

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE FEDERATION
OF
YOUNG FARMERS' CLUBS**



**POLICY
FOR THE
PROTECTION
OF
CHILDREN
AND
YOUNG PEOPLE**

Issued June 2006

1. INTRODUCTION

As an Organisation with a responsibility for young members under the age of 16, we need to be aware of how to protect those young people in our care and to recognise the importance of good practice, particularly with the development of junior YFCs and junior sections of Open Clubs. We already have many members under the age of 16 and it is essential that we take relevant precautions in order to protect these young people as well as leaders.

By the very nature of YFC, the vast majority of our volunteer leaders are 'home reared' and invited by the members to undertake a role. However, we must be aware that occasionally individuals might come forward who have ulterior motives for wanting to work with young people and we cannot afford to put young people, or the good reputation of our Federation at risk. Therefore, in order to minimise the risk of potential abusers gaining access to young people, it is essential that the following procedures be applied:

2. AT COUNTY LEVEL

FOR ALL VOLUNTARY or PAID WORKERS

(Voluntary Workers for GFYFC will be defined as Voluntary Field Officers).

- All volunteer workers will be subject to the same criteria as club and group leaders.
- All workers with unsupervised access to children and vulnerable young people should be subject to an enhanced level CRB check.

3. AT CLUB AND GROUP LEVEL

FOR NEW CLUB AND GROUP LEADERS

- All new Leaders who have not been continuously involved from membership age for 5 years with the club or group will be asked to undergo a full Criminal Records Bureau check. The same leaders will be asked to provide two referees of which one should be a current club member. Copies of the Policy and forms will be sent to new Leaders to complete following their election and the relevant checks made by the Federation Organiser.
- All new leaders will be expected to attend training events provided at either a group or county level as soon as possible after they are appointed. It is also expected that all leaders will attend relevant training opportunities to update their knowledge and skill. This will be provided by YFC and other agencies and leaders will be required to attend a training event at least once every 3 years.
- All leaders must be annually elected by the current members of the club or group; if they are new to the role of leader but not the club or group they will be asked to provide two referees one being from a current club member. If there are any concerns about a leader's actions or behaviour, members have the right not to re-elect them or to seek help from other leaders or the Federation Organiser.
- GLOUCESTERSHIRE Federation of Young Farmers clubs reserves the right to check or recheck any person that has or is raising concerns

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CLUB OFFICER/LEADER

The duties of a Club Officer/Leader with under 16s recognises that parents have placed those young people in the care of a Young Farmers Club and that this responsibility carries the expectation that the Club Officers/Leader will always act in the best interests of those young people.

In terms of YFC activities, Club Officers/Leaders are expected to exercise such reasonable care as would be taken by a reasonable parent. Obvious dangers such as broken windows, damaged equipment etc. should be dealt with and reported promptly. Activities should be planned and equipment checked so as to minimize any risks whilst retaining the sense of adventure and achievement that the activity sets out to provide. Equipped with good judgement and common sense, Club Officers/Leaders should be able to recognise the degree of reasonable care needed to keep your group's enthusiasm high and its accident record clean.

It is important for Club Officers/Leaders to know who to turn to for help and advice in running their Club.

Remember...SILLY QUESTIONS ARE BETTER THAN SILLY MISTAKES!!

5. ROLE OF CLUB OFFICER/LEADER

The abuse of children is most easily concealed, and therefore perpetuated, where there is confusion amongst adults over roles, responsibilities and accountability. Therefore risks are minimised if all Club Officers/Leaders have clear roles, outlining their tasks and responsibilities, thus allowing each adult to continually check on the actions of others. Openness and honesty in all dealings with young people are always to be encouraged.

Training

It is important that all Club Officers/Leaders as a minimum receive yearly training sessions to enable them to discuss any events which have taken place and keep them up to date with current legislation.

6. ADVICE ON PROTECTING CLUB LEADERS

Club Leaders are at risk of accusations of unacceptable behaviour towards young people. The following 10 points of advice and guidance are aimed at minimising these risks and should be given to Club Leaders:

1. *Do not rely on your good name to protect you.*
2. *Do not for one moment believe "It could never happen to me".*

3. *Whilst respecting the need for privacy and confidentiality, try never to be totally alone with a young person. When one to one situations are unavoidable, ensure that other adults are close by and aware of your presence.*
4. *Never engage in inappropriate physical or verbal contact with young people.*
5. *If you suspect that a young person is developing a 'crush' on you, discuss it with other leaders and explore constructive ways of dealing with it in a proper manner.*
6. *Similarly, if you notice one of your colleagues is risking accusations, draw his or her attention and suggest that they adhere to the guidelines.*
7. *Mixed gender groups (especially residential ones) should always have mixed gender leadership.*
8. *If you are feeling emotionally disturbed, or you feel an abnormal affection for a young person, withdraw from the situation and discuss the matter with a trusted friend.*
9. *Never take chances with young peoples' safety.*
10. *Be aware that young people can and do fabricate stories that may place you in a bad light. Do not allow circumstances to develop where a young person's story can be given additional credence.*

REMEMBER - the checks we carry out on YFC personnel working with young people are there to help protect your good name!

7. CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is a complex area for most adults. It requires both acceptance and understanding and, where there is any doubt about procedures, willingness to take professional advice before acting. It is possible that individuals may be placed in the position of having to report child abuse. You may become suspicious of an injury on a child, a child may confide in you, or you may just realise that a child whom you have come to know quite well suddenly starts to act out of character. All of these may be the signs of child abuse and it is your legal responsibility to do something about it.

