

WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH 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			



NGB: Mountaineering Ireland

Club Name:

Section 1: Mental Health and Wellbeing Statement

Mountaineering Ireland recognises the value and impact sport can have for children, young people, and adults. Sports can have a significant positive impact on wellbeing and mental health. Sport enhances mood and self-esteem, reduces anxiety, and promotes resilience, confidence, and empowerment. Physical activity releases endorphins, the body's natural "happy chemicals," and reduces levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Sport is a tool that can condition both mind and body. Sport can teach you how to manage stress and anxiety and help you in cope with emotions. Life is full of victories and defeats, and sports can help in dealing with life in all situations.

Mountaineering Ireland respects the rights and dignity of all our young athletes and acknowledge that everyone who is involved in our organisation has mental health and wellbeing needs. Mental health is our ability to cope with what happens in life, physically, emotionally, and socially. This policy document aims to provide an understanding of how to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for children and young people in our sport.

As part of our commitment to ensuring we take mental health and wellbeing into consideration in all aspects of our sport, Mountaineering Ireland and (*insert club name*) is working towards making sure that:

- ✓ We support our staff to have some level of mental health and wellbeing awareness training.
- ✓ We demonstrate how or staff can be welcoming towards people experiencing a problem with their mental health and wellbeing.

- ✓ We respect that everyone needs to take care of their mental health and wellbeing and that some of us may need more support than others.
- ✓ There are key members of staff in Mountaineering Ireland and our club who are happy to discuss how our sport can be adapted to suit your mental health and wellbeing needs or how we can be more inclusive.
- ✓ We aim to repeatedly ask all our young members if they are happy with the level of support, they receive from us and whether it can be improved in any way.
- ✓ Mountaineering Ireland and our club recognise how the pressure of competitive sport can affect young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- ✓ We aim to ensure all staff know the details of the mental health and wellbeing support services available to both staff and young people.
- ✓ All staff know how to raise concerns to protect young people who are experiencing a mental health crisis or identifying as at risk of self-harm or suicide as part of our safeguarding reporting procedures.
- ✓ Support and information on mental health and wellbeing continues to be shared as young people progress on the talent pathway and the potential pressures of funding, sponsorship and achievement come into play.

Section 2: Club Guidance

A club environment can impact on the wellbeing of young people. The club creates that environment. Listening to the views of children and young people is the foundation of safeguarding. Clubs must ensure to the best of their ability that:

- ✚ The environment is a welcoming space for young people. It must be a safe and secure space where children and young people will be respected, treated fairly and equally, and feel a sense of belonging.
- ✚ Children and young people must be consulted in all matters that affect them. They must be listened to, and their voice must impact on the activities of the club.
- ✚ The achievements and progress of children and young people is measured by a range of activities, and not solely on competitive success. All achievements are celebrated.

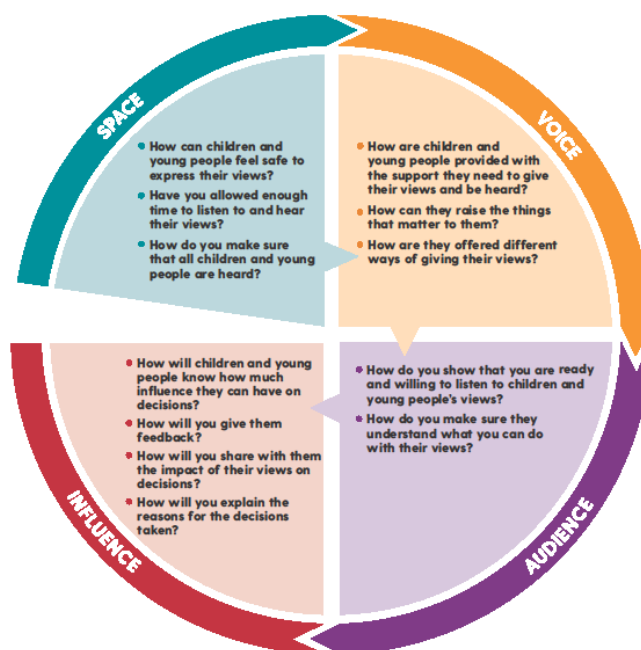
- ✚ There must be a positive attitude and atmosphere towards the implementation of the codes of conduct. Any breaches of the codes of conduct must be dealt with fairly, consistently, and clearly.
- ✚ Clubs should engage with [Sport Ireland's Young Voices Toolkit](#) to support their endeavours to include the views of young children. Training on the toolkit is available through the Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer at safeguarding@mountaineering.ie. The Lundy Model, which underpins the Toolkit, includes an everyday spaces checklist for clubs available below.
- ✚ The UK Coaching initiative, [Play Their Way](#) has many useful resources such as a [Self-Reflection on Listening to Children's Voices](#).
- ✚ [Mind](#) an organisation who provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing mental health problems have created a [Mental Health and Physical Activity Toolkit](#) that clubs can also engage with.

Everyday Spaces Checklist

This checklist is designed as a guide to help you ensure that children and young people have a voice in decision-making. It can be applied in many everyday situations including in classrooms, hospitals, childcare settings, child and youth services, youth and sports clubs, youth projects, arts and creative initiatives and other spaces.

