



Health & Safety Guidance: Coaching Practice

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1.0 Introduction

There are inherent risks in the sport of gymnastics but the majority can be controlled and kept to a minimum through the adoption and implementation of accepted best coaching practices. This document sets out the British Gymnastics health and safety guidance in relation to the provision coaching activities. Anyone who is responsible for the provision of gymnastics activity should ensure all activities are fully risk assessed and is ultimately responsible for ensuring appropriate control measures are in place to help ensure a safe environment is provided at all times.

The following guidance is part of a suite of documents that should be read and implemented in conjunction with the BG Health & Safety Management System & Guidance.

1.1 Safety and Responsibility in Gymnastics

All those involved in the provision of coaching activities have a general duty of care to participants to exercise reasonable care for their safety both in training and competition and should ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable that:

- Gymnastics activity, training or coaching takes place in a safe environment, and the equipment and facilities used are suitable, safe and well-maintained.
- Coaches have the required qualifications, competence and experience for the role they are undertaking.
- Coaches carry out coaching duties with reasonable skill and care and in a reasonable, prudent and professional manner in accordance with the British Gymnastics Standards of Conduct and sports coach UK (scUK) codes of Ethics and Conduct.
- Coaches employ best coaching practices are employed at all times and are meticulous in their physical and mental preparation of the participant appropriate to the level of participation.

1.2 The Prudent and Caring Coach

The prudent and caring coach will ensure that the following principles are implemented and continually upheld:

- A safe environment is provided at all times.
- Clear and adequate instructions are given prior to commencing an activity.
- Coaching methods and procedures are continually assessed for the safety of both performer and coach.
- Only competent and suitably trained and qualified persons supervise or coach an activity.
- The clothing and special equipment (e.g. hand-guards) to be worn by the participants must be suitable, not loose fitting, and in good order.
- The health status of each participant should be known before commencing a training session or competition. If a coach knows of any health reason, medical condition or injury which might affect a participant's ability to train or compete, or which might adversely affect his or her health if he or she were to train or compete, appropriate medical advice should be obtained before the participant undertakes any training activity or competes. If a medical advisor advises that the participant should not train or compete, the participant should not do so until a medical advisor has advised that the participant may do so.

- Medical advice should be sought in case of injury and only persons who are qualified should administer first aid.
- An accurate record of injuries and actions should be maintained and kept up to date.
- Medical approval should be sought following a debilitating injury before permitting a participant to recommence training or competition.
- Coaches must be immediately accessible and never leave the premises while a session is in progress.
- Always ensure that a minimum of two responsible adults are present during training sessions. One of the adults must be an appropriately qualified coach and the second adult must not be one of the participating gymnasts.

1.3 Coaching Qualification Criteria

Gymnastic activities involve an inherent risk and in the desire to protect the participants and ensure their safety and wellbeing, British Gymnastics requires the following criteria to be implemented:

- The minimum qualification for a coach wishing to operate independently is a BG Level 2 qualification in the disciplines being offered. To be responsible for running a club, they must also complete the BG Club Management module within one year.
- Level 1/Assistant Coaches must only work under the supervision of a qualified British Gymnastics Coach (or higher).
- Coaches and Teachers should only work in the sports specific areas in which they are qualified and only to the level to which they are qualified.
- It is a BG requirement that the coach designing and directing the programme holds a minimum of Level 2 qualification in the specific disciplines being offered. The only exception is when coaches are participating in a coaching course or following completion of the practical elements of the course (during the mentoring period), providing that they are under the direct supervision of a coach who holds a higher level qualification in the appropriate discipline.
- For coaching at higher levels of performance, the coach must hold a level of qualification appropriate to the level of performance to be undertaken in that particular discipline of the sport.
- British Gymnastics has a duty to ensure that coaches are safe to undertake the coaching of participants within their knowledge and competency according to current best practice.
- British Gymnastics will require all coaches working with children and/or adults at risk to hold a BG approved criminal records check and complete BG recognised safeguarding course (if over 18). Level 1 coaches under the age of 18 coaches must complete the BG Foundation Safeguarding.
- In a competition or other BG event, the coach must possess a current qualification according to the following criteria:
 - I. A coach who holds a Coach level qualification may be present in the event arena and be responsible for activities to the level of their qualification.
 - II. At other levels, the coach must hold a level of qualification appropriate to the level of performance of the participant in the particular discipline.
 - III. A less qualified coach may assist a more highly qualified coach but only in those areas and to the level to which they are qualified.

