



# COACHES CODE OF PRACTICE



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# INTRODUCTION

Coaching is a powerful catalyst for promoting positive behaviour within Welsh Rugby. Coaches have a key role to ensure that those who take part in rugby in Wales, have enjoyment and fulfilment from the sport, and enable participants to achieve their goals and aspirations.

It is a coaches responsibility to develop and lead an optimal culture that services the needs of players and the team in relation to their aspirations and goals.

Working with and for people is central to the effectiveness of a coach to develop and build positive relationships with others.

The WRU Coaches Code of Practice aims to provide clear guidance on the expected standards of conduct that coaches should adhere to. The WRU Coaches Code of Conduct is aligned alongside this Code of Practice, to assist coaches in developing the key principles of good coaching practice.

It has been developed to help provide clarity of what good practice looks and feels like in terms of coaching behaviours. It will also summarise what poor practice looks and feels like.

Working with and for people is central to the effectiveness of a coach to **develop and build positive relationships** with others.



# POSITION OF TRUST – RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COACH

Coaches are in a position of trust, influence and power with those they coach, and due to the culture of sport, this may create a situation where the coach is allowed to facilitate power, obedience and potentially the rationalisation of abuse.

There are groups that may have additional vulnerabilities in both the community and professional game.

Coaches who are working with children or adults at risk in the community game have an added level of responsibility to ensure that they create and maintain safe environments in relation to the players that they coach, to ensure that they are appropriately safeguarded.

Coaches who are working with talented young players, who are children or young adults in the professional game, also have similar responsibilities, particularly around building appropriate and positive relationships with the players.

Elite athletes spend a significant amount of time alone with their coach who is often involved in other areas of the athlete's life as well. This can lead to abuse, through inappropriate relationships or even illegal sexual contact.

In a performance environment it is extremely important that coaches are appropriately qualified, and experienced in managing the unique challenges and vulnerabilities associated with safeguarding elite young players, and understanding the importance of a player-focused environment.

Staff who are working with children in a performance environment must also be appropriately vetted.

Coaches need to understand that there are personal behavioural boundaries that should not be crossed. Examples of this include unsupervised social outings, inappropriate social media contact, inappropriate conversations in person or via phone and highly personal conversations that were irrelevant to the athlete's participation in sport.

Coaches need to ensure that they fully understand their responsibilities and manage those boundaries effectively. They need to be able to drive high standards of behaviour and performance within the elite pathway environment. It is important to understand the needs of the players, and also manage their workload appropriately.

Regular dialogue with the players and parents are key to building relationships. Coaches should provide feedback to players on a regular basis to drive and improve their performance. However it is equally important that these open and honest discussions are conducted in the right manner, with the interests of the player the primary concern.



Coaches also need to understand how injuries, and particularly long term injury can affect athletes mental well-being. For young athletes this can be viewed as a real issue, and can have serious consequences. Many suffer anxiety, as they know that they are competing for places and looking to secure a contract. Parents and Coaching Staff have a critical role in supporting players as many will feel isolated in this situation.

Players also need to be managed effectively when returning to play after injury, and coaches need to be aware of the balance of power in situations such as this. It should be a collective decision between medical staff, coaching staff, parents (if the player is under 18) and player, and again it is vitally important that player welfare is the main consideration in this decision.

It is important that coaches also manage player transition appropriately, this may be transition from age grade to senior rugby or for those athletes who are not successful in obtaining a professional contract transition from elite sport back into the community game.

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# COACHING IN THE COMMUNITY GAME

The Welsh Rugby Union are committed to promoting positive, inclusive, and safe environments, and working with parents, volunteers and carers to ensure we create a culture in which all children, young people, and adults at risk are able to learn, develop, and have fun through their rugby journey.

It is vitally important that everyone involved in Welsh rugby (i.e. volunteers, coaches, parents, carers) understand their safeguarding responsibilities in relation to all the people they interact with in the rugby environment.

