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# **COACHES CODE OF CONDUCT: COACHING PROCEDURES**

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Version 1.0

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## Introduction

Gymnastics naturally comes with risks, yet these risks can be effectively managed and reduced through the implementation of best coaching practices. It is the responsibility of those supervising gymnastics activities to conduct thorough risk assessments and ensure the implementation of effective control measures to uphold a safe environment consistently.

This guidance forms part of a broader collection of documents that should be studied and applied in conjunction with the IGA Health & Safety Management System & Guidance.



## Gymnastics Safety and Accountability

All individuals involved in coaching activities bear a fundamental responsibility to exercise reasonable care for the safety of participants, both during training and competitions. It is essential to ensure, to the extent reasonably possible, that:

- Gymnastics activities, training, and coaching occur in a secure environment, utilising equipment and facilities that are suitable, safe, and well-maintained.
- Coaches possess the necessary qualifications, competence, and experience required for their roles.
- Coaches conduct their coaching responsibilities with skill, care, and professionalism in alignment with the IGA's Standards of Conduct and the codes of Ethics and Conduct
- Coaches consistently implement best coaching practices and meticulously prepare participants, both physically and mentally, commensurate with their level of involvement.

## The Diligent and Compassionate Coaching

The conscientious and attentive coach will ensure that the following principles are implemented and consistently maintained:

- Maintain a safe environment at all times.
- Provide clear and comprehensive instructions before starting any activity.
- Continuously assess coaching methods and procedures for the safety of both participants and coaches.
- Ensure that only competent, adequately trained, and qualified individuals supervise or coach activities.
- Ensure participants wear appropriate clothing and equipment (e.g., hand-guards) that are well-fitted and in good condition.



- Verify the health status of each participant before training sessions or competitions. If a coach is aware of any health issues, medical conditions, or injuries that could affect a participant's ability to train or compete, or potentially harm their health during these activities, appropriate medical advice should be sought beforehand. If a medical advisor recommends against training or competing, the participant should refrain from doing so until medical clearance is obtained.
- In case of injury, it is imperative to seek medical advice, and only qualified individuals should administer first aid.
- Maintain an accurate and updated record of injuries and treatments.
- Obtain medical clearance before allowing a participant to resume training or competition after a serious injury.
- Coaches must remain accessible at all times and should not leave the premises while a session is ongoing.
- Ensure there are always at least two responsible adults present during training sessions. One must be a qualified coach, and the other should not be participating as a gymnast.
- Personal mobile phones should not be used within the gymnasium unless consent is given for emergency purposes.

## Coaches and Assistants

Gymnastic activities inherently involve risks, and in prioritising participant safety and well-being, IGA's mandates the following criteria:

- Coaches wishing to operate independently must hold a minimum IGA Level 2 qualification or equivalent in the relevant disciplines. .
- Level 1/Assistant Coaches must work under the supervision of a qualified Coach (or higher).
- Coaches and Teachers should operate strictly within their qualified sports-specific areas and up to their certified level.



- The coach designing and directing programs must hold at least a Level 2 qualification in the specified disciplines. Exceptions are allowed during coaching courses or after completing practical elements (under direct supervision of a higher-level coach).
- Coaches working at advanced performance levels must hold qualifications commensurate with the discipline's specific performance requirements.
- IGA's ensures coaches are competent and adhere to current best practices.
- Coaches working with children and/or adults at risk must undergo an approved criminal records check and complete a IGA recognised safeguarding course (if over 18). Coaches under 18 must complete a Foundation Safeguarding.
- Coaches participating in IGA competitions or events must hold current qualifications based on the following guidelines: Coaches with a Coach level qualification may oversee event activities at their qualification level. Coaches at other levels must possess qualifications suitable for the participants' performance level in the discipline. Less qualified coaches may assist higher-level coaches only within their certified areas and to their certified level.

### **Gymnast-to-Coach/Instructor Ratios**

When recommending participant-to-coach/teacher ratios for Gymnastics and Trampoline activities, several factors must be taken into account. These include the age and developmental stage of participants, the nature and complexity of the activity, the experience levels of both participants and coaches, and the available facilities and equipment.