Please do not use this checklist for developing policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation – use the Planning Checklist on page 18.

Please make sure that the ways you involve children and young people in decision-making are age-appropriate and accessible for all, whether in person or online.



The Role of Persons within a Club

All persons working and volunteering with children and young people are influential in the creation of an environment that recognises the wellbeing of its members and promotes positive mental health messages. Adults with roles such as being a member of a committee, a coach, a sports leader, team manager, and a Club Children's Officer should ensure that:

- ✚ Children and young people can easily identify the CCO (Club Children's Officer) or other adults who they can trust and who they know will listen to them. An example of this would be to have posters dotted around the club with an image of the CCO/other responsible adult and contact details with a brief explanation of their roles.
- ✚ Adults must have an understanding of the importance, benefits, and relevance of listening to the views of children and young people without judgment. This must form part of the adult's values and beliefs, an authentic and meaningful understanding of the rights of children.
- ✚ Adults must be open to engaging in continuous professional development, to learn about and promote the wellbeing and mental health of all club members.
- ✚ Adults must support inclusion, equality, and diversity, along with motivation and the empowerment of the child and young persons in the achievement of their goals, at whatever level they may be. Goals must be realistic and achievable, whilst challenging.
- ✚ The involvement of children and young people in any decision-making process should be meaningful as opposed to tokenistic. We must remember that this is their space, and we are the facilitators of that space.
- ✚ Age-appropriate information is provided based on the children and young person's age and stages of development. For example, information regarding Coco's Law ([Infographic for Coco's Law](#)) may be provided to Teenagers when discussing/highlighting consent and safe use of images during Anti-Bullying Week.
- ✚ There are real opportunities given to children and young people to express their views. This can be achieved through a Club Childrens Committee who meet for 45 minutes before the main Club Committee meeting. 2 items from the children's agenda should then be discussed at the main Clubs Committee meeting. Junior safeguarding officers may be appointed.

- ✚ Adults must provide real and tangible feedback to children, for example, “You said.... We did....”

Section 3: Coaches and Elite Sports

Elite athletes, coaches and staff are exposed to stressors that may increase their susceptibility to experiencing wellbeing and mental health difficulties. Research shows such athletes are less likely to seek help due to stigma, and perceptions of limited psychological safety in sport such as selection concerns and fears of help-seeking signifying weakness. Stigma is one of the leading deterrents of help-seeking in elite sport. Coaches may experience stressors such as the pressure to succeed, frequent travel and isolation. Taking steps forward to create mentally healthy high-performance environments will have a positive impact on wellbeing and mental health which in turn may positively contribute to athletic performance. Coaches have the potential to help shape team cultures that normalise, destigmatise and are supportive of mental health and help-seeking. Coaches can successfully enhance their team’s culture through clear communication relating to their teams’ values.

Actionable Recommendations

- ✚ Supportive environments should be underpinned by a culture of “psychological safety” which reflects a climate of trust, mutual respect, acceptance, and civility and positive coaching styles.
- ✚ Coaches should explicitly communicate with their athletes that their mental health is valued, promote help-seeking, and proactively model this approach by eliminating language or practices that stigmatise mental illness and mental help-seeking such as “toughening up,” including derogatory labelling.
- ✚ Provide sports-specific mental health training that is tailored to the sport to improve help-seeking behaviour, knowledge, recognition of supports available, and to remove the fear of stigma.
- ✚ Any personalised athlete plans should address both the physical health and mental wellbeing needs of each individual athlete.

- ✚ Coaches should aim to prepare athletes for key transitions, such as following a major injury, by promoting the development of a non-athletic identity among athletes throughout all stages of their career. The ability to manage stressful situations is a key indicator of thriving in elite sport.
- ✚ Coaches can aid the development of the athlete's self-management and coping skills to prepare them for sporting and non-sporting challenges.
- ✚ Diversity should be visible to support minority groups within an open and inclusive environment that supports individual's needs.
- ✚ Procedures should be developed for the provision of feedback (performance and wellbeing) to and from coaches, athletes, and staff. Feedback should be factual, non-judgemental, concrete, formative, changeable and conveys high yet realistic expectations.
- ✚ There should be a person-centred approach over a one size fits all approach.

Source: Purcell R, Pilkington V, Carberry S, Reid D, Gwyther K, Hall K, Deacon A, Manon R, Walton CC, and Rice S (2022) An Evidence-Informed Framework to Promote Mental Wellbeing in Elite Sport. *Front. Psychol.* 13:780359. Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.780359

Support Services

Jigsaw - a network of centres across Ireland to make sure young people have somewhere to turn to and someone to talk to. <https://jigsaw.ie/get-support/>

Childline Ireland - <https://www.childline.ie/> Freephone 1800 666666

Reachout – online youth mental health service. <https://www.youth.ie/project-item/reachout/>

Mental Health Ireland - <https://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/your-mental-health/?external=1>

Childline UK - <https://www.childline.org.uk/> 0800 1111

Mind – Sport, activity and mental health information and advice. <https://www.mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help/using-this-tool/>

NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) UK helpline – if you have concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing, contact the NSPCC helpline <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/>