Coaches should ensure that they are suitably qualified to coach at the relevant level and also be appropriately vetted through the Disclosure and Barring Service. Coaches should create a positive, and supportive environment, so that children, young people and adults at risk have the opportunity to develop a range of life skills. When they are able to participate in rugby within a safe environment, they develop life skills alongside their rugby development.

These skills then help them to positively contribute to society in the future, develop a love of the sport whilst also improving their physical well-being by engaging in a healthy active lifestyle. They will also have the opportunity to develop their sporting potential.

There is a responsibility for everyone involved in the game to ensure that respect, and discipline remain a central theme in providing people with the opportunity to enjoy rugby both on and off the field. Coaches have a key role to play in this as positive role models, and are in a position of trust and responsibility, and should display open and transparent leadership.

Coaching is a key role where positive behaviours should be exhibited, and these should be aligned to the behaviours described in the Key Principles of Good Coaching Practice. This will have a direct influence on how the culture grows not only within teams but the wider club.

Parents and carers also play a vital role in providing children and adults at risk with opportunities to participate in rugby and support their ongoing participation. Through their positive involvement, they can enhance children's self-confidence, motivation, enjoyment, and long-term engagement in rugby, as well as helping them benefit from the range of life skills that can be taught through rugby. Thus, working with parents and carers helps to optimise the rugby experience of the individual.

It is important that our volunteers and other people involved in the game understand the importance of creating and contributing to a positive rugby culture, and treat all people with respect so that everyone enjoys the 'Welsh Rugby Experience'.

Rugby players at all levels  
deserve to train and compete  
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stimulating environment.**



# COACHING IN THE PERFORMANCE PATHWAY

There are different challenges presented for young players in a performance environment or talent pathway, and issues such as over training, managing injuries, social media, doping, diet, bullying and managing relationships all have the potential to raise safeguarding issues.

No young person starts off as an elite athlete – they must grow in experience, skill and confidence with the support of their coach and others.

For many young people, reaching a representative level has been their focus for a number of years, and they will have trained hard to achieve this. Parents will also have made a significant contribution to support their child's progress and success. Within competitive sport, too much early pressure can lead to burn-out and withdrawal from participating in sport.

The WRU are committed to working with staff that are involved in managing the performance pathway or similar programmes to ensure that they understand their safeguarding responsibilities, and provide a safe and positive environment for those young athletes to develop and thrive.

Rugby players at all levels deserve to train and compete in a safe, healthy and stimulating environment. Responsibility for creating a safe, player-focused environment lies with the coaching and management staff, and ultimately the WRU.

The staff who manage and coach talented young players in pathway programmes are in a position of trust, and they have to understand the role and the responsibilities that are attached to this.

They have a responsibility to ensure that children who are identified as elite young players are appropriately safeguarded. Those young players involved in such programmes often have to work under intense pressure, in close relationships with coaches and support teams, and safeguarding issues can arise.

There are factors that can make some talented young players more vulnerable to harmful behaviours, either from themselves, their coaches or parents, or members of their entourage.

These factors include:

- A win at all costs approach
- Intense coach – player relationships
- A self-image that is linked closely with performance excellence
- Child athletes operating in an adult-focused environment
- Being away from family and support networks
- Fear of losing funding or a place on the programme if they speak out

These demands on the talents and time of a young person can have negative consequences on their ability to socialise with those outside the sports world and denial of other peer opportunities and friendships.

Potentially abusive situations can arise when a high-performance coach develops training programmes and prioritises attendance at competition schedules that are not aligned to the needs of the young person, and it has been highlighted that talented young players are vulnerable in these circumstances.

Players should be treated as an individual, and training programmes tailored to their particular development needs. It is important that those managing such programmes understand and know their players well, and focus on developing the person as well as the athlete and player. They need to have empathy and manage workloads and expectations effectively.