However, it is essential for the supervising coach to conduct a risk assessment for each situation and establish a participant-to-coach ratio that is both safe and suitable for effective supervision.

It is also crucial to note that a minimum of two responsible adults should always be present in the gymnasium. To ensure a safe and productive coaching/teaching environment, IGA recommends the following reasonable participant-to-coach/teacher ratios:



## **Preschool Classes**

For classes with independent children, a ratio of eight participants per coach is advised. This ratio can be adjusted based on the presence of additional qualified assistant coaches, with each additional directly supervised assistant coach allowing for an increase of up to 8 participants.

In classes where parents, guardians, or carers participate alongside children, a maximum ratio of 20 children per coach is recommended.

## **Gymnastics Classes**

All gymnastics activities must be overseen by appropriately qualified coaches or instructors. Coaches should hold qualifications that match the performance level of participants in the specific discipline of gymnastics.

The recommended maximum number of participants per apparatus/station is 8. When supervising multiple apparatus/stations, the lead coach must conduct a thorough assessment considering:

- The participants' age, developmental stage, experience, varying abilities, and the discipline involved.
- The qualifications and experience of the coaches themselves.
- Their capacity to observe, guide, support, and respond to the needs of all individuals in the gymnastics area.
- The nature and suitability of the apparatus setup for the activities.

Typically, a single coach should not supervise more than 16 gymnasts without the presence of other suitably qualified coaches. However, if a qualified Assistant Coach is directly supervised by the lead coach, each Assistant Coach can oversee up to 8 additional participants (e.g., lead coach with 16 gymnasts plus an Assistant Coach with 8 gymnasts = a total of 24 participants).



## **Trampolining Coach Ratios**

All trampolining activities must be overseen by appropriately qualified coaches or instructors. The supervising coach is responsible for ensuring that trained spotters of appropriate size and age are positioned at each side where end decks are absent.

The recommended maximum number of participants per trampoline is 8. When supervising multiple trampolines, the lead coach must conduct a thorough assessment considering:

- The participants' age, developmental stage, experience, varying abilities, and the discipline involved.
- The qualifications and experience of the coaches themselves.
- Their capability to observe, advise, support, and respond to challenges encountered by individuals in the trampoline area.

Typically, a single coach should not oversee more than 16 recreational trampolinists without the presence of other suitably qualified coaches.

Furthermore, the coach in charge must ensure that any individual operating the "push in mat" who is not a qualified coach is trained, experienced, mature enough, and familiar with the performer.

## **Coaching Individuals with Disabilities**

When coaching individuals with disabilities, it is essential to conduct a thorough assessment of the risks to both the individual and other participants when determining the ratio of gymnasts to coach. Depending on the specific disability, one-to-one supervision may be required. For more detailed guidance on disability-related matters, The Equality Act 2010 available at [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk), and the IGA Safeguarding and Protecting Vulnerable Adults policy.



## Participant Age and Skill Levels

It is impracticable to anticipate every conceivable circumstance in gymnastics due to numerous variables, such as the gymnast's age, physical and psychological traits, gender, ability level, training hours, and personal aspirations. IGA offers the following general principles for the safe participation and long-term development of gymnasts:

- Gymnasts should engage only at a level that ensures their safety.
- Effective planning and preparation will support the gymnast's long-term development.
- Proper physical conditioning should be integrated into the gymnast's training regimen.
- Cultivating an appropriate work ethic and attitude helps foster a positive approach to training and participation.
- The gymnast's training schedule (days/hours) should consider their needs outside the gym, such as social activities.
- Coaches should operate within the scope of their qualifications.

IGA adheres to a Long-term athlete progression, This model outlines guidelines for the safe and effective development of gymnasts, particularly those on a competitive pathway.

Age bands and training loads provided in the model serve as illustrative examples only. The progression of gymnasts through these stages depends on various factors, including discipline, entry age, physical, cognitive, and emotional maturity, and their competitive or recreational goals.





The duration spent in each stage is influenced by the nature of the discipline and the gymnast's individual progression. Guidance is provided on the recommended frequency of competitions per year, based on age and developmental stage. This volume is suitable only when gymnasts are adequately prepared, free from injury (including micro-trauma), and competent in performing routines. It is crucial to maintain a balanced approach to training, skill development, competition, and recovery when planning the yearly competition schedule.

