other volunteers should not be involved in providing intimate personal care for young or disabled participants. This should always be the responsibility of the parents, carers or other identified chaperones, care staff or volunteers.

The reasons for this include:

- It puts the child in a potentially vulnerable position
- The potential negative impact on the young person's privacy and dignity
- Sports staff are unlikely to be trained to carry out this role and it isn't their role – they are there to facilitate and supervise sports activities
- It can impact on the level of adult supervision for the remainder of the group
- There may be health and safety considerations around manual handling procedures
- The adult may be vulnerable to others misinterpreting their behaviour or motivation, and may result in concerns or allegations arising
- It can reinforce the child's vulnerability and lack of autonomy
- It models and may help to perpetuate poor practice

#### ***How should a club ensure that a young person's intimate care needs will be addressed?***

It is helpful for a club to have a personal/intimate care policy.

Alongside a range of other practical considerations (such as access, communication, equipment, and so on) intimate care needs should have been considered and discussed with the young person and their carers at the outset as part of an initial discussion about how the young person's needs will be met.



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Arrangements should be clarified and agreed to ensure that the full range of support needs of each (disabled) child will be met in the sports context. This discussion should have clarified that it will be the responsibility of the parents or another identified person to undertake personal care tasks – wherever the activity will be taking place. If such an agreement has not been reached, a meeting should be arranged with Hannah's parents to establish one – even retrospectively.

In light of this, the parents need to be reminded of their responsibilities, and why it is important for Hannah, the coaches and the club that they fulfil their part of the agreement. A meeting with parents can provide an opportunity to consider any issues that are affecting their ability to comply, and ways in which these can appropriately be addressed.

The intention is never to exclude Hannah or restrict her participation in the sport, but there is a need to ensure that a robust, clear, and agreed plan is in place in her interests and those of the coaching staff and club.

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