

POLICE APPROVED SCHEME



child-Safe™

"reducing crimes against children..."

Protecting Young People in Sport & Organised Groups

A Guide for Parents

***Some of the information contained in this booklet is sexually explicit.
Some parents may feel this is unsuitable to be read by children.***

Supported by the Bath and North East Somerset Area Child Protection Committee

It is very difficult not to raise fears and anxieties when reading this booklet. Child abuse is a complex and sensitive issue for all those involved in children's activities. Some parents take the view it will not happen to their child, others fear for their child's safety every time he or she leaves the home. Whatever your own thoughts the club or organisation that has given you this information recognises that your child's welfare is extremely important. As part of the 'Child-Safe' Code of Practice, you are encouraged to ask questions of the staff and to call in from time to time to see what is going on. I urge you to do this.



If society is to be the way we all wish it to be in the future, the development of our children in a fear-free, nurturing environment is of the utmost importance.

Gabby Logan

1 Protecting your children from abuse

Many parents worry that their children may suffer abuse when they are out of their sight – playing sport or participating in activities away from home.

This guide has been written to help you protect your children when they are involved in organised clubs and groups. Developed by Avon and Somerset Constabulary and children's charity, ACHE, it is part of a child safety information pack which has been distributed to the organisers of sports clubs and children's activities.

The Child-Safe guidelines contained in this booklet are designed to help you feel more secure and to keep your children safe from harm. Like road safety, you can make these simple rules part of your family's life.

2 What is child abuse?

Most people who look after our children are safe. But sadly, some adults are very skilled at making friends with children with the intention of harming them

This situation can arise anywhere – in the family, at school, and at sports and other children's group activities. In fact, in the majority of cases children are abused in the family home or by someone known by the family and child.

There are many different forms of child abuse but they fall into four main categories:

Sexual abuse

Sex offenders, who are usually but not exclusively men, are found at all levels of society and come from every type of background. They will often take up positions and activities which give them easy access to children such as:

- leader of a children's activity group
- a coach or volunteer in children's sport
- a worker in a school
- a member of a caring profession.

Sexual abuse of children ranges from vaginal and anal intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, fondling, 'flashing,' showing them pornographic videos and other material, to sometimes inappropriate touching.

Abusers often "groom" children for sexual purposes by taking a strong interest in a child and their family, gaining their trust over a long period of time.

Physical abuse

Children who are hurt or injured and who display signs of unusual bruising may have been physically abused. This kind of abuse also includes giving children alcohol and drugs. Signs to look for include changes in a child's demeanour and behaviour; flinching when adults come near; and being in a state of "frozen watchfulness" or appearing frightened or withdrawn.

In a sporting or activities situation physical abuse can occur when children are bullied by their peers or adults. For example, overly-rigorous training or exercise routines are seen by some people as bullying. And bullied children often show signs of fear, such as mood swings, withdrawn behaviour or sudden changes in performance.

Neglect

This is when adults fail to meet a child's basic needs, such as for food, warm clothing, or failing to provide appropriate medical attention. This also includes leaving young or vulnerable children alone inside or outside the home.

Neglect might also occur during organised activities if young people are exposed to risk of injury or there is a failure to ensure their safety and well-being.

Emotional abuse

This form of abuse includes persistently subjecting a child to emotional ill-treatment, bullying or deliberate rejection. All abuse involves emotional ill-treatment of some kind this can be in organised activities as well as individual situations. It may also involve children who live in households where there is domestic violence or may involve inappropriate parental expectations.

The Child-Safe approach

Remember, it is important to keep a sense of perspective about child abuse:

- most adults will never hurt a child
- children should be allowed to become independent and learn to look after themselves – there's no need to wrap them up in cotton wool.



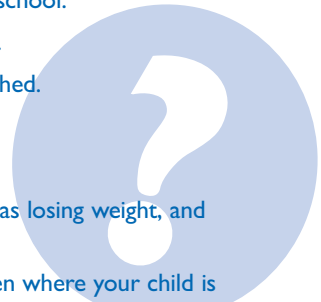
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How do I recognise if my child is being abused?

Child abuse can manifest itself in physical, emotional and medical symptoms. Your child may also tell you about aspects of the abuse in order to test your reaction. They may, for example, talk about being asked to “keep a secret.”

Here are some of the most common signs you should look for:

- Unexplained or untreated bruising or injuries.
- Suffering continual stomach pains or other physical ailments without any medical explanation.
- Aggressive or withdrawn behaviour and refusal to talk about the injuries.
- Refusal to attend school or suddenly doing badly at school.
- Refusing to take part in their normal social activities.
- Unexpected fear of an adult and flinching when touched.
- Sexually explicit behaviour and language.
- Unaccounted for sources of money
- Changes over time in manner and appearance, such as losing weight, and becoming dirty and dishevelled.



