GUIDANCE NOTES NO:

# 10.7

# BEST PRACTICE IN OPEN-AGE ADULT DISABILITY FOOTBALL

## FOR CLUBS AND LEAGUES

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The FA
FOR ALL

# INTRODUCTION

When we talk about 'best practice' we mean those actions that reduce the risk of poor practice and abuse by creating an inclusive, safe, and positive environment.

This includes making use of The FA's Respect programme, recognising and promoting adults' rights, appropriate support and a place where everyone is encouraged to make their own decisions and choices.

Best practice includes ensuring coaches and others in positions of power understand their responsibilities and respect clear boundaries in relationships.

Every disability provision is unique. Therefore, exactly what clubs implement will depend on a number of factors, including:

- Safeguards already in place;
- Abilities and vulnerabilities of participants;
- Level and format of football;
- Whether under 18s are involved;
- Location and environment in which training, playing and socialising takes place;
- Expectations of partner or other organisations (for example those clubs linked to charities or centres with pre existing strong safeguards).

Please read this document in conjunction with the other documents provided in Section 10 of The FA's safeguarding Guidance Notes.

For the avoidance of doubt, this document is for guidance purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. If clubs require legal advice, they should contact an independent legal advisor.

All The FA Guidance Notes referred to in this document are available by **clicking here**.

# 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF CHOICE

All adults have rights including the right to self-determination – that's the right to make choices and decisions about our own lives.

Adults should be supported to make their own choices in football whether it's a small choice like choosing what to eat or drink after a game or a life changing choice such as whether or not to accept a place on a talent pathway.

When making a choice or a decision people need to:

- Understand information;
- Remember it for long enough;
- Think about the information;
- Communicate their decision.

The ability to make a decision can be affected by factors such as: having a learning disability, dementia, mental health needs or acquired brain injury; being physically ill; the time of day; feeling tired or unwell; being pressurised; experiencing stress; being under the influence of alcohol or drugs; or even feeling very happy and excited. Sometimes we might feel able to make a choice but at other times we might need support or time to reflect.

Staff and volunteers can support people to make choices and decisions by getting to know them; thinking about how individuals communicate; considering how much time people need to understand an issue; involving someone who knows the person well; and offering support themselves when appropriate.

Players over 18 'self-consent' to participate in football and no one can consent for them. At times however some players may choose to involve family members, carers or personal assistants to support them for example in completing registration documents or communicating their wishes and needs.

It's unlikely but if someone is attending and it seems to be against their wishes, or they seem to dislike the game, sees if you can have a word with them about your concerns. You can also talk to the Club Welfare Officer (Adult Disability Teams) who can, if necessary, seek advice from the County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer. Adults should not be forced to attend or 'persuaded' against their wishes.

It's important to note that we all make unwise choices sometimes – it's part of how we learn. However, if you feel someone is making unwise choices and is at risk as a result of this talk to the CWO (Adult Disability Teams) who in turn can seek support from the County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer.

**Example:**

A participant in a pan-disability club insisted on buying rounds of drinks in the club bar after games but this left them very short of money. The participant told the coach he was worried about money but didn't know what to do. The Club Welfare Officer (Adult Disability Teams) and coach discussed this and suggested to everyone that they all buy their own drinks in future and that rounds were kept for special occasions such as end-of-season get-togethers and birthdays.

# 2. BOUNDARIES AND THE RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST

Volunteers and staff may be seen as role models and be trusted and looked up to. Between coaches, managers, officials and players there is an imbalance of power which creates an inequality in the relationship. This imbalance is referred to as the 'relationship of trust'.

Volunteers and staff in a relationship of trust with adults in adult open-age disability football should maintain clear boundaries and are advised not to enter into a sexual or intimate relationship with anyone with whom they work or volunteer.

However, if sexual relationships do develop between those in a relationship of trust and adult participants the Club Welfare Officer (Adult Disability Teams) should, in complete confidence, have a conversation with the County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer. Any such situation will be approached on a case by case basis.

Staff and volunteers in professional clubs will have additional rules and guidance about this and must follow these.

