

GUIDELINES ON TRANSPORTING A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IN YOUR CAR

The issue of transporting children has become very sensitive for sports leaders and parents. Many coaches argue that their club could not operate without the goodwill of volunteers and parents ensuring that children are returned home or transported to events in a private car.

The CPSU and guidance from the Sports Council for Northern Ireland encourages coaches not to take children on journeys alone in their car. This view has been taken as our knowledge has grown of how those who want to harm children has developed. The vast majority of coaches and volunteers will help out through their genuine desire to see children or their particular sport develop. Unfortunately we must face the reality that a minority of others will join a sports club to gain access to children and create an air of acceptability about their role, justifying their close contact with children.

Though those who want to abuse children may find it more difficult to do so in a group setting, such as a leisure centre or sports pitch, they could use this time to gain the trust of not only the young person but also other adults. Developing credibility is an essential part of any abusers 'grooming process'. Not only grooming the child 'make love to their minds' (quote from convicted paedophile) but also grooming other coaches or parents i.e. becoming the best volunteer.

The last stage to enable someone to offend against a child is viewed as grooming the environment i.e. creating a justifiable reason for getting the child alone. There have in the past been many opportunities within the sport setting for those who wish to abuse children to isolate a particular child. Thankfully Sports Governing Bodies are reducing this possibility in most coaching sessions, but the issue of transport can still leave children vulnerable.

Best practice is clearly to avoid transporting a child alone, but we recognise that in some circumstances it is an essential part of a child's participation in training and competition. If all alternatives have been exhausted and an adult has to transport a child there are a number of safety measures that should be put in place to minimise the risk:

- The driver like all coaches / volunteers who have access to children in your organisation should have agreed to an Access NI check being carried out on them.
- Parents should be informed of the person who will be transporting their child, the reasons why and how long the journey will take.
- A person other than the planned driver should talk to the child about transport arrangements to check they are comfortable about the plans

- The driver must ensure that they have insurance to carry others, particularly if they are in a paid position or claiming expenses.
- The driver should attempt to have more than one child in the car.
- When leaving children off after a match or training session coaches / volunteers should alternate which child is dropped off last. Ideally two children would be left off at an agreed point i.e. one of their family homes.
- The person who leaves children home should be alternated; this would reduce the risk of any one individual from always being alone with the child.
- The driver should have a point of contact and mobile phone should they break down.
- Ensure that children are aware of their rights and they have someone to turn to or report any concerns they may have. If a culture of safety is created within your club then the child is more likely to talk to another person if they are feeling uncomfortable about a situation.
- Late collections. These can present clubs and coaches with particular difficulties. Parents/guardians should be provided with guidelines addressing the issue and outlining their responsibility and the consequences of late collections. Clubs should have contact numbers for parents/guardians and if possible be provided with an alternative contact number. Parents/guardians should have a contact number for the club/coach to inform them of emergencies and possible late collections.
- Children should wear seatbelts at all times. The following is guidance on the new seat-belt law introduced in September 2006. for more information please visit www.roadsafetyni.gov.uk

Children **must** use an appropriate child restraint or seatbelt when travelling in a car or goods vehicle.

- Depending on their weight under 3s must use a baby seat or a child seat
- Those under 12 and 135cm tall must use the right type of booster chair or booster cushion
- Older children should use an adult seatbelt

Drivers are responsible for making sure that children under 14 are safely strapped in at all times.

Parents and guardians of children up to 135 cms (or about 12 years old) will have to make sure their children are always safely strapped into the right type of seat or booster.

In taxis if there is no child restraint available, children can travel in the back seat of taxis. Those over 3 must use the adult seatbelt, but under 3s should not as adult seatbelts are not suitable for very small children.

Passengers on minibuses will be required to wear seat belts where fitted and the driver will be responsible for making sure that children under 14 use their seatbelts. If seatbelts are fitted on a bus, passengers must use them. The operator will be responsible for letting people know that they must use seat belts.



If there is an 'unexpected necessity' a child of 3 or more can wear an adult belt on a short journey in a car or light goods vehicle when no appropriate child seat is available. This is not intended to cover regular school runs or other journeys that are planned in advance. Children under 3 years must always have a child seat. The only exception is when they travel in the rear of taxis and a child seat is not available.

These are European rules on seatbelts, so they apply in the Republic of Ireland and all countries in the European Union.

