

## **Safeguarding Young and Novice Members**

**Draft**

The IMC has adopted the British Mountaineering Council's child protection policy. This can be read in full at [www.thebmc.co.uk](http://www.thebmc.co.uk). These notes are intended as a few "Do's and Don'ts" to highlight some of the main issues.

The notes relate to protecting young members from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, and keeping them safe when participating in club activities. They also relate to protecting adult members from the possibility of false allegations.

Although young members are the primary focus of the BMC policy, the policy also refers to "vulnerable adults". In our rather special circumstances, this could refer to adult beginners or less experienced members who are relying on us for their safety when climbing or mountaineering.

Good up to date information on safely introducing novices to climbing or hillwalking can be found in the handbooks published by Mountain Leader Training UK: "Hill-Walking" by Steve Long and "Rock Climbing" by Libby Peter. Again, the notes below just highlight a few of the main points.

### **Child Protection – protecting ourselves from misunderstanding or false allegation**

- DON'T climb in a one to one partnership with a young member in situations that are isolated from other climbers – in general this is best avoided at any time, definitely avoid it on a regular basis with the same young member.
- DO take care when helping young members in ways that involve physical contact that could be misunderstood: eg "spotting", and assisting with putting on harnesses or tying in. It's best if young beginners tie in themselves, following your demonstration. If you do need to physically assist, explain clearly what you are doing, preferably with another adult within earshot. DO avoid taking young members alone on car journeys, or inviting them alone to your home.
- DON'T give alcohol to young members or buy alcohol for them to consume.
- DON'T take photographs of young members when they are semi-undressed or in any other situation that could be misinterpreted. Always ask permission before taking pictures.
- DO be careful with your language – sexually explicit language or innuendo is not appropriate in the presence of young members and can easily be misinterpreted.
- DO interpret the above sensibly. We are talking about potentially misunderstood behaviour between adults and young members where there is a significant age difference. We are not talking about normal relationships between 19 year olds and 17 year olds, nor between parents and their own children.

### **Child Protection – protecting young members from emotional harm**

- DO encourage young members to do well, but don't pressure them into over-stretching themselves – "Challenge by Choice" is a good motto.
- DO remember that young members, however able, are not usually as resilient as adults.
- DO praise young members' achievements, even where they have not succeeded fully at what they were attempting. Avoid any "one-upmanship" with young members, and discourage excessively competitive peer-pressure between young members.

### **Child Protection – reporting suspicions or concerns**

- DO be on the lookout for signs that a young member might be being suffering abuse or neglect (eg unusual injuries they appear embarrassed to talk about, significant and unexplained changes in behaviour, or excessive distrust of adults).
- DO be willing to listen to young member's story if they appear to want to divulge something that is troubling them. Reassure them that they are doing the right thing by telling you, but don't get involved – listen, but don't question or comment.
- DON'T ignore any concerns you have about the behaviour of an adult club member with one or more young members.
- DO report any concerns of this nature to the club's youth officer, but don't attempt further investigation yourself. It is very unlikely that concerns of this nature will arise from IMC activities, but if they do, we have a duty to report it.

### **Safety of novice climbers (and of yourself when climbing with novices)**

The most important factor in ensuring safety when introducing climbing to novices is the experience and judgement of the leader. There isn't a simple set of rules that fits all situations, but the following tips may be helpful.

- DO check that novices' harnesses are properly adjusted and correctly tied in before every climb, until you are fully confident they can get this right themselves.
- DON'T lead climbs with a novice belayer if there is a significant chance you might fall. A good guide is to come down at least one full grade from your current leading standard on routes you know – two grades down on routes you don't know. Don't over-extend yourself because your novice is able to tackle harder routes than you should be leading – rig a top-rope, or borrow a more experienced belayer.
- DO be careful leading novices on climbs with traverses. Always protect for the second as well as the leader. If this isn't possible, choose another route.
- DO ensure that novices know what to do before they are ready to climb if you will be at the top of the pitch. Where possible take your stance within sight and hearing of them. If they are attached to anchors, make it simple for them to detach themselves.
- DON'T allow novices to belay each other unsupervised until you, and they, are confident they can do so effectively. Before this, always tail the dead rope, or be in a position to take over the belay quickly.
- DON'T allow novices to lead traditional climbs unsupported until you, and they, are confident they can place runners well and accurately assess their quality. For early leads, use a method that allows you to check the placements. Either pre-place crucial runners yourself, or climb or prussic alongside on a fixed rope.
- DO check the anchor placements and stance carefully before novices belay at the top of a pitch, until you are confident they can do this safely – this is not an easy skill to learn.
- DO spend some time at the end of the day or weekend giving novice climbers an assessment of what they should be ready to do next. Don't leave them thinking they now have the knowledge to go climbing on their own, if they still need your support to be safe.