Coaches planning training routines should consider the development of a young person as a whole to maximise their development and potential. Some key factors to consider as a coach are:

- How well do you know your players? Can you read if they are having a good or bad day and flex your session appropriately
- Where are they currently in relation to their goals?
- Rates of development are different and needs to be acknowledged when planning any sessions
- Are the sessions challenging or not challenging enough? The aim is to find the sweet spot
- Are we providing a psychologically safe environment? Do players feel comfortable to be themselves and push themselves without fear of failure
- The vulnerability of young people participating in elite-level sport
- The impact that elite-level sport may be having on the child's development

It is clear that rugby is a sport that has physical requirements. Added to this, as a young player progresses through the pathway the level of physicality in games increases. However, too much emphasis on physical conditioning within any session will have a negative impact on a child's social and physiological development.

As a young player progresses through the pathway there will be heightened demand on their playing and training time. It is essential that all stakeholders plan and manage this accordingly. This is due to the fact that a young player competing in too many games and tournaments that are close together, or being exposed to excessive training requirements, can be at a physical risk because of a shortened recovery time.

It must be highlighted that potential safeguarding issues can arise when a coach develops training programmes and competition schedules that dismiss the needs of the young person and prioritise external goals.

This may include:

- A training schedule that requires travelling long distances
- The frequency of the training, what times training occurs and length of training sessions
- Representing the sport in regional or district competitions balanced with club or school commitments
- Being forced to play above their age group



An example of this may be an under 15 player who is selected to play above his age group at regional level, and also required to play in the Dewar Shield under 15 competition, and also be required to play for school and club. These situations need to be managed effectively and ensure that the demand upon the child both physically and mentally is not excessive.

It is important that players workloads are appropriately managed, and they have time to train and not just compete.

It is the responsibility of those adults who have a duty of care to the child to ensure that there are sufficient periods of rest to enable recovery, regeneration and growth.

As talented young players progress through the pathway strength and conditioning training becomes more prevalent, the welfare of the individual must be the primary focus. There is a need to development their strength and conditioning to equip them with the physical attributes for the modern game at the elite level.

However strength and conditioning should not be viewed as simply an addition to an overall training and competition programme for a child, but rather as a key factor in long-term athletic development.

The demands on a young person can have negative consequences on their ability to socialise outside of the rugby environment and leave little time for other peer opportunities and friendships, so it is extremely important to consider it as the development of not only a player and athlete, but also as a person. There is a need to have a holistic approach to developing young athletes, as investment in the person will benefit their overall player development, and ability to perform in a team environment.

When players enter the performance pathway it is vitally important that the expectations of players, parents and guardians are appropriately managed. There should be a clear policy in place as to how they will be managed.

Players who enter the performance pathway should receive an induction where they are briefed on what the expectations on them are, and parents and guardians should also be aware of this. The induction should also include information on selection, training, competitions, anti-doping, diet, role of sports agents, reporting concerns and safeguarding issues and other player welfare related education.

There should be regular performance reviews conducted and appropriate and relevant feedback should be provided at every opportunity

It is extremely important that players who are released from the performance pathway programme are managed appropriately upon their exit. They should be supported through this process along with their parents, to ensure that they are encouraged to continue playing rugby, and are retained in the game.

Players and parents should be provided with specific feedback and should have an exit interview, so that their transition from this environment into the community game is as comfortable as possible

Coaches should **respect**  
**and champion** the rights  
of the individual



# THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF GOOD COACHING PRACTICE

The Welsh Rugby Union are committed to promoting positive, inclusive, and safe environments, and working with parents, volunteers and carers to ensure we create a culture in which all children, young people, and adults at risk are able to learn, develop, and have fun through their rugby journey.

## Rights

Coaches should respect and champion the rights of the individual within the team environment .

