

# SAFE USE OF CHANGING FACILITIES POLICY



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Mountaineering Ireland Version Control			
Version	Author	Date	Amendments
1.0	Catherine Hibbitt	August 2023	Reviewed
Approved by Board: 04/09/23			



**NBG:** Mountaineering Ireland

**Club Name:**

## Introduction

The Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) produced this guidance in response to enquiries from individuals and organisations seeking advice about the safe use of changing facilities and/or toilets. These include queries about:

- ✚ adults who feel uncomfortable about sharing changing rooms with young children.
- ✚ activity organisers unclear about the level of supervision they should provide.
- ✚ unaccompanied children using facilities.
- ✚ use of gendered changing rooms by transgender, gender-questioning or non-binary children
- ✚ toilets or changing rooms at a venue being used by young people for an event, but which can still be accessed by members of the public (such as at a leisure centre, public park, or open space).

There are no specific legal requirements regarding the use of changing facilities, however, Mountaineering Ireland is cognisant of the safeguarding responsibilities and duty of care regarding the use of changing facilities. Many sporting facilities may already have guidance and policies in place, which should be followed in the first instance. This policy, adapted from the CPSU guidance, may be useful in the absence of any other guidance, and to address issues or circumstances not covered in such a policy.







## Type of facility

A major consideration in establishing a safe use policy for changing facilities is whether the facilities will be used exclusively by junior teams or athletes. Typically, this would be the case where a club owns, hires, or manages its own facility, or has negotiated sole use of a more public facility at a particular time. The advantage of this type of arrangement is that it reduces

the safeguarding risk of children mixing with adults when changing or showering. However, many changing facilities are also used by other adults (sports teams, individual athletes, or members of the public). All facilities should have a safeguarding policy and procedures for reporting any concerns, and staff and volunteers should familiarise themselves with these. In the case of a public park, for example, the activity organiser should find out who manages the facility and what their relevant policies are.

### **Supervision in the changing facility**

If mixed use of the changing facility by adults and children is unavoidable, at least 2 members of staff (of the same gender as the children) should supervise the group. It is important that staff and volunteers seek to balance the need for adult supervision with the rights of children to privacy in this context. Supervision in the changing facility may also be necessary when:

-  children are too young to be left alone or change themselves.
-  any child below the age of 8 years must be accompanied (even if children younger are capable of changing themselves).
-  the group includes disabled children who require additional support and assistance with changing (note that this should be undertaken by prior agreement with their parent or professional carer)
-  children could injure themselves or access a potential risk such as a climbing wall that is unattended.
-  there are concerns about bullying, fighting or other harmful behaviours taking place that need to be managed.
-  there are concerns about the prospect of photographs being taken in changing rooms.

### **Who should supervise?**

If you have decided that children need supervision, staff and volunteers should consider who will carry this out. This task provides access to children in circumstances of increased vulnerability and therefore careful consideration should be given to ensuring that those undertaking this task have been assessed as being suitable to do so. Consider the following:

- ✚ numbers – organisers are recommended to have more than one adult supervising, as this will ensure cover in the event of an accident or incident occurring or if one supervisor is called away.
- ✚ gender – it's considered good practice to ensure that children are supervised by staff or volunteers of the same gender while changing timings – by agreeing a very clear timetable for use of the changing facilities by children, the risks associated to any extended contact between the adults and children are minimised carry out safe recruitment practices, including:
  - ✓ criminal records check for individuals whose roles make them eligible.
  - ✓ self-declaration – completion of an appropriate self-declaration form as part of safe recruitment.
  - ✓ references – these should include a reference from a recent previous employer where they have worked with children.
  - ✓ role description – provide clear details about the boundaries of their role.
  - ✓ code of conduct – a document that individuals sign up to that clarifies the standards of behaviour expected of staff and volunteers.

### **Parents as supervisors**

Parents are often involved in supervising children during sports activities and outings and can provide valuable support to organisers and coaches. Where they are responsible only for their own child (or, by agreement, their relatives, or friends' children), this constitutes a private arrangement outside the responsibility of the activity organisers. However, when parents undertake a formal supervisory role at the request of or with the agreement of the organiser, which includes having responsibility for other people's children, the same steps should be taken for staff and volunteers to make sure they are suitable for their role.

### **Unsupervised children in sport or leisure facilities**

There are potential risks associated with inadequate adult supervision levels of young children in changing and shower areas.

### Parents' (or guardians) responsibilities

Parents and guardians have a responsibility to ensure that their children are appropriately supervised while they are attending a sport or leisure facility. It is parents' responsibility to judge whether it is safe and appropriate to allow their unaccompanied child to visit a sport or leisure facility. This judgement should be based on:

- ✚ their child's general developmental maturity.
- ✚ their child's awareness of the potential risks.
- ✚ the level of supervision and care provided within the facility.

Parents may wrongly assume that staff will take responsibility for their children within a sport or leisure facility, or within specific areas such as changing rooms. Parents should therefore be informed about the facility's expectations about supervision of their children, including the use of changing rooms and shower areas. Parents should clarify these points before they let their children go to a facility alone.