### **Children under eight**

Participating in activities lasting two or more hours may necessitate registration with Local Authority Social Services. Although regulations typically do not apply to sports activities, IGA advises clubs offering classes to this age group to notify the Local Authority to avoid ambiguity.

IGA recommends that sessions for children under eight should not exceed two hours, and pre-school classes should not exceed 45 minutes in duration.

### **Age and Competition**

Competitions play a pivotal role in gymnastics, providing valuable experience for performance-oriented gymnasts over time. To safeguard young gymnasts, IGA requires that participants must be at least nine years old in the calendar year of the event to qualify for national or UK finals.

Recognising that younger gymnasts may wish to participate in events, IGA offers the following recommendations:

<b>Age</b>	<b>Competitive Setting</b>
6 years old during the year of the competition	Recommened to club, school, and leisure center participants
7 years old in the year of the competition	Up to the level of county and County Sports Partnerships
8 years old in the year of the competition	Up to the regional and national level
9 years old in the year of the competition	UK wide national level



Some IGA Clubs host a variety of competitions, including intra and inter-club events, and in some instances, international competitions following full FIG rules. These events occasionally extend beyond the intended scope of the above guidelines, which aim to protect very young participants from undue pressure.

Organisers of such events must thoroughly assess all aspects, such as competition level and formality, to establish appropriate age criteria for participation.

### **Utilisation of volunteers under the age of 14**

Clubs that utilise volunteers under the age of 14 should verify compliance with their Local Authority Byelaws, as certain authorities have stringent regulations concerning the involvement of children under this age.

## **Participant Age and Skill Levels**

IGA embraces the involvement of individuals with disabilities and expects coaches to integrate them into existing classes whenever feasible and suitable. Coaches are required to plan ahead to accommodate the needs of disabled participants in gymnastics activities, preceded by a thorough risk assessment.

Coaches should note that additional qualifications are not necessary to include disabled gymnasts in regular classes. However seeking further knowledge to accommodate all gymnasts is recommended.

Under the Equality Act 2010, disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that significantly and long-term impacts a person's ability to carry out everyday activities.

### **Legal Responsibilities towards Individuals with Disabilities**

IGA reminds coaches that under the Equality Act 2010, they are considered service providers. This means coaches are obligated to adhere to the following requirements:

- Avoid treating disabled persons less favourably than other members of the public.



- Make reasonable adjustments to practices, policies, and procedures to facilitate access for disabled individuals.
- Take reasonable steps to modify or provide alternative means to overcome physical barriers that hinder disabled individuals from accessing services.

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Reasonable adjustments may include simple improvements like better lighting, user-friendly color schemes, and clear signage. Major changes such as installing automatic doors or wheelchair ramps may be justifiably avoided if they pose excessive costs, service disruptions, or impracticality.

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## **Classes Specifically for Individuals with Disabilities**

Recognising that mainstream inclusion may not always be feasible, IGA supports the provision of specialised classes for disabled individuals. Coaches intending to deliver such classes are strongly encouraged to complete qualifications based on coaching and supporting those with disabilities.

### **Attire and Personal Dress**

The dress code for gymnastics activities aims to ensure the safety of participants and coaches. The following guidelines must be followed during training and events:

- Participants and coaches should wear suitable attire that allows for unrestricted movement and does not pose a safety risk due to looseness.
- Clothing with buckles or clasps is prohibited due to safety concerns.
- Adornments or raised elements on gymnastics clothing are also prohibited.
- Long hair should be securely tied back to prevent accidents.
- Participants are required to work barefoot or wear gymnastics slippers.
- Socks should not be worn without proper gymnastics footwear on polished or slippery surfaces.
- When using a trampoline, socks or appropriate gymnastics footwear (excluding training shoes) must be worn.

### **Body Modifications and Decorations**

IGA maintains that wearing jewellery and body piercings during gymnastics and trampolining activities poses safety risks and is therefore prohibited under this policy. This applies to all participants and coaches during both training sessions and competitive events, whether held domestically or internationally.

Participants are required to inform their coach of any body adornments or jewellery and remove them prior to participating. This measure aims to minimise the risk of injury to themselves, coaches, and others present.



