

G12 – Protecting Children and Young People with Disabilities

British Canoeing recognises that some children and young people have additional vulnerabilities. This guidance documents describes the reasons for vulnerabilities and outlines good practice. It should be read alongside our Safeguarding Children and Safeguarding Adults policies.

Children and young people with disabilities might be additionally vulnerable because they may:

- Have significant communication differences - this may include very limited verbal communication or they may use sign language or other forms of non-verbal communication.
- Be subject to the prejudices and/or misconceptions of others e.g. about their 'attractiveness' to potential abusers.
- Require personal intimate care – this can make it difficult for them to know what acceptable and unacceptable touching is.
- Have a reduced capacity to resist either verbally or physically.
- They are used to being told what to do – and not given choices.
- Not be believed.
- Depend on the abuser for their involvement in sport or for basic needs.
- Lack access to peers to discover what is acceptable behavior.
- Have medical needs that are used to explain abuse.

Children and young people with disabilities may also be less valued than their peers and poor care may be observed and tolerated by others. This might include such things as not speaking directly to the child or young person, failure to offer choices; using derogatory language; and not respecting their privacy and dignity.

Reducing the potential for vulnerability

Bearing in mind that children and young people can be and are disadvantaged by these and other experiences, it is important for all those that work with children to be extra vigilant in creating a safe culture, including:

- Finding ways of understanding and communicating with all children and young people.
- Ensuring best practice at all times in physical and health care – make sure the young person's health needs are known, recorded and sufficient people know how to respond if required.
- Building relationships with parents and carers and including the families of players in club activities.
- Discuss with parents and carers any physical care that is required and how this can be done.
- Observing carefully changes in mood, appearance and behaviour and discussing those concerns with families, carers or the designated person if suspicions or concerns are significantly aroused about the care of the child or young person.
- Acknowledging that disabled children and young people can be additionally vulnerable and that vigilance is essential.
- Implementation of a club code of conduct for adults and children.
- Give the child or young person every opportunity to make informed choices and respect their choice.

It may be necessary to ask other specialist agencies for help and advice. It should be seen as a strength of the club to approach families, Education, Health, Children's Social Care/ Social Services, voluntary agencies and community groups for advice about supporting a child or young person to participate or to ensure more vulnerable children are afforded appropriate safeguarding and protection.