The Easy-Read documents (see **Guidance Notes 10.9, 10.10, 10.11** and **10.12**) may be helpful in ensuring participants with learning disabilities know about their right to be safe in football.

**Please note:**

Relationships that predate the volunteer/player relationship do not fall within the relationship of trust.

If the relationship of trust with an under-18 is breached, it must immediately be reported to the Club Welfare Officer and onwards to the County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer.

More information about the relationship of trust can be found in **Guidance Notes 1.7: The FA's Relationship of Trust Statement.**

# 3. PHYSICAL CONTACT

Some adults may find it difficult to recognise, describe or report sexually abusive or exploitative behaviour. It's known that disabled children are at additional risk of abuse and its possible that childhood abuse may make it hard for an adult to recognise and report adult abuse.

Follow and promote these guidelines to help keep everyone safe.

**Positive actions:**

- Physical contact should take place in an open environment and not in secret or away from others;
- Encourage independence and avoid doing things for adults that they can do for themselves;
- Use physical contact to treat an injury, develop skill or prevent an accident – but ask permission first;
- Ask if the adult is open to any physical contact, for example when celebrating or consoling the adult. An arm on or around the shoulder may be welcome in these circumstances;
- Remain sensitive to how physical contact is received. Even minor physical contact can be very distressing to some adults;
- Where touch is required to provide assistance with mobility ask for advice on how best to do this. The participant or their carer or personal assistant will usually be the expert;
- If a participant requires physical, personal assistance or personal care a personal assistant or carer should stay.

**The behaviours below can make abusive behaviour harder to see or give confusing messages and so should be avoided**

- Taking part in horseplay, rough, physical or sexually provocative games;
- Touching in a way that could be seen as sexual;
- Doing things of a personal nature that the person can do for themselves-for example helping someone dress who does not need assistance.

The Easy-Read documents (**Guidance Notes 10.9, 10.10, 10.11** and **10.12**) may be helpful in ensuring participants with learning disabilities know what is acceptable/ unacceptable behaviour in football.

**Example:**

An enthusiastic new volunteer greets people attending a sporting memory group with a hug. This distresses two people.The volunteer is quietly spoken to about the confusion this caused the attendees and from then on is supported to meet and greet by name and when appropriate handshake.

# 4. INVOLVING AND LISTENING TO PLAYERS

Research shows that an open environment, where everyone can speak freely about their concerns and where there is a culture of no secrets will be safer for all.

**Positive actions:**

- Consider using the Easy-Read templates (see **Guidance Notes 10.10, 10.11** and **10.12**) designed for adults with learning disabilities. These will help share messages about Respect and what participants can expect from football. Being informed can help people speak out about concerns and help contribute to a safe club;
- Engage players in club processes and decision-making – this might be small things such as what to sell in the club snack shop or strategic decisions about starting a new team or how to ensure players are represented fully on committees;
- Find ways to listen to participants views – simple things such as comments boxes and surveys can help;
- Ask how new joiners heard about the club and ask people when they leave why they are moving on. This way the club is informed about the player experience.

# 5. RATIOS OF HELPERS TO PLAYERS

In adult disability football, the ratio of volunteers or staff to players needs to be managed on a case-by- case basis.

**The following may help work out how many helpers are required:**

- The facilities, including security, spectators, access arrangements, location of changing rooms and toilets;
- The support needs of players;
- The number of under-18s playing and the support they need;
- Emergency evacuation procedures at the venue;
- Any known health or communication needs;
- Any other needs such as the need for quiet time out or the chance to de-escalate.

It's only by having enough helpers that situations such as injury, illness and challenging behaviours can be managed effectively.

Most environments will benefit from at least two helpers in case of illness/injury/crisis and to minimise the risks that occur in lone working.

# 6. ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURES

Transition times can be stressful for some people. If people find arriving or leaving difficult, talk to them and ask permission to talk to carers/personal assistants about how to make this easier for them.

Some participants might welcome a routine on arrival or a known coach to greet them and a clear marker to signal the end of the session.

**Positive actions:**

- Keep a register or record of who attends each session;
- Keep a home address and request details of a person to contact in an emergency;
- Decide how you will manage situations if players who would ordinarily be met at the end of the session are not collected.