1.4 Coaches and unqualified assistants

British Gymnastics reserves the term coach to refer to individuals who hold a BG recognised coaching qualification and would refer to individuals who do not hold an appropriate qualification as 'unqualified assistants'. It is the club's responsibility to ensure that any use of unqualified assistants in the delivery of gymnastics activity is fully risk assessed and is carried out in accordance with the following guidance:

- An unqualified assistant can assist with the session in terms of demonstration, assisting with warm-up etc. but must not coach in any way i.e. they cannot support skills, teach progressions, supervise children participating in gymnastics or run classes.
- Unqualified assistants who are assisting during a gymnastics session must be fully supervised at all times by a qualified Level 2 (or above) coach.
- Unqualified assistants who are undertaking a Level 1 coaching qualification may coach skills within their syllabus once they have completed the practical elements of the course under the direct supervision of a level 2 or above coach. Once an individual has attained the Level 1 qualification they are then qualified to coach the moves within the syllabus providing that there is a Level 2 providing overall direction during the session.
- It is the responsibility of the club to determine the appropriate level of safeguarding training and recruitment checks (including criminal records checks) based on [BG Criminal Record Checks Policy & Guidance](#).

1.5 Gymnast to Coach/Teacher Ratios

There are a number of diverse factors to consider when making recommendations with regard to the ratio of participants to coach/teacher in Gymnastics and Trampolining activities.

These factors might include: the age and stage of development of the participants, the level and type of activity, the experience of the participants and coach and the type of facility and equipment available.

However, the coach in charge must always make an assessment (i.e. a risk assessment) of each situation and must determine a ratio of participants to coach/es that is reasonable, safe and effective.

Please note that there should **always** be at least two responsible adults in the gymnasium.

To ensure that a safe and effective coaching/teaching situation is maintained, British Gymnastics recommends the following reasonable ratio of participants to coach/teacher:

Award Scheme Coach

Award Scheme Coaches (ASC) will all be current bronze or silver club members of a BG club or registered BG Leisure Centre Scheme. They will be at least 14 years old at the start of the course.

ASC Coaching is the first rung on the ladder of a coaching career. They can work with a maximum of 8 gymnasts at any one time under the direct supervision of a minimum Level 2 or above coach. Using the Proficiency Award Scheme, the ASC will help with the teaching of the skills content of the scheme by way of demonstration and instruction. The ASC will also understand how the Proficiency Scheme works, and how to assess the children in their group.

Pre-School Classes

For independent child classes, a ratio of eight participants to one coach is recommended. This can be increased proportionally to the number of qualified assistant coaches, i.e. 8 per additional directly supervised assistant coach.

For classes where the parent, guardian or carer is participating with the child, a maximum ratio of 20 children to one coach is recommended.

Gymnastics Classes

Suitably qualified British Gymnastics coaches or teachers must supervise all gymnastics activities. Coaches must be qualified to the level of performance of the participants in the specific discipline of the sport.

The recommended maximum number of participants to one apparatus/station is 8 participants.

Where more than one apparatus/station is to be supervised, the coach in charge must carefully assess the following:

- The age, stage of development, experience, varying ability and number and discipline of the participants.
- The coaches' own qualifications and experience.
- Their ability to observe, advise, support and respond to the needs of everyone in the gymnastics area.
- The level and type of activity and suitability of the apparatus arrangements.

Normally, one coach would not be expected to supervise more than 16 gymnasts, without other suitably qualified coaches being in attendance. However, where a directly supervised and qualified Assistant Coach is used, in addition to the supervising coach, each additional Assistant Coach may supervise a maximum of 8 participants (i.e. qualified lead coach = 16 gymnasts plus 8 gymnasts with AC = 24 in total).

Trampolinist to Coach Ratios

All trampolining activities must be supervised by suitably qualified British Gymnastics coaches or teachers. It is incumbent upon the coach in charge to ensure that trained spotters of suitable size and age are provided at each side where the end decks are not present.

The recommended maximum number of participants to one trampoline is 8 participants.

Where more than one trampoline is to be supervised, the coach in charge must carefully assess the following:

- The age, stage of development, experience, varying ability and number and discipline of the participants,
- The coaches' own qualifications and experience,
- Their ability to observe, advise, support and respond to the difficulties of anyone in the trampoline area.

Normally, one coach would not be expected to supervise more than 16 recreational trampolinists, without other suitably qualified coaches being in attendance.

The coach in charge must also ensure that the person/s sliding in the “push in mat”, if not a qualified coach, is: trained, experienced, of sufficient maturity and familiar with the performer.

