

GUIDANCE ON CHANGING AND USE OF CHANGING ROOMS

British Fencing have a duty of care to children and vulnerable adults while they are participating in fencing. This may at times extend to issues around changing. Often fencing clubs may use facilities that already have their own policies in place, this would include schools, leisure centres and private sports facilities. It is likely that they will have changing room policies in place, in which case they should be followed by clubs or user groups.

It is important to remember that many children and young people are very self-conscious and anxious about their body image and undressing in front of others. Many children will opt to change at home and therefore changing may not be such a big issue. Wherever possible, provision should be made for those who choose to change at the venue.

Where no pre-existing policy is in place, anyone involved in fencing should follow the following policies. There are two formats:

- Where a changing room(s) will be used exclusively by a club or fencing activity
- Where changing room(s) will be shared with others outside of the sport

Exclusive Changing Rooms

Typically, this would be the case where a club, organisation, event or other fencing activity owns, hires or manages its own facility, or has negotiated sole use of a more public facility at a particular time. The advantage of this type of arrangement is that it negates any concerns arising from children mixing with adults when changing or showering.

Shared Changing Rooms

Ideally, children and vulnerable adults should have sole use of changing facilities. However, many clubs will use venues where changing facilities are used by other adults; this can include other sports teams, individual athletes or members of the public. This is typical in venues such as leisure centres or schools.

In these circumstances, there is a need for additional steps to be taken to ensure adequate supervision of the children while changing. This will avoid risks associated with mixed-facility use and to prevent or reduce opportunities for unwanted contact between the young people and these adults when changing or showering. It is important for staff/volunteers to balance the need for adequate supervision with the need to ensure young children are afforded appropriate levels of privacy.

Where shared changing rooms are to be used, the following options should be explored:

- Is there a separate room/facility available that can be used?
- Can specific time slots be negotiated to have exclusive use of the changing room?
- Can access to a designated area of the changing room for sole use be negotiated?
- Can participants change at home?

Where sole use cannot be secured then in the first instance, supervision of changing should be the responsibility of parents or carers. As a last resort where this is not possible, at least two members of staff should supervise the group. Ideally, those staff should be of the same gender as the children. A clear timetable for this supervision should be agreed in advance

Supervision in the changing facility may also be necessary when:

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- children that are too young to be left alone or change themselves. Organisers of groups of children under eight years should arrange for their supervision while changing before and after the activity. Although most children of school age may be capable of changing their clothes, many leisure facilities have established guidelines that any child below the age of eight years must be accompanied
- the group includes disabled children who require additional support and assistance with changing (note this should be undertaken by prior agreement with their parent or professional carer)
- children could injure themselves or access a potential risk such as a swimming pool that is unattended
- there are concerns about bullying, fighting or other troublesome behaviours taking place which need to be managed

Who should supervise?

If you have decided that the children and young people need supervision, staff/volunteers should consider who will carry this out. This task provides access to children in circumstances of increased vulnerability and therefore careful consideration should be given to ensuring that those undertaking this task have been assessed as being suitable to do so.

- Numbers – organisers are recommended to have more than one adult supervising, as this will ensure cover in the event of an accident or incident occurring or if one supervisor is called away.
- Gender – it is considered good practice to ensure that children are supervised by staff/volunteers of the same gender while changing.
- Timings – by agreeing a very clear timetable for use of the changing facilities by children, the supervising adults and any coaches or officials respectively, the risks associated to any extended contact between the adults and children are minimised.
- Carry out safe recruitment practices including:
 - criminal records checks for individuals whose roles make them eligible by virtue of their role meeting the current definition of regulated activity
 - references – these should include a reference from a recent, previous employer/club where they have worked with children/young people
 - role description – providing clear details about the boundaries of their role
 - code of conduct – a document that individuals sign up to that clarifies the standards of behaviour expected of staff/volunteers.

Parents as supervisors

Parents are often involved in supervising children during sports activities and outings, and can provide valuable support to organisers and coaches. Where they are responsible only for their own child (or by agreement their relatives' or friends' child/ren) this constitutes a private arrangement outside the responsibility of the activity organisers. However, when parents undertake a formal supervisory role at the request of or with the agreement of the organiser which includes having responsibility for other people's children, the same steps should be taken to establish their suitability as for any other supervisory position (as outlined above).

What about mixed gender teams?

Many sports operate mixed gender teams at several age group levels and arrangements to enable the groups to change separately should always be made. Solutions may include:

- each gender using a different room or facility
- each gender having a distinct time slot
- everybody changing at home before they leave
- each gender having an allocated area of a larger shared facility that ensures privacy.