Coaches should develop a coaching environment -

- that does not discriminate on the grounds of gender, marital status, race, colour, disability, sexual identity, age, occupation, religious beliefs or political opinion
- that does not allow any form of discrimination to go unchallenged
- which provides a positive and engaging rugby experience to all participants
- where everyone has the opportunity to participate
- which recognises the rights of people to be treated as individuals even in a team sport
- which players to seek advice from other coaches, volunteers or staff if the need arises
- that promotes the concept of a well-balanced lifestyle both within and outside rugby
- that respect the rights, dignity and worth of every athlete and treat everyone equally, regardless of background or ability
- that prioritises player welfare as your primary concern
- that respect the views of other coaches, management and support staff in public and avoid unbalanced criticism of colleagues



## Relationships

Coaches should build positive working relationships with their players, management and support staff

Coaches should develop a coaching environment -

- that provides a positive experience by demonstrating leadership qualities to champion appropriate and respectful behaviour
- that does not engage in behaviour that constitutes any form of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional or neglect) or poor practice
- that develops positive working relationships with players based on honesty, transparency, mutual trust, and respect
- that promotes the welfare and best interests of the players that you coach
- that does not exploit an athlete's vulnerability
- that enables them to take action if you have concerns about the behaviour of another coach, management of support staff member
- that empowers your players to be responsible for their own decisions
- that encourages and supports players to accept and take responsibility for their own behaviour and performance
- that ensures that they are accountable for their actions

## Personal Standards

Coaches should adhere to a set of personal standards that aims to achieve excellence and demonstrate positive leadership qualities

Coaches should develop a coaching environment -

- that enables you to be a positive role model, particularly for young players, in and out of the rugby environment
- that enables you to be fair and honest with players and others involved in the sport
- is as safe as possible by creating and maintaining a safe environment to minimise risk and safeguard the reputation of the sport
- that promotes the execution of safe and correct coaching practice
- that actively promote the benefits of participation in rugby, including the positive contribution that it can make to achieving improved outcomes for everyone, but particularly children, young people and adults at risk



## Professional Standards

Coaches should obtain appropriate qualifications and be appropriately vetted, and ensure that they continue to develop their skills and abilities as a Coach through continuous professional development

Coaches should develop a coaching environment -

- that is committed to providing a high quality service
- that strictly maintains the appropriate level of confidentiality
- that enables you to act ethically, professionally and with integrity
- that enables you to be professional in your approach and accept responsibility for your actions
- that enables you to be appropriately qualified to coach at the relevant level
- that enables you to work within the limits of your professional competence and area of expertise
- that enables you to work with colleagues in a way which best serves the interests of the player
- that if required be appropriately vetted in accordance with the WRU Safeguarding Policy
- that contributes to the development of coaching as a profession through continuous professional development, exchanging knowledge and ideas with others, and by working in partnership with other agencies and professionals
- that seeks consent from a parent or legal guardian when providing a service to a player, who is under 18 years of age or where you believe the athlete may not have the capacity to consent either through maturity or mental capacity
- that ensures compliance with the WRU Safeguarding Policy
- that ensures compliance with the WRU Codes of Conduct for Coaches
- that ensures compliance with the WRU Social Media Code of Conduct
- that ensures compliance with the WRU Anti-Doping Rules and promote clean sport
- that ensures compliance with the WRU Discipline Regulations, WRU Anti-Corruption Regulations and other disciplinary related policies and guidance

The Welsh Rugby Union are **committed** to ensuring that children, young people and adults at risk have the opportunity to develop.



# RECOGNISING POOR COACHING PRACTICE AND ABUSE

Even for those experienced in working with child and adult abuse, it is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or has already taken place. Staff and volunteers in sport, are not experts at such recognition. However, they do have responsibility to act if they have any concerns about the behaviour of someone (an adult or another child) towards a young person or adult at risk.