Coaching Disabled People

When working with disabled people, a competent assessment of the risk to the individual and other participants must be made when determining the ratio of gymnasts to coach. Depending on the nature of the disability, one-to-one supervision may be necessary. For further information on disability issues please refer to section 2.6 within this policy, the Equality Act 2010 at www.legislation.gov.uk and the BG Safeguarding and Protecting Vulnerable Adults policy.

General Comment

When groups are warming up, cooling down or working on low risk activities on a floor area, the ratio may be increased within the bounds of safety.

1.6 Age and Level of Participation

It is impossible to account for every conceivable situation in gymnastics since there are many variables to consider, including the chronological age of the gymnast, physical and psychological characteristics, gender, ability, number of hours trained and the aspirations of the gymnast.

British Gymnastics considers the following general guidelines appropriate to the safe participation and long-term development of gymnasts;

- Gymnasts should only participate at a level at which is safe for them to do so
- Sound planning and preparation will assist in the longer-term development of the gymnast
- Appropriate physical preparation should be part of the gymnasts training programme
- An appropriate work ethic and attitude should be developed. This will help the gymnast to foster a positive attitude to training and participation
- The gymnasts training programme (number of days/hours) should be sensitive to the needs of the gymnast outside the gym environment, e.g. socialising
- The coach should stay within the boundaries of their qualification

British Gymnastics has a model of Long Term Athlete Development. For a copy of the British Gymnastics Long Term Athlete Development model, visit the British Gymnastics website click on “Technical” then “Downloads”.

This model has been designed to provide guidelines for the safe and appropriate/effective development of gymnasts, with particular reference to gymnasts following a competitive pathway. Although our model assigns broad age bands and an indication of training load, these are purely for illustrative purposes only. The stages through which a gymnast moves as they develop will depend on the discipline, the age at which the gymnast enters the pathway, their physical, cognitive and emotional maturity and whether they wish to follow a competitive or recreational pathway. Furthermore the time spent within any particular stage will depend on the nature of the discipline and of course, the gymnasts themselves.

Guidance is given as to the recommended number of competitions per year, according to the age and stage of development. The volume is only appropriate if gymnasts are adequately prepared, free from injury (including micro trauma) and competent at performing their routines. It is critical to ensure that gymnasts have an appropriate balance of training and skill development, competition and recovery. The yearly competition programme must be planned appropriately to allow this to happen.

Children under eight years of age

Where gymnasts under the age of eight years are involved in activities of a duration of two or more hours, the provider may be required to register with the Local Authority Social Services. Although the legislation that regulates the care of children under eight years is not normally applied to sport, British Gymnastics recommends that clubs with classes for children within this age group should notify the Local Authority of their existence to avoid any uncertainty on the issue.

British Gymnastics recommends that sessions for children under the age of eight years do not exceed two hours and classes for pre-school children should not be longer than 45 minutes.

Age and Competition

Competition is an integral part of gymnastics and the performance-orientated gymnast must gain experience in competition over a period of time. However, to protect the young gymnast, it is British Gymnastics policy that for an event that leads to a national or UK final, the gymnast must attain the minimum age of nine years in the calendar year in which the event is held.

It is recognised that gymnasts may wish to enter events when they are below the age of nine years. British Gymnastics therefore recommends the following;

Age	Competition environment
6 years old in the year of competition	Within the club, school and leisure centre only
7 years old in the year of competition	Up to county and County Sports Partnership level
8 years old in the year of competition	Up to regional and home country level
9 years old in the year of competition	Up to BG/UK wide national level

Some BG Clubs run a variety of competitions, which include inter and intra club events and in some cases; international competition using full FIG rules. Some of these events fall outside the intended scope of the above guidelines, which were put in place to ensure very young children are not exposed to excessive pressure. In such cases, it is important that competition organisers can demonstrate that they have carefully assessed all aspects of the event (e.g. level of competition, nature/formality of event etc.) when determining the appropriate age criteria for entry.

The world governing body for gymnastics, the Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (F.I.G.) has age related rules governing the performance of a gymnast at international events.

These can be viewed at

<http://figdocs.lx2.sportcentric.com/external/serve.php?document=2414>

Use of Under 14 yrs. children as volunteers

Clubs using children (under 14) as volunteers should check with their Local Authority Byelaws – as some Local Authorities have strict rules regarding the use of children under 14.

1.7 Coaching Disabled Participants

Inclusion

British Gymnastics welcomes the participation of disabled people and expects coaches to include disabled people within the existing classes they provide. Coaches are also expected to plan ahead in order to meet the needs of disabled people in gymnastics activity where it is possible and appropriate to do so. A risk assessment should always be made prior to the commencement of any gymnastics activity.