Recognising signs of abuse or receiving a disclosure of abuse is always stressful and upsetting and in many cases it is much easier to convince yourself that there is really no problem and do nothing about it – this can be very dangerous! What do you do if you suspect child abuse? What can you do if you are accused of child abuse or inappropriate behaviour?

This document is designed to help anyone working with under 16's to:

- Recognise the signs of child abuse, whether physical, emotional or sexual.
- Develop techniques of how to deal with it.
- Understand their legal responsibility.
- Minimise situations that may lead to accusations of child abuse.

- To convince people that the consequences of doing nothing may be very serious, or even fatal.
- To provide guidance and protection for both the young person and you in carrying out your responsibilities.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

- Physical: Where young people are made to suffer physical hurt or injury.
- Sexual: Where adults seek sexual gratification from children or young people.
- Emotional: Where young people are harmed by a chronic lack of love and affection or are receipt of threats, taunts etc.
- Neglect: The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs.

8. HOW TO RECOGNISE CHILD ABUSE

Noticeable injuries or changes in behaviour patterns may be the result of a number of things, abuse being only one. The following information is intended to make you stop and think, but not necessarily jump to conclusions.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

It can be very difficult to establish whether an injury has been caused by accident or abuse. Ask the child about the injury and if you are at all unhappy with the explanation given, then report your suspicions in the first instance to the YFC Federation Organiser. He/she will then agree with you if the matter should be reported to the Local Authority Child Protection Unit, and who is to take responsibility for such action. (The Local Authority Child Protection Unit is usually located in your Social Services Department and their telephone number should be listed in the telephone directory).

SEXUAL ABUSE

This is much more difficult to identify than physical abuse as there may not be any outwardly visible signs. Indications of sexual abuse may be:

- Emotional or behavioural changes, e.g. a normally quiet child may become loud and aggressive or a boisterous child may suddenly become quiet and passive.
- Sexually explicit talk and behaviour, inappropriate to the child's age.
- Uncharacteristic eating disorders.
- Depression and suicide attempts.

However it is much more likely to be discovered by means of disclosure, either accidental, deliberate, or through a third party. As with alleged physical abuse, where the parent is not implicated, the parent should be consulted and involved in the next steps.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Probably the most difficult type of abuse to recognise, where some indications may include:

- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence (always thinking their contribution is “rubbish” and needing constant reassurance).
- The child having extreme difficulty forming friendships, thus becoming a “loner”.
- The child frequently being used as a “scapegoat” by other children.
- The child being withdrawn, introverted and depressed.

With all of the above examples, one must make judgements about the maturity of the child or young person and consider his/her wishes at all times.

SUSPICION OF CHILD ABUSE

As a voluntary worker, you may gain the trust of children and young people to such an extent that it is you they choose to talk to if they have something they wish to disclose. Many volunteers and paid staff may not know how to deal with this disclosure but it is important to remember that it is your duty to prevent abuse and to report any abuse discovered or suspected to statutory child protection agencies.

IF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON WANTS TO TALK TO YOU IN CONFIDENCE:

- Accept what they say, keeping calm and giving them your undivided attention.
- Let them know that depending upon what the problem is, you may need to tell someone else, so do not promise confidentiality.
- Reassure them that you will not be shocked or judgemental.
- Reassure them that even though they may feel that they have broken a rule, you will not hold them to blame.
- Recognise the child/young person’s fears and feelings – be aware that they may have been threatened and may not be telling you all they know.
- Reassure them that they were right to tell you.
- Discuss the options with the child or young person and agree future action, recognising your legal responsibilities and the perceived maturity of the child.
- Make notes as soon as possible, writing down exactly what was said when he/she said it. Record dates and times of these events and keep a handwritten record.

- Never physically examine a child/young person except in an emergency such as an accident or to prevent worsening of a condition.
- In this case always have another person present (a good rule of thumb would be that an examination starts when a child's clothing is removed and the child's body is felt for signs of injury. A peep down a child's collar to spot signs of injury to neck or back could be described as observation, rather than examination). If in doubt leave well alone for the experts and remember the parent's right to be informed if the parent is not the perpetrator.
- Never push for information. It is inadvisable to question the child/young person too closely. This should be left to a practitioner skilled in asking such questions and aware of the sensitivities required in such evidence gathering.
- Always seek professional help with speed and in the best interests of the child. Where a parent is not implicated or the subject of an allegation, it is best to involve the parent as early as possible in the care of the young person. If you return the child to a parent's care and fear the allegations made by the child may go unreported, then do advise the County YFC office in the first place. The County YFC office should work with you in seeking professional advice from Social Services at the earliest opportunity.
- In any location where youth activities are carried out, it is always valuable to display the 'Child Line' number so that a worried child or young person, who may not have the confidence to consult an adult, has a telephone option.

PROCEDURE GUIDELINES IF ABUSE IS DISCLOSED OR SUSPECTED

- DO NOT DELAY
- ADVISE YOUR COUNTY YFC OFFICE OF YOUR CONCERNS AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY – THEY WILL BE ABLE TO ASSIST YOU IN THESE DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES
- CONTACT THE STATUTORY SERVICES RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILD PROTECTION IN YOUR AREA, i.e. Social Services, NSPCC or the Police Child Protection Unit. This task may be undertaken by the County YFC Office on behalf of the "abused" – it is important to clarify who is taking responsibility for informing the statutory authorities.
- KEEP A WRITTEN RECORD OF ANY ACTION TAKEN.

Be aware that there are procedures for investigating when a child is at risk. Social Services may set up a Case Conference. If you are invited to attend to give information, or support the parent/family, you need to clarify in what capacity you have been invited, i.e. as a member of the conference or as support. You may wish to seek legal advice if your role in the procedure has been questioned or criticised.