The WRU encourage employees and volunteers to report any concerns that they have to the Club Safeguarding Officer or directly to the WRU Safeguarding Team. If there is a serious concern that a child or adult at risk may be at immediate risk then the matter should be reported directly to the Police.

It is not the responsibility of staff, coaches or volunteers to decide whether or not abuse is occurring. Their role is to follow procedures and forward any information or concerns to the appropriate contact, who will then deal with the other agencies involved to determine whether abuse has taken place i.e. Social Services or Police.

The Welsh Rugby Union are committed to ensuring that children, young people and adults at risk have the opportunity to develop in such an environment. We have a proactive safeguarding approach that aims to develop and evolve our strategies and continually drive up standards to protect children, young people and adults at risk involved in Welsh rugby.

However if incidents of abuse are reported, the Welsh Rugby Union are also committed to supporting children and young people, adults at risk and families to ensure that any investigations are conducted in a professional and expeditious manner.

## Recognising Abuse

### Examples of Physical Abuse of Children

- Causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child. The following are examples of physical abuse in a rugby environment:
- Exposing young players to exercise or training which disregards the capacity of their immature and growing body
- Exposing young players to overplaying, over training or fatigue
- Exposing young players to alcohol, or giving them the opportunity to drink alcohol below the legal age
- Exposing young players to performance enhancing drugs or recreational drugs

### Examples of Emotional Abuse of Children

- Humiliating children or in front of others
- Providing repeated negative feedback
- Repeatedly ignoring a young player's efforts to progress
- Repeatedly demanding performance levels above those of which the young player is capable
- Over emphasis on winning and not enough on development

### Examples of Sexual Abuse of Children

- Developing or encouraging inappropriate relationships between adults and children.
- Inappropriate use of social media by grooming children
- Inappropriate touching of children

### Examples of Neglect of Children

- Young players are left alone without proper supervision
- Young players are exposed to unnecessary heat or cold without fluids or protection
- Young players are exposed to an unacceptable risk of injury
- Young players are exposed to bullying



### Examples of Adult Abuse

- Self – Neglect
- Modern Slavery
- Domestic Abuse
- Discriminatory
- Organisational
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial or Material
- Neglect or Acts of Omission
- Emotional or Psychological

## Recognising Poor Coaching Practice

### Examples of Poor Coaching Practice

- Inappropriate behaviour or overbearing conduct
- Excessive training and competition pressure
- Failing to follow appropriate safeguarding and coaching processes
- Not providing players with appropriate training, guidance and support
- Failing to respect the rights of players, parents, coaches, officials and other volunteers within the game
- Failing to take responsibility for the welfare of children or adults at risk
- Failing to respect decisions made by officials
- Failing to comply with the Codes of Conduct
- Taking children or adults at risk to your home or other secluded places
- Engaging in rough, physical or sexually provocative games
- Sharing a room with a child
- Allowing or engaging in any form of inappropriate touching
- Making sexually suggestive remarks
- Reducing a child or adult at risk to tears as a form of control
- Allowing children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- Allowing allegations made by a child or adult at risk to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon
- Leaving any training or match without ensuring the safe dispersal of children or adults at risk
- Carrying out personal care for a child that the child can do unaided
- Abusing a privileged position of power or trust
- Resorting to bullying tactics, or verbal abuse
- Causing a participant to lose self-esteem by embarrassing, humiliating or undermining the individual
- Spending excessive amounts of time alone with children or adults at risk away from other adults, or carers.



# USEFUL CONTACTS

There is further information available in the **WRU Safeguarding Policy** and the **WRU Game Locker**

<https://d2cx26qpfwuhvu.cloudfront.net/wru/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/11100315/WRU-Safeguarding-Policy-2019-.pdf>

<https://www.wrugamelocker.wales/en/resources-and-videos/resources/>

## Useful Contacts

WRU Policy and Integrity Team:

WRU Integrity Line (Tel. No. **029 20 822 200**)

Integrity Mailbox **integrity@wru.wales**

