

# Code of Conduct & Good Practice for Coaches and Sports Leaders

This is one of a series of documents intended to set the standard for behaviour within Rowing. It applies to all Coaches, with or without qualifications, umpires, officials, and anyone left in charge of young people or vulnerable persons, within Irish Rowing.

## Rowing and Young People

Rowing Ireland is indebted to the countless number of volunteers who give of their time in providing rowing opportunities for young people and vulnerable persons.

Rowing provides an excellent pathway for people to learn new skills, become more confident and maximise their own potential.

Through their participation, they can learn and develop life skills, have fun and enjoyment, make friends and experience life in a way that can enhance their personal growth throughout their lives.

People become involved in rowing for a variety of different reasons. They come from a variety of sporting backgrounds and take on various roles within clubs and other organisations. Irrespective of their role or responsibility, coaches and leaders all share the common goal of providing opportunities for young people and vulnerable persons.

Coaches, parents, carers and administrators all have an important role to play in promoting good practice in sport. They should have, as their first priority, providing safety and enjoyment of the sport.

Rowing Ireland wants sport to be safe, to be fun and to ensure that all rowing and associated activity takes place in the spirit of **'FAIR PLAY'**.

Fair play is the guiding principle of the Sports Council Code of Ethics as well as the Rowing Ireland Code of Ethics and Good Practice which is designed to provide guidance for those working with young people in rowing. It outlines the type of issues that need to be discussed and addressed to provide the safest and most enjoyable environment not only for rowers but also the coaches and other volunteers involved.

Coaches achieve satisfaction from working with young people and vulnerable persons. Focusing on the individual participants' needs and performance encourages young people to achieve and demonstrate enjoyment, equality and fair play. They will come to realise that standards of behaviour are as important as sports performance.

Coaches should be aware of the imbalance of power that exists between an athlete and a coach. In addition, the athlete can be vulnerable at certain times and in certain conditions. The athlete must be able to trust her/his coach to act in the athlete's best interests. In addition, the coach should be careful not to hurt or exploit the athlete's vulnerability. Because of the power imbalance and the vulnerability of athletes, intimate relationships between coaches and athletes are in most cases inappropriate.'



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In taking this approach children and vulnerable persons are encouraged to:

- Do their best – put in their best effort.
- Improve and develop their skills.
- Make friends.
- Play by the rules.
- Appreciate/accept everyone in the group, regardless of ability, race, religion, gender etc.

## Player Centred Approach

Coaches need to be aware of why children and vulnerable persons want to try rowing. They want to learn new skills, make new friends, be part of a group, to win and be successful, experience challenges, excitement and action.

While winning is important, it must be remembered that winning at all costs does not meet the needs of players. Results are not necessarily a good indicator of coaching effectiveness or ability, the improvement level of those in rowing and their level of enjoyment is.

Coaches should aim to provide a safe and enjoyable environment where young people and vulnerable persons are placed at the centre of all activities.

## In promoting good practice and creating a player centred approach coaches should:

- Act as good role models.
- Encourage and be positive during sessions so that participants leave with a sense of achievement.
- Set challenging, realistic but achievable goals.
- Plan and prepare each session appropriately and ensure proper levels of supervision.
- Ensure that all activities are inclusive and allow all participation in an enjoyable way.
- Put the welfare and enjoyment of children and vulnerable persons first and strike a balance between this and winning or achieving results.
- Enforce the principles of fair play treating each person equally, with dignity and respect and ensure that everyone plays within the rules.
- Be aware of the developmental stages and needs of those in rowing.
- Avoid over training and over emphasis on competition.
- Involve parents/guardians/carers and other club members in what we do.
- Be qualified and up to date with the latest coaching knowledge and skills.

# Best Practice

In keeping young people and vulnerable persons at the forefront of planning and practice, coaches can be confident that participants will enjoy their rowing experiences and that their actions are regarded as safe and in keeping with the principle that welfare of is of paramount consideration.

Coaches are given a position of trust by parents/guardians and rowers, and should show the highest standards of behaviour whilst in the company of children and vulnerable persons. It is important that coaches follow an agreed code of good practice, and parents/carers/club officials are satisfied that coaches are suitable to lead the activities undertaken. It is important to note that in adhering to these guidelines we ensure not only a safe environment for children and vulnerable persons, but also a safe environment in which coaches and volunteers can operate.

## Coaches/volunteers should never:

- Exert undue influence over a participant in order to obtain personal benefit or reward.
- Share a room with a young or vulnerable person alone on away trips.
- Engage in rough physical games, sexually provocative games or allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any kind, and/or make sexually suggestive comments about or to a child or vulnerable person.
- Engage in any sexual activity with under 18's. This will be subject to club disciplinary procedures.
- Use any form of corporal punishment or physical force on a young or vulnerable person.
- Take measurements or engage in certain types of fitness testing without the presence of another adult.
- Undertake any form of therapy (hypnosis etc.) in the coaching of young or vulnerable people.

Most coaches work in an environment where it is recognised that, in a sporting context, certain types of coaching require a 'hands on approach', i.e., it may be necessary to support a participant in order to physically demonstrate a particular technique. This should only occur when necessary and in an open and appropriate way with the knowledge, permission and full understanding of the participant concerned and his/her parent/guardian/carer.