# 7. SHOWERS, CHANGING ROOMS AND TOILETS

Facilities will and the support needs of individual players will vary so the positive actions need to be considered in the light of the environment.

**Positive actions:**

- Give players the choice of changing with the team or coming ready-changed;
- Remind players when they need to come ready-changed
- Ensure there are separate facilities for male and female players;
- Ensure children's teams and adult teams use changing rooms and showers at different times or have separate changing areas;
- Explain that cameras and filming are not allowed when people are changing and ideally not in changing rooms at all;
- Encourage adults to be as independent as possible;
- Ensure volunteers and staff knock if they need to enter an occupied changing room and only enter if it's essential to do so;
- Use toilet doors to display posters about helplines and local agencies e.g. ones related to issues such as domestic violence, mental health etc;
- Display the contact details of the Club Welfare Officer (Adult Disability Teams);
- Only hold a team talk in the changing room when players are dressed or changed;
- Consider whether a volunteer or staff member or carer needs to wait outside the changing rooms (e.g. if a player is known to have seizures);
- Follow FA guidance for trans players when required.

The Easy-Read documents (**Guidance Notes 10.9, 10.10, 10.11** and **10.12**) may be helpful in ensuring participants with learning disabilities know what is acceptable/ unacceptable behaviour in changing rooms.

# 8. PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILMING

There is no legal power to prevent photography or filming in a public place. Positive images should be used to celebrate football and should focus on the football and not the disability.

If the club intends to take photographs or film at an event, it is good practice to inform people and ask them to say if they do not want to be on film.

Clubs will usually want to use photos or films for specific usage, for example a press release, social media, leaflet or website during the season. In the case of large group photos of adults e.g. of a closing ceremony, you would not be expected to seek individual or specific consent.

If an individual is to be the main subject of a photo, for example for publicity purposes, it is best practice to seek specific consent and to ensure they are shown it before it is used. Only the adult involved can consent to having their photo taken or used. Their carers/personal assistants or family cannot consent on their behalf. However, the adult who consents must have the mental capacity to consent. This means, for example, that they understand which image will be used, how and where.

If you are unsure about a person's capacity to make this decision, their image should not be used and the consent should not be relied upon.

Sometimes inappropriate photos can be used to bully or blackmail people online. Therefore images of football should always be positive and respectful – and participants should be appropriately dressed. The risk of inappropriate images is reduced by not allowing cameras in changing rooms.

# 9. RUNNING WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Please be aware that you are responsible for ensuring all content is appropriate, whether hosted on websites, social network platforms and any associated message boards or blogs.

**The FA rules in this area will help keep your players and your club's reputation safe. For example, it is against FA rules to post comments that are or maybe seen as:**

- Offensive;
- Insulting;
- Abusive;
- Threatening;
- Racist;
- Discriminatory;
- In some other way causing offense or harm to others.

Any such comment made on club or league websites and/or social networking sites may result in disciplinary action being taken in line with The FA's Disciplinary policies and procedures.

Comments made on websites that are threatening or abusive could lead to legal action being taken against those responsible for posting or hosting them.

Comments made may attract libel claims and legal action through the civil courts if they are defamatory.

**Positive actions:**

- Appoint an appropriate adult(s) to monitor the content of the website/ social networking sites. If there are under-18s accessing the site, the adult you have appointed should attend The FA's Safeguarding Children Workshop. To find a Safeguarding Children Workshop near you, contact your County FA.**Click here** to find the contact details of your County FA;
- Make sure everyone within your club knows who is responsible for monitoring the content of the website and social networking areas and how to contact them if they come across inappropriate content;
- When posting photos of adults follow the guidance under point 9 above;
- If you decide to use forums or message boards, ensure they are password-protected and only allow comments to be posted by individuals who are known and have been permitted access by the club/league;
- Regularly monitor the content and use The FA's 'Respect Codes of Conduct' and 'Relationships of Trust' as a guide to what is acceptable behaviour and what is not;
- Ensure privacy settings are locked so that the page(s) are used explicitly for club or league matters and not as a place to meet, share personal details or have private conversations.