Coaches are reminded that they do not need to hold any additional qualifications in order to include a disabled gymnast in an existing class. Guidance on coaching disabled participants is included in all British Gymnastics Common Core Resource Packs.

The Equality Act 2010 states that a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Legal Obligations towards Disabled People

British Gymnastics reminds coaches that in terms of the Equality Act 2010, they are considered to be service providers (anyone who provides goods, facilities or services to the public whether these services are paid for or free). This means that coaches are legally required to comply with the duties placed on them by the Act as follows:

- Avoid treating any disabled person less favourably than other members of the public.
- Make reasonable changes to practice, policies and procedures in order to make it easier for disabled people to use the services provided.
- Take reasonable steps to remove, alter or provide alternative means of avoiding physical features of premises that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use services provided.

British Gymnastics understands that reasonable changes and adjustments would include minor works such as improving lighting, helpful colour schemes and accessible signage. British Gymnastics also recognises that service providers may be able to justify not carrying out major changes and adjustments (such as installation or modification of automatic entrance doors, ramps, wheelchair lifts or accessible toilet facilities) if it would incur unreasonable levels of expenditure, service disruption or impracticality to make the change.

Grounds for Refusing to Include

British Gymnastics expects disabled people to be included within existing classes where it is appropriate to do so. However it accepts that there are some circumstances that may constitute reasonable grounds for refusing:

- Presence of health issues that contra-indicate participation on medical grounds. In this instance, disabled persons may need to provide evidence from a medical professional to verify that it is appropriate for the individual to participate in a particular activity.
- Identification of an unacceptable level of risk being posed to the health, safety or well-being of:
 - either the disabled person
 - or others they are likely to come in contact with if included within existing classes.
- Recognition of the necessity to irrevocably change programme(s) provided in existing classes in order to accommodate the disabled person within them.

In the event that a coach refuses to accept a person with a disability into existing classes, British Gymnastics will only support that coach if they do so on reasonable grounds that can be shown to be supported by evidence.

Classes Specifically for Disabled People

In acknowledgement that it is not always possible or appropriate to include disabled people in mainstream gymnastics classes, British Gymnastics supports the view that there must be scope to provide classes specifically for disabled people, except where there are medical grounds that would contra-indicate participation. It is strongly recommended that all coaches who intend to deliver classes specifically for disabled people complete the British Gymnastics Disability Awareness Add-On Module or stand-alone trampoline disability qualification.

1.8 Personal Clothing: Dress

The Code of Dress for gymnastics activities is designed to safeguard the participants and coaches. The following points should be adhered to during training and events:

- Ensure that the gymnasts and coaches wear appropriate clothing, which does not impede the freedom of movement required by the activity and is not too loose as to constitute a hazard.
- The wearing of clothing with buckles or clasps are dangerous and are prohibited.
- Raised adornments on gymnastics clothing are dangerous and are prohibited.
- Long hair may become a hazard and it should be tied back to avoid accidents.
- Participants should work in bare feet or gymnastics slippers.
- Do not permit the wearing of socks without gymnastics footwear on polished or slippery surfaces.
- When participating on a trampoline, ensure that socks or suitable gymnastics footwear (not training shoes) are worn.
- Long fingernails present a risk to the gymnast and coach. The coach is responsible for ensuring the length of fingernails is compatible with the activity.
- Coaches and gymnasts should be aware of the risks associated with wearing spectacles and minimise the risks by wearing flexible frames, an elastic sports band or contact lenses to ensure safety.

NB: The Code of Dress for participants at a BG Competition will be that stated by the FIG in the sport specific code. Any concessions or variance from this code will be published in the sport specific competition handbook.

Coaches at events:

Coaches who are active in the event arena should dress smartly according to the following: -

- Tracksuits, polo shirts or sweatshirts with long trousers, socks and training shoes or gym slippers,
OR
- Where coaches are not physically active in the event arena, they should dress smartly according to the traditions of the particular discipline.

Sensitivity to religious beliefs should be afforded with regard to the dress code but safety is paramount and any clothing that is considered by the coach to be a safety hazard should be changed or participation may be prohibited. Any concessions on dress must be within the bounds of reasonable safety. The element of risk should be explained to the coach/participant (parent or guardian) and every attempt to control the risk should be adopted.