For coaches involved in spotting or directly supporting gymnasts, all jewellery must be removed. However, when coaches are assessing performance or providing instruction without physical contact with equipment or gymnasts, they may wear jewellery.

Exceptions to this policy may be considered under special circumstances, detailed as follows:

- Jewellery that cannot be removed, such as rings or dermal piercings, must be adequately covered with protective tape to eliminate any potential risks.
- Newly pierced stud earrings should be covered with protective tape until they can be safely removed, typically after six weeks.
- Religious or medical jewellery, such as diabetes bracelets or Sikh Kara bracelets, may be worn, provided they are covered with a sweatband or similar protective item during participation to mitigate risks. Coaches must be informed of any medical reasons necessitating the wearing of such items.

In cases involving religious necklaces like Christian crucifixes or Hindu Mangalsutra necklaces, no participant should wear them during activities due to safety concerns.

It is essential that coaches conduct thorough risk assessments in all instances mentioned above. If a significant risk that cannot be adequately controlled is identified, coaches must prohibit participation in the interest of safety. Legitimate health and safety concerns that prevent participation will take precedence over any other considerations, including religious or medical reasons.

Non-compliance with this policy may result in the individual's exclusion from participation on safety grounds and could invalidate their insurance coverage in case of an accident resulting from non-compliance.

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## Ensuring Safety

Ensuring optimal safety levels during activities is paramount. Key considerations include:

- **Participant Preparation** Prior to skill instruction, participants must be adequately prepared physically and psychologically. This includes developing necessary strength, flexibility, and body awareness.
- **Progressive Learning** It is best practice to use progressive sub-skills related to the main skill, allowing sufficient time for skill consolidation.
- **Competent Spotting/Supporting** Spotting and supporting are crucial for safe skill acquisition, involving careful observation and handling techniques taught in IGA coaching courses.
- **Apparatus Suitability** Apparatus should be carefully selected and checked for height, width, and stability, ensuring a safe landing surface appropriate to the activity level and participant's ability.
- **Safe Landings** Emphasis should be placed on teaching correct landing techniques and safe falling methods.
- **Flexibility/Stretching Exercises** IGA provides guidelines for proper flexibility training practices, addressing concerns over technique and proximity during coaching. Detailed guidance is available in the Flexibility Training Guidelines for Gymnasts document.
- **Weight Training in Gymnastics** The use of Olympic weightlifting or similar exercises is discouraged until post-pubertal development stages. Progression in physical preparation should primarily involve body-weight resistance, with supplementary use of single weight discs or belts where appropriate.
- **Overuse and Growth Related Injuries** Given the sport's demands, participants are susceptible to overuse injuries, particularly during growth spurts. Coaches should vary training routines, ensure correct techniques, and monitor growth patterns to mitigate injury risks.
- **Fatigue Management** While training intensity should progressively increase, coaches must monitor fatigue levels to prevent performance decline and injury.

## Safeguarding

As coaches, we are entrusted with the safety and well-being of all participants. This responsibility requires us to strictly adhere to safeguarding policies and maintain a vigilant approach to ensure a safe environment for every gymnast.

### Commitment to Safeguarding Standards

All coaches must adhere to the highest standards of safeguarding as outlined in our Safeguarding policies and the guidelines provided by the IGA. This includes:

- **Vigilance and Awareness:** Coaches must be vigilant and responsive to any signs of potential harm, abuse, or neglect. This involves being fully aware of the different forms of abuse and understanding the procedures for reporting concerns.
- **Clear Communication:** Maintaining open and honest communication with both gymnasts and their parents or guardians. This includes being approachable and providing clear information on safeguarding policies and procedures.
- **Respecting Boundaries:** Always maintaining professional boundaries with gymnasts. This includes avoiding situations that could be misinterpreted or lead to inappropriate relationships or behaviour.
- **Confidentiality:** Safeguarding sensitive information and only sharing it on a need-to-know basis in line with legal and organisational guidelines.

### Use of Personal Mobile Phones and Devices

To protect the privacy and safety of our gymnasts, personal mobile phones or devices must not be used within the gymnasium to take photographs or videos of children. The use of such devices in this context can compromise safeguarding protocols and lead to the misuse of images.



