

## Safeguarding and inclusion of deaf and disabled children and young people in sport

Many deaf and disabled children and young people already enjoy the benefits of sports and activities – whether playing for fun or competing at national or international level. However we know that many thousands of other keen, willing and able young disabled people are prevented from doing so because of negative misconceptions about them, or because they are not given access to opportunities, facilities, or support from appropriately trained coaches and staff.

Sports should take positive steps to include deaf and disabled children and young people, and in doing so also recognise and address their additional needs and vulnerabilities.

### How can sports promote the inclusion of disabled children?

Research by Sport England<sup>1</sup> found that only 12 per cent of disabled young people are members of sports clubs, compared to 46 per cent of all young people, indicating that a lot more can be done and should be done to involve deaf and disabled children in sport.

Sports can include children and young people with disabilities by:

- becoming familiar with the different impairment needs through disability equality training or local disability specific groups
- including positive images of people with disabilities in all aspects of marketing materials
- telling people what activities are on offer through school events, local sports centres, at tournaments, through the local community, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and coaches
- offering taster sessions or open days for disabled children and young people
- including specific sections on disability in your organisation's Mission Statement in Strategic Plans and Risk Assessment Policy
- seeking feedback from young people about the activities to find out what worked and what didn't. This information can be used to adapt the activity in the future.

Activity providers, including sports clubs, have to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in the way they deliver their services. Examples of reasonable adjustments could include:

- providing larger, well-defined signage for people with impaired vision
- putting in a ramp at the entrance to a building that has steps to accommodate wheelchair users or those with impaired mobility.

What is considered a reasonable adjustment for a large organisation may be different to a reasonable adjustment for a small club. It is about what is practical in the service provider's individual situation and what resources they may have.

All young people have the right to participate in sports or activities of their choice, however mainstream sports clubs may not always be the most suitable or safest environment for a child with specific or complex needs. There are a wide range of disability-specific sports, clubs, organisations and governing bodies.

### What are the barriers to young people of participating in sport?

Some common barriers deaf and disabled children may face with getting involved in sport include<sup>2</sup>:

- lack of early experiences in sport

<sup>1</sup> Finch, N (2001) *Disability Survey 2000: Young people with a disability and sport. Headline Findings*. London: Sport England.

<sup>2</sup> International Platform on Sport & Development, (2011). *Barriers to Participation* [online] Available at: [http://www.sportanddev.org/learnmore/sport\\_and\\_disability2](http://www.sportanddev.org/learnmore/sport_and_disability2)



- sports lack of understanding and awareness of how to include people with a disability in sport
- limited opportunities and programmes for participation, training and competition
- lack of accessible facilities, such as gymnasiums and buildings
- limited accessible transportation
- limiting psychological and sociological factors including attitudes towards disability of parents, coaches, teachers and even people with disabilities themselves
- limited access to information and resources.

By working towards the lifting of barriers that stop deaf and disabled children from being fully integrated into mainstream life, they can also be more effectively safeguarded from abuse.

## Why are deaf and disabled children more vulnerable to abuse?

The available UK evidence on the extent of abuse among deaf and disabled children suggests that they are at increased risk of abuse and that the presence of multiple disabilities increases the risk of both abuse and neglect.

Deaf and disabled children may be especially vulnerable to abuse for a number of reasons:

- the increased likelihood of social isolation
- having fewer contacts to disclose to than non-disabled children
- a dependency on others for practical assistance in daily living, including intimate care
- an impaired capacity to resist, avoid or understand abuse
- their speech and language communication needs may make it difficult to tell others what is happening
- their particular vulnerability to bullying
- being viewed as a “safe target” for abusers
- their relative powerlessness physically, psychologically and socially) and the opportunities this presents for grooming by potential abusers
- many young people having learnt to be compliant
- a reluctance to challenge carers who may often be viewed as valiantly coping with the burden of a disabled child and therefore not considered as potential risks
- the denial of the possibility of (particularly sexual) abuse of disabled children
- disabled children being less likely to be heard or listened to.

## What types of abuse do deaf and disabled children experience?

Sullivan and Knutson<sup>3</sup> (2000) found that 31% of disabled children had been abused compared to a prevalence of 9% in the non-disabled population. A more recent review of the literature<sup>4</sup> in relation to children with disabilities continued to find:

- that disabled children are significantly more likely to experience abuse than their non-disabled peers
- that most disabled children who were abused endured multiple forms with neglect being the most common
- that children with communication difficulties and behavioural disorders were more at risk of maltreatment

Like other children, deaf and disabled children are subject to all types of abuse. However there are additional risks that they may face as a result of their condition, disability or impairment. For example:

- **neglect** – a child could be confined to their room, lack appropriate supervision, or be deprived of visitors

<sup>3</sup> Sullivan PM and Knutson JF (2000) Maltreatment and Disabilities: a population based epidemiological study. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 24 10 1257–1273.

<sup>4</sup> Stalker, K. and McArthur, K. (2012), Child abuse, child protection and disabled children: a review of recent research. *Child Abuse Rev.*, 21: 24–40. doi: 10.1002/car.1154



- **sexual** – a child could be subject to inappropriate personal care or be abused by someone taking advantage of one to one supervision arrangements
- **physical** – drugs given incorrectly to a child, insufficient treatment, misuse of medication or inappropriate restraint of a child
- **emotional** – lack of stimulation or over-protection of the child, the child may suffer from a lack of privacy or from too high or low expectations.

NSPCC research found that disabled children are also significantly more likely to experience harm online than non-disabled children. Across every single measure (from bullying, to racism, to being asked to send sexual messages), disabled children were more likely to report having had harmful direct personal experiences on a social networking site than non-disabled children.

***The NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit has produced a resource to support sport and recreation organisations in their safeguarding responsibilities towards deaf and disabled children. The resource includes film scenarios, expert commentary, guidance notes and training tasks.***  
<https://thecpsu.org.uk/resource-library/2013/safeguarding-deaf-and-disabled-children-in-sport/>

For further information on the inclusion and participation of children and young people with a disability contact;

**English Federation of Disability Sport:** Tel: 01509 227750, Fax: 01509 227 777 <http://www.efds.co.uk/>

**Scottish Disability Sport:** Tel: 0131 317 1130, Fax: 0131 317 1075 <http://www.scottishdisabilitysport.com/>

**Disability Sport Wales:** Tel: 0845 846 0021, Fax: (029) 20 665 781 <http://www.disabilitysportwales.com/>

**Disability Sports NI:** Tel: 028 9046 9925, Text phone: 028 9046 3494 <http://www.dsni.co.uk/>

In addition to the CPSU resource there are also a range of courses and resources available to sports to support work with deaf and disabled participants:

**Sportscoach UK** – *How to Coach Disabled People in Sport* [www.sportscoachuk.org/](http://www.sportscoachuk.org/)

**Sportscoach UK** – *Inclusive Coaching: Disability* [www.sportscoachuk.org/](http://www.sportscoachuk.org/)

**Typhoo Sports For All** – *Disability Inclusion* (in partnership with **Federations of Disability Sport**)  
<http://www.efds.co.uk/microsite.asp?section=1061&sectionTitle=Typhoo+Sports+for+All>

