

Protecting Young Children and Young People with Disabilities

British Rowing recognises that some children and young people have additional vulnerabilities. This document describes the reasons for vulnerabilities and suggests good practice guidelines. It should be read alongside the British Rowing *Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy*.

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

- lack a wide network of friends who support and protect them
- 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 distinguish between what is acceptable and unacceptable touch
- have a reduced capacity to resist either verbally or physically
- be used to being told what to do – and not being 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 behaviour
- 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, for example, include 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 – making sure the young person's health needs are known, recorded and that appropriate individuals know how to respond if required
- building relationships with parents and carers and including the families of rowers in club activities
- discussing with parents and carers what physical care may be required and how this can be done
- observing carefully changes in mood, appearance and behaviour and discussing any 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 are additionally vulnerable and that vigilance is essential

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- implementing a club code of conduct for adults and children
- giving the child or young person every opportunity to make informed choices and respecting 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 services, health authorities, Children's Social Care Services, voluntary agencies and community groups for advice about supporting a child or young person to participate, and to ensure more vulnerable children are afforded appropriate safeguarding and protection.