## Safeguarding

Additional Safeguarding Measures Related to Mobile Devices:

- **Restricted Access:** Ensure that any work-based devices used for capturing images or videos are password-protected and accessible only to authorized staff members.
- **Secure Storage:** All images and videos taken on work-based devices should be stored securely, with regular audits conducted to ensure compliance with safeguarding policies.
- **Parental Consent:** Obtain explicit written consent from parents or guardians before capturing or using any media involving children. This consent should specify how the images or videos will be used and shared.
- **Regular Audits:** Conduct regular audits of media files and device usage to ensure that all safeguarding protocols are being followed. Any discrepancies or concerns should be reported immediately to the designated safeguarding officer.
- **Clear Policies on Social Media:** Ensure that media taken within the gymnasium is not shared on personal social media accounts. Any sharing on official platforms must comply with safeguarding guidelines and have prior approval.

By adhering to these guidelines, coaches not only protect the young athletes in their care but also uphold the integrity and reputation of the sport of gymnastics. Safeguarding is a collective responsibility, and as coaches, we must lead by example, demonstrating our commitment to the safety and well-being of every gymnast.

### Reporting Welfare Concerns

As coaches, safeguarding the welfare of our gymnasts is our foremost priority. It is essential that any concerns related to the well-being of an athlete are promptly identified and reported to ensure swift and appropriate action. This section outlines the procedures and responsibilities for reporting welfare concerns within our gymnastics program.





## Safeguarding

### Identifying Welfare Concerns

Welfare concerns can arise from a variety of situations, including but not limited to:

- **Physical Abuse:** Any form of physical harm or injury inflicted intentionally.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Persistent emotional maltreatment, which can cause severe and long-lasting effects on a child's emotional development.
- **Neglect:** Failure to provide for a child's basic needs, including food, clothing, and a safe environment.
- **Bullying and Harassment:** Any form of bullying or harassment, whether by peers, other coaches, or external individuals.
- **Inappropriate Behaviour:** Any behaviour by a coach, volunteer, or other individuals that crosses professional boundaries or puts the gymnast's welfare at risk.

### Reporting Procedures

All coaches are required to follow the established reporting procedures when a welfare concern is identified:

1. **Immediate Action:** If a child is in immediate danger or needs urgent protection, contact emergency services (999) immediately.
2. **Internal Reporting:** Any non-urgent concerns should be reported to the club's Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) as soon as possible. The report should include:
  - The nature of the concern
  - Any observations made (physical signs, changes in behavior, etc.)
  - Any conversations or disclosures made by the child
  - The date, time, and context in which the concern was identified
3. **Confidentiality:** Maintain confidentiality throughout the process. Information should only be shared with those directly involved in the safeguarding process, such as the DSO and relevant authorities.
4. **Documentation:** Ensure that all reports are documented accurately and thoroughly. Use the club's official safeguarding report form to ensure consistency and completeness.



## Safeguarding

5. Follow-Up: The DSO will assess the concern and determine the appropriate course of action, which may include further investigation, contacting child protection services, or providing support to the child and their family. Coaches should follow up with the DSO to ensure that the concern has been addressed and documented.

6. Support for Coaches: If you have reported a concern, remember that you are not alone. Support is available from the DSO and senior staff to help manage any emotional or psychological impacts.

7. Whistleblowing: If you believe that a concern has not been appropriately addressed or if there is a conflict of interest, you have the right to escalate the issue by contacting an external body such as the IGA's safeguarding team or child protection services.

### Handling Disclosures

If a gymnast discloses a concern directly to you:

- Listen Carefully: Allow the child to speak without interruption. Show empathy and understanding.
- Do Not Investigate: Your role is to listen, not to investigate. Do not ask leading questions or make assumptions.
- Reassure the Child: Let them know they have done the right thing by speaking up, and reassure them that they will be supported.
- Report Immediately: Inform the DSO as soon as possible, providing them with all relevant details from the disclosure.

By adhering to these guidelines, we can ensure that any welfare concerns are addressed swiftly and effectively, creating a safe environment where all gymnasts can thrive. Safeguarding is not just a policy—it is a fundamental commitment to the well-being of every child in our care.