

Definition and Role of Children's Officers

Club Children's Officers

The Code of Ethics describes the role of the Club Children's Officer. The Irish Sports Council and the Sports Council NI have approved training established to meet the requirement of this role. At least one Children's Officer should hold an up to date certificate of Child Protection from ISC/CNI/NISC and all Children's Officers should be familiar with the Code of Ethics and Child Welfare Guidelines of Swim Ireland.

The Club Children's Officer should be child centred in focus and should have as his/her primary aim the establishment of a child centred ethos within the club. S/he is the link between the children and the adults in the club. S/he also takes responsibility for monitoring and reporting to the Club Committee on how club policy etc. impacts on children and their Sports Leaders.

Given the need to ensure that children are valued within all sporting contexts at least one Children's Officer, preferably two, must be appointed by all clubs, subject to appropriate selection and recruitment procedures as recommended within the Code of Ethics. Some of the skills required for a Children's Officer are:

- A good listener
- Approachable
- Ability to maintain confidentiality

The primary role of the Children's Officer is the welfare of the children. They should be available to any swimmer or parent who has concerns. Their contact numbers should be made available to all members of clubs and their parents.

Children's Officers must operate independently of their club's administrative and coaching structure. They must not be committee members or coaches. They must operate a strict code of confidentiality within the club, but if a concern about child protection comes to the Children's Officer they should inform the designated person or, if not possible, the appropriate statutory authority.

The Children's Officer should have the following functions:

- to promote awareness of necessary child welfare policies and procedures
- to influence policy and practice within the club in order to prioritise children's needs
- to provide an accessible resource to children
- to encourage the involvement of parents/guardians in the club activities and co-operate with them in ensuring a safe and enjoyable environment for their children
- to act as an advisory resource to Leaders on best practice in children's sport
- to meet with the Club Management Committee as required but at least once a year
- to ensure the election of male and female club captains with whom they can liaise to ensure the voice of the young person is heard

Children's Officers must never investigate or validate child protection concerns without or within the club and have no counselling or therapeutic role. These roles are filled by the Statutory Authorities. It is, however, possible that child protection concerns will be brought to the attention of the Children's Officer. In this event, it is essential that the correct procedures are followed, i.e. that reports are passed on immediately to the designated person who reports to the Statutory Authorities.