A clothing Modification form must be submitted to the competition organiser with the entry. The request will receive full consideration and club and entrant will be informed of the outcome within 10 working days of receipt of the request. In the event the request is declined, the entry fee will be refunded in full, providing that this form was submitted prior to the closing date.

1.9 Body Piercing and Adornments

British Gymnastics believes that jewellery and adornments worn in body piercing are inappropriate for safe practice in gymnastics and trampolining. This policy applies to all participants and coaches in training and in events at home and abroad.

Participants

A person participating with body adornments or jewellery **MUST** inform the coach and also remove the relevant items to reduce the risk of injury to the participant, the coach and others.

Coaches

Whilst a coach is carrying out a spotting or gymnast supporting role; all jewellery must be removed. However if the coach is evaluating performance or giving instruction only; (by this we mean coaching whilst not in direct physical contact with the gymnast or gymnastic equipment), jewellery may be worn.

Exceptions to the above policy may be applicable in special circumstances which are outlined below:

Jewellery that cannot be removed:-

It is acknowledged that in some circumstances, it may be impossible to remove a ring and/or dermal piercings. Should this be the case; the ring must be sufficiently covered with protective tape; and the piercings covered sufficiently in order to eliminate any risk.

Newly pierced ears

Newly pierced stud earrings need to be covered with protective tape but must be removed as soon as possible (normally after six-weeks).

For the avoidance of doubt; any jewellery which can be removed, must be removed.

Religious and Medical jewellery:-

With regards to the wearing of jewellery; sensitivity to religious beliefs and medical requirements/reasons should be afforded, but safety is paramount and any jewellery that is considered by the coach to be a safety hazard, should be changed or participation may be prohibited. Any concessions on religious or medical jewellery must be within the bounds of reasonable safety. The element of risk should be explained to the coach/participant (parent or guardian) and every attempt to control the risk should be adopted. Examples include the following:

Diabetes Bracelet can be worn; but whilst participation is taking place a sweatband or similar must cover the item in order to eliminate any risk. The coach in charge must also be advised that a participant is wearing the bracelet for medical emergency reasons.

Sikh Kara - Bracelet worn in the Sikh religion; can be worn, but whilst participation is taking place a sweatband or similar must cover the item; in order to eliminate any risk.

Religious Necklaces – Examples are; the Crucifix necklace for Christians or the Mangalsutra necklace as a symbol of marriage for Hindu women. On safety grounds, no participant should be permitted to participate whilst wearing necklaces, be they religious or other.

NB: if a sweatband is used to cover up an item of jewellery when doing vigorous activity, the sweatband should be taped in place to minimise the risk of the sweatband slipping and exposing the item of jewellery.

In all instances above; it is the responsibility of the coach in charge of the session to ensure a sufficient risk assessment has been carried out. If the coach identifies a significant risk to the participant, coach or others, which cannot be controlled satisfactorily, then within the bounds of reasonable safety, the coach MUST prohibit participation. Legitimate health and safety concerns which contra-indicate participation, will supersede any other considerations, be they religious, medical or other.

Failure to conform will prohibit the individual's participation on the grounds of reasonable safety and may render the individual's insurance invalid should an accident result directly from non-compliance.

1.10 Discipline

A good standard of behaviour and code of conduct within the gymnasium will greatly reduce the risk of injury and enhance concentration and the work ethic. The standards should be applied equally to all participants. The full standards of conduct can be found on the BG website.

1.11 Safety in Coaching

It is essential that appropriate precautions are taken during activities to ensure that optimal levels of safety are maintained at all times. Particular consideration must be given to the following:

Preparation of the Gymnast

The physical and psychological preparation of the participant is of prime importance to facilitate the safe learning of skills or movements. Appropriate strength, flexibility and body awareness together with psychological factors must be developed prior to teaching a skill.

Progressive Learning

The use of carefully selected progressive sub-skills, which relate to the complete skill, is recommended good practice and time for consolidation in performance should be allocated.

Competent Spotting/Supporting

“Supporting” and “Spotting” are integral with the safe learning of gymnastic skills and involve the techniques of observation and handling, to ensure the safe performance of the skill. Recommended safe practices as taught on BG coaching courses should be used. Coaches must

be continually alert to the risks encountered where an inferior performance occurs and be ready to provide emergency support.

Suitable Apparatus

Carefully erect and check the suitability of the apparatus for height, width and stability. Ensure that a safe and appropriate landing surface is provided at all times in accordance with the level of activity and the ability and experience of the participant. Frequently conduct a risk assessment of the environment to ensure that it remains safe.

Safe Landings

Correct landing techniques and methods of falling safely should