



# CHILD PROTECTION

By Kirstie Jennings

**In recent years, child protection has been one of the most discussed issues in sport, and golf has not been different. But why has this issue become the 'hot topic' and why do golf clubs and those within them need to do anything different? After all, we have been successfully looking after children within our clubs for years.**

There are several aspects to that answer, but the first part is simply that sport is a place where children can be found, and where there are children, there are risks to their welfare. According to the NSPCC, more than eight million children participate in sport each week, which shows the importance of sport in children's lives. Sport, and membership of a club, can play an important role in the lives of children, helping them to develop social and life skills, as well as keeping them active. It should be a positive experience for all children, but for some there is the possibility that they can be at risk of abuse, or suffer the consequences of poor practice simply from a lack of planning or awareness on the part of adults.

Evidence shows that some adults use sport to gain access to children for their own inappropriate purposes; children have been physically or emotionally punished for poor performances on the course by parents with a strong desire for their child to achieve; and the behaviour of children even adults at the club has tipped over into unacceptable bullying.

So why do we need to do anything different? The answer is that we have a legal responsibility to safeguard the welfare of children that take part in our sport, as well as a moral obligation. The government has clearly set out the areas it thinks that those "that offer services for, or work with, children must have" addressed in order to meet their legal responsibility. Golf clubs must consider the way they cater for children and build in good practice and procedures to make sure that the risks to children are minimised as far as is reasonably possible. Each and every member of staff and volunteer within the golf club has a part to play in making this happen.

Sport England are keen to support the government in their aims and has asked that all sports work towards and achieve the Standards for Safeguarding Children in Sport. Golf has achieved the first two levels, and is awaiting the outcome of its submission against the Intermediate Level of the Standards.

Golf has had a number of child protection cases that have been managed

by the governing bodies and in some cases the police or social services, some of these cases have involved greenkeepers. The number of cases is not alarming, and not out of proportion with other sports, or the number of young people and adults within golf, but nevertheless, they have happened and require that we address the issues involved in the cases and improve our procedures as a result.

Golf has to tackle these issues as a sport- it is not just a case of dealing with our own issues within our own club, but rather requires us working together to make sure that all children, no matter where they are, have a positive experience, and that our problem is not passed on to another club, elsewhere. The national governing bodies in golf recognised the benefits of working together for both themselves and the children in our sport some years ago, when they formed the Children in Golf Strategy Group (CiG), initially to develop a child protection policy. The group consists of major national governing bodies of golf across Great Britain and Ireland, and is supported by the R&A and the Child Protection in Sport Unit of the NSPCC, which is at the forefront of safeguarding within sport.

A child protection policy was written and distributed to golf clubs, but it soon became apparent that this alone was not going to change practice within golf clubs. Junior Organisers and Secretary Managers were asking for guidance on the practical implementation of the policy. The real issue was what a golf volunteer, coach or member of the golf club staff did at the Saturday afternoon coaching session, or during the summer holidays when the club was full of young people playing golf all day, and not writing a policy that clubs agreed to, but put on a shelf and forgot about. The CiG Resource Pack was produced, which provides advice and information that coaches, clubs and volunteers can follow and adapt to suit their own needs. We are close now to the release of the revised version "Guidelines for Safeguarding Children in Golf" early in 2008.

Club should now request Criminal Records Bureau disclosures for those working with children, whether they are volunteers or members of staff. Staff and volunteers should attend child protection workshops to help them better understand the issues involved, and procedures should be drafted by the club to help them address children's needs.

But safeguarding is not just about protecting the children within golf, but also about equipping the adults working with them to better prepare

themselves for the challenge and therefore to better protect themselves against misunderstanding and false allegations. If we don't help the volunteers and staff working with children, then they will be less likely to feel able to come forward and volunteer, and that can't be of benefit to the children or the future of our sport.

It is easy to see how important the issue of safeguarding is to PGA professional coaches, junior organisers, or Secretary Managers, and how they must introduce procedures and exercise good practice, but where do greenkeepers fit in? What relevance does this have for them?

The answer depends on the greenkeeper's role within the club to some extent. In some cases, greenkeepers will have minimal contact with children, but in others it will be more significant, but in all cases, an understanding of the issues involved in safeguarding will be beneficial.

It is important that greenkeepers understand the policies and procedures of the golf club where they are working, so that they know the context that the club is operating within. The club may have a code of practice relevant to working with children, that all within the club should have read and understood - it will provide guidance on the type of behaviour that is considered appropriate when around children. Greenkeepers will come across young people during the course of their work, and should follow the code of practice. This is important when junior members spend time working alongside greenkeepers, for example, on work experience, or where they are "helping out" during the holidays.



It is possible that some clubs will require that greenkeepers obtain a Criminal records Bureau disclosure as part of their work, due to the nature of their contact with children. The club is only doing what it is required to legally in order to ensure that those working with children are suitable to do so, and should be supported in these efforts. Working within a golf club provides all staff with access to children, and it is essential that we all recognise the responsibilities and obligations that this brings with it. Golf is a great sport, where children can learn so much about life, mix with different age groups, and develop skills that will benefit them throughout their life, quite apart from experience the joy of taking part. Lets make sure that we all contribute in a positive way.

The CiG Resource Pack can be found at [www.childreningolf.org](http://www.childreningolf.org). If you have any queries about the issue of safeguarding, or have any concerns, please contact the NSPCC Golf Development Officer on 07974 916699, or the England Golf Compliance Officer on 07949 111924.

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