# 10. DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Digital communication channels such as social media, texts and other platforms help clubs and teams communicate and are critical for the organisation of football.

However adults with care and support needs can be groomed and abused on line.

If a person is lonely or unhappy or isolated it's easy for messages to be misinterpreted and this can lead to misunderstandings about the nature of the relationship. A person may seek extra comfort, friendship or time and this can be difficult and compromising for the volunteer.

When communicating with players consider whether another volunteer or staff member should be copied in;

- Focus on football;
- Avoid abusive pictures or language that could be considered insulting, abusive, threatening, discriminatory or in any way might cause offense or harm to others;
- When appropriate ask players whether another person needs to be copied in to ensure they receive the correct information on dates/times/venues.

The Easy-Read documents (**Guidance Notes 10.9, 10.10, 10.11** and **10.12**) may be helpful in ensuring participants with learning disabilities know what is acceptable/ unacceptable behaviour in communications.

# 11. UNDER-18S IN ADULT OPEN-AGE DISABILITY FOOTBALL

As in any adult football, 16/17-year-olds may be playing in teams with adults. These players should be fully involved in deciding whether playing in an adult open-age team is right for them. Their safety and wellbeing must be the most important factor in the decision.

**Every affiliated football club that involves under-18s must ensure appropriate safeguards are in place.**

The FA Safeguarding Children Policy applies wherever under-18s play. This means that where there are under-18s in open-age adult teams the club/league must adopt a Safeguarding Children Policy and ensure those working with 16/17-year-olds have a DBS Check.

To find out who needs a Check, how to manage this process and where to find a policy template for safeguarding children in adult open-age football please see Appendix 5 (A Guide for Clubs with 16/17-year-old Players) in **Guidance Notes 10.1: Safeguarding Adults in Open-age Disability Football**.

The actions below can help create a safe and enjoyable experience for under-18s in open-age disability football:

**Understand and communicate the 'Relationship of Trust':**

- Ensure staff and volunteers understand that they are in a relationship of trust with all 16-17 year olds. This means they must not abuse the child's trust and must never enter into sexual or intimate relationship with an under-18 player. For more information, see **Guidance Notes 1.7: The FA's Relationship of Trust Statement**;
- Any breach of the relationship of trust with a 16/17-year-old must be reported immediately to a Club Welfare Officer and onwards to the County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer.

**Identify a named person for the young person to talk to if they have any concerns:**

- This might be the Club Welfare Officer (youth), the Club Welfare Officer (Adult Disability Teams) or another adult the young person knows and trusts;
- Ensure the child feels confident they can talk to this adult;
- Ask or require this person to attend The FA's Safeguarding Children Workshop.

**Ensure the named person knows that all safeguarding concerns must be reported immediately to a Club Welfare Officer.**

- Involve and empower the young person;
- See **Guidance Notes 7.1: Know Your Rights in Football and** consider sharing these Guidance Notes with young people in open-age football. Some young people with disabilities may need support to understand the content so consider sharing the Easy-Read documents with the child and their parents/carers (**Guidance Notes 10.10. 10.11** and **10.12**);
- Discuss with the young person and their parent/carer the young person's preferences about coming ready-changed or changing/showering with the other members of the team. Some clubs arrange for under-18s to shower and change separately;
- Ensure the young person and their parent/carer are made aware of the differences between youth and open-age adult football. Adults may be more competitive, language may be stronger and possibly offensive, there may be alcohol consumed or other behaviours young people are not comfortable with;
- Ensure the young person knows they should not seek or accept any alcohol or drugs from anyone;
- Explain to the young person and their parent/carer how to report any social media content or messaging that is abusive, offensive, discriminatory or upsetting;
- Copy the parent/carer in to any communications so all club communications with the young person are transparent.

**Ratios of helpers to players**

- Where there are under-18s in an open-age adult disability team it is advisable for two adults helpers to be present to ensure the safety and welfare of players. See **Guidance Notes 5.5: Ratios of Adults to Children**.

The FA has produced a range of Guidance Notes about best practice in under-18 football. To access the complete directory of these notes, click here.

## REMEMBER: UNDER-18s ARE STILL CHILDREN

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