### Facility operators' responsibilities

When children are given access to facilities, operators assume a duty of care for them. The level of responsibility will vary, depending on if the child is:

- ✚ alone and unsupervised.
- ✚ with parents.
- ✚ attending an activity.
- ✚ attending an activity staffed by the facility.
- ✚ attending a school group, club or other activity managed by a third party.
- ✚ attending a public session.

Operators have a responsibility to put in place appropriate safeguarding arrangements, which include promoting and implementing a policy for admitting unaccompanied children. This information should be provided to parents and other users, informing them about the policy regarding unaccompanied children and any rules about the supervision of young children within the facility.

In practice, while facilities need to be able to establish a minimum age for admission that is practical to operate, identifying a child's age can be difficult.

While the facility may set the lower age limit, it is for parents to judge if their child needs to be accompanied.

Facilities should have a process for responding to children below a minimum age of 8 who may arrive, or be left, at the facility alone. Refusing entry or asking an unaccompanied child to leave the centre would raise obvious safeguarding concerns.

### Third-party hirers

Organisations hiring facilities should ensure they are aware of:

- ✚ key safeguarding contacts at the facility, should an issue arise.
- ✚ changing room layouts (for example, single gender, cubicles, or village style).
- ✚ whether members of the public have access to the changing facilities and toilets at the same time as the children.
- ✚ other activities taking place that could impact on the use of changing facilities and toilets.
- ✚ the particular changing needs of any of the children and young people under their supervision; this may include gender, medical conditions, or disabilities, which could mean special equipment (such as hoists or changing mats) being required.

If members of the public will also be using the toilets and changing facilities, make sure that there is staff presence at these points:

- ✚ to monitor and ensure that contact between young people and members of the public is appropriate.
- ✚ to motivate and encourage young people to return to their groups in a timely manner to help young people if they are lost.

Processes must be in place for missing children or found children who do not belong to the activity or event but who have been found or passed on to facility managers or event organisers. Please refer to [Mountaineering Irelands Missing /Found Child Policy](#) for guidance.

### Mixed-gender teams

Many sports operate mixed-gender teams at several age group levels, and arrangements to enable the groups to change separately should always be made. Solutions may include:

- ✚ each gender using a different room or facility.
- ✚ each gender having a distinct time slot.
- ✚ everybody changing at home before they leave.
- ✚ each gender having an allocated area of a larger shared facility.

### Transgender and non-binary children

Using gendered changing facilities can be a source of stress for transgender and non-binary children. Sport and activity providers should consider how to support these young people to use the changing rooms that they feel comfortable with. Your policies should reflect that decisions need to be made on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration all children's safety. For more information and advice on this topic see the Child Protection in Sport Unit topic page <https://thecpsu.org.uk/help-advice/topics/safeguarding-lgbtqplus-young-people/>

### Information for parents/guardians regarding changing facilities

- ✚ Ensure that parents/guardians are made aware that changing facilities at venues may be shared by both club members and members of the general public.
- ✚ Ensure parents/guardians are made aware of the type of changing room in use, i.e., separate for male and female or mixed changing villages (and what segregation measures are in place).
- ✚ Ensure that the behaviour of members in changing rooms is part of the member's Code of Conduct and any behaviour contracts, where appropriate. Adult members should be encouraged to use their own area wherever possible, when changing at the same time as children. Where this is not possible adults are to be reminded to change in an appropriate fashion, and to be mindful that they are changing with children.
- ✚ Ensure parents/guardians are aware that they should not be alone in the changing room whilst children are changing unless their child is of an age where help is required

from parents/guardians or if the child requires additional specific assistance. This is generally at an age that is stipulated by an organiser, usually eight years of age. In such circumstances, the parent/guardian must be the same gender as the child, unless the facility has family changing facilities or is a mixed changing village.

- ✚ When organising an event where other clubs are involved, ensure that parents/guardians and competitors are advised (via the event information) whether or not the facilities are likely to be open to the general public at any time during the event.

Mountaineering Ireland does not advise that adults supervise changing facilities as that places them and the children at risk of harm and allegation. Clubs may however place a safeguarding officer on the outside of the doors in and out of the changing rooms to allow children to call for assistance if required. This approach has proved helpful to many clubs when children have reported incidents of bullying or general behaviour issues between members in the changing rooms.

### **Responsibility after a session is completed.**

The view of Mountaineering Ireland is that each affiliated club has a reasonable duty of care to their members, which extends to an awareness on the part of the club that their junior members have been collected, in so far as is possible, at the conclusion of a session, i.e., that a member is not left unsupervised if a parent/guardian is late. This has to be age appropriate, i.e., a 17-year-old is capable of getting themselves home, but a 12-year-old is not.

However, if a club uses changing rooms that are also accessible to non-club members, it would be extreme to expect a club to search the changing areas in case a junior club member was there. Best practice would be for a club to make all junior members and their parents/guardians aware that if children are not collected by a parent/guardian, then they should make that known to the Club Children's Officer, coach or whoever the club deems to be appropriate, and for the nominated individual to ensure that the member is supervised appropriately until a parent/guardian arrives or they communicate alternative arrangements.