It is important to be alert for signs of abuse. However, even where your child is displaying some or all of these signs it does not necessarily mean they are being abused – there may be other causes. Also, none of these signs may be present, but you may just feel something is wrong.

You should also be aware of any adult who pays too much attention to your child – this is a classic sign of a potential abuser. For example:

- giving gifts, toys or favours
- offering to take your child on holidays or outings
- looking for opportunities to be alone with your child.

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What can I do to protect my children?

The Child-Safe rules for keeping your children safe are basically an extension of good parenting.

Always:

- know where your children are
- know who they are with
- know when they will be home

- be sure your children know where you are and how to contact you
- listen carefully to their concerns and reassure them they will be listened to.

You should also teach your children to:

- know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touching. Even if they are unclear encourage them to talk to you about it.
- know the difference between “safe” secrets which are fun to keep and “unsafe” secrets which they are concerned or unhappy about. A secret about a surprise birthday party is fine, but no one should ask them to keep quiet about secret touches.
- have a family codeword, you should consider the “kidscape code”, if someone tries to collect them – NO CODE, NO GO! Buying your child a travel pass and/or a phone card means they will always be able to contact you or get home unaided.
- feel confident about refusing to do anything they feel is wrong or frightening and to tell you if anyone – even someone they know – touches them in a way which alarms or confuses them. **Most abusers are not strangers.**
- always tell you if something bad has happened to them – even if they have broken a rule – and you will sort it out. Children often conceal abuse because they are worried about getting into trouble.
- make a fuss! Tell them that if someone tries to touch or to grab them to shout “NO” and run away as quickly as they can. Then to tell you or another adult.

Remember – keeping your child safe is the most important thing – breaking rules to keep safe is okay.

Joining clubs or groups

Before letting your child join any club or group, or sending them on any other kind of organised activity these points should be kept in mind:

- Talk to other parents about their experience of the group – are they confident their children are in safe hands?
- Ask the staff and volunteers if they have been police checked and how long they have been involved with the club/group.
- Ask the police or local authority if they have any links with the group.
- Is the club/group well-known in the local community? How long has it existed? Is it known to local schools, churches, health centres, youth and community services?
- Ask how many adults will supervise the children. Will your child always be with other children and never left alone with an adult or adults?

- What are the changing and toilet arrangements?
- Does the group encourage parents to get involved?
- Has the group produced a written policy which clearly states its commitment to protect the children in its care from abuse? Is it part of a bigger organisation with clear child protection rules? Does it state the qualifications and responsibilities of the staff and volunteers? Is there a qualified first aider on hand?

If you know any of the other parents well, some of these tasks can be shared. If you still have doubts contact Social Services or the caring organisations listed at the end of this booklet.

Once your child has joined the group . . .

- call in from time to time to see what is going on
- talk to your child about the activities and listen carefully if your child seems reluctant to attend
- talk to other parents.

5 What do I do if my child tells me he/she has been abused?

- Most importantly, stay calm and listen to your child.
- You will be distressed – don't react in a way which will upset your child even more. And don't tell them off if the abuse occurred because they were disobeying you.
- Make sure your child knows that you believe them, and that they are not to blame in any way for what has happened.
- Let your child say as much – or as little – as they like. Don't try to get more information than he/she is willing to give.
- Contact social services or the police directly about your concerns.

If you suspect your child has been abused you will be feeling very upset and may be feeling anger towards someone you trusted.

Do not confront the suspected abuser, seek help and report your concerns. There are many organisation which exist to help people at this difficult time.

Remember – these guidelines are about making you feel comfortable about your child's safety. Most adults are not abusers so you need not be frightened – or frighten your children – unduly.

By following the advice contained in this booklet and information pack you will be able to help protect your children when they are participating in youth activities and enable them to develop independence and self confidence.

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Helpful information

The child protection units in your local Police Force and Social Services will help you in suspected cases of child abuse. They will also advise on child protection and related issues.

Organisations involved in child protection include:

Avon & Somerset Constabulary Child Protection Team

Tel: 0117 945 4707 or 945 4786 Fax: 0117 945 4781

Barnardos 0117 941 5841

Bath & North East Somerset

Social Services

Telephone 01225 477000

ACHE

Telephone 01225 318500 Fax: 01225 331243

Childline 0800 1111

Off the record (Bath) Tel: 01225 312481

Young Persons Freephone 0800 389 5551

NCH (Bath) 0800 064 1727

Kidscape

152 Buckingham Palace Road

London

SW1W 9TR

020 7730 3300

The charity KIDSCAPE has kindly allowed us to include some of their original material in this booklet.

*Income from the sale of the Child-Safe information pack
will help fund further crime prevention initiatives.*

ACHE
Action on Child Exploitation

web site: www.ache.org.uk

AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY
CHILD PROTECTION TEAM

web site: www.child-safe.org.uk