Coaches must realise that certain situations or friendly actions could be misinterpreted, not only by the rower, but by outsiders motivated by jealousy, dislike or mistrust and could lead to allegations of sexual misconduct or impropriety. Therefore coaches should be aware of, and avoid all situations conducive to this risk.

## Where possible, coaches/volunteers should avoid:

- Spending excessive amounts of time with children or vulnerable persons away from others.
- Taking sessions alone (always employ "Two Person" supervision).
- Taking children or vulnerable persons to their homes.
- Taking children/vulnerable persons on journeys alone in their car.

# Safety

Coaches have a responsibility to ensure the safety of the participants with whom they work as far as possible within the limits of their control. Therefore, coaches should seek to create a safe and enjoyable environment for rowing and training.

## In this respect:

- Regular safety checks should be carried out in relation to premises, training facilities and equipment.
- Appropriate safety rules should be adopted and implemented.
- Parent/guardian/carer should be informed of the starting and finishing times of training sessions and events.
- A first aid kit should be available at all training sessions /events and injuries should be recorded, with a note of action taken in relation to each one. Never put injured rowers out to compete.
- Parent/Guardian/Carer should be notified of injuries/illness which their children/young persons incur while participating in any rowing activity.

## In promoting "Sport for Fun" coaches should:

- Encourage participation and fun.
- Promote the development of skills as opposed to winning at all costs.
- Emphasise and praise effort.
- Act as a good role model.
- Actively discourage participants from abusing umpires, officials, crew mates or opponents (remove from crew).
- Insist on **FAIR PLAY** (remove from crew).
- Be realistic with your expectations.
- Be aware of participants' feelings.
- Teach rowers to respect different cultures.

## Children & vulnerable persons in Rowing are entitled to:

- Be safe.
- Be treated with dignity, sensitivity and respect.
- Participate in rowing on an equal basis, appropriate to their ability and stage of development.
- Be happy, have fun and enjoy the sport.
- Make a complaint in an appropriate way and have it dealt with through a proper and effective complaints procedure.
- Be afforded appropriate confidentiality.
- Be listened to and to be believed.
- Have a voice in the running of the club.

Children & vulnerable persons should also be encouraged to realise that they also have responsibilities to treat other participants, officials, coaches and volunteers with the same degree of fairness and respect.

In this regard children/vulnerable persons should agree to:

- Play fairly, do their best and have fun.
- Make high standards of Fair Play the standard others want to follow.
- Respect opponents. They are not enemies, they are partners in a sporting event.
- Congratulate opponents after events, whoever wins.
- Give opponents a hand if they are injured, make allowances so they can get attention.
- Accept apologies from opponents, when they are offered.
- Respect fellow crew/squad members and support them both when they do well and when things go wrong.
- Treat rowers from minority groups with the same respect you show other people.
- Be modest in victory and be gracious in defeat “**BE A SPORT**”.
- Approach the club Safeguarding/Children’s Officer with any questions or concerns they might have. Coaches and parents/carers should encourage children/vulnerable persons to speak out and support them in doing so.

Children/vulnerable persons should not:

- Cheat.
- Use abusive language, or argue with, the umpire, officials, crew mates or opponents.
- Use violence: they should use physical contact only when it is allowed within the rules.
- Bully.
- Tell lies about participants.
- Spread rumours.
- Take banned substances to improve performance.
- Keep secrets about any person who may have caused them harm.

Signed: .....  
Name:.....  
On Date:.....

## Responsibility to Report

Any person, who has concerns about a child/vulnerable person’s welfare or who suspects that a child/vulnerable person is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, has a responsibility to report their concerns to the HSE/Gateway team or Gardai/Police.

Persons unsure about whether or not certain behaviours are abusive and therefore reportable, are advised that they can seek advice from the duty social worker in their local health board area where they will receive appropriate advice.

In cases of emergency where a child/vulnerable person appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the duty social worker is not contactable, call the Gardai/Police.

Under no circumstances should a child/vulnerable person be left in a dangerous situation, pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities.

All clubs should have clear procedures for responding to reports or concerns relating to the safety and welfare of children/vulnerable persons. Coaches/volunteers, children/vulnerable persons and parents/guardians/carers should be aware of how and to whom they report concerns within the club or organisation.

## Mobile Phones etc.

Mobile phones and communication devices are often given to children/vulnerable persons for security, enabling parents/carers to keep in touch and make sure they are safe.

However such technology has also allowed an increase in direct personal contact with young & vulnerable persons, in some cases used to cross personal boundaries and cause harm. Within clubs there is a need to encourage responsible and secure use of these devices.

In this respect Coaches are advised to:

- Use group texts for communication among athletes and teams and inform parents/carers of this at the start of the season
- It is not appropriate to have constant communication with individual athletes
- Don’t use the phone in certain locations; inappropriate use of your camera phone may cause upset or offence to another person, e.g. changing rooms, or may cause a safety risk e.g. on the water.

For further information or advice see:

[www.rowingireland.ie](http://www.rowingireland.ie)

**Or contact:** National Children’s Officer, c/o Rowing Ireland, National Rowing Centre, Farran Wood, Ovens, Co. Cork. Tel. +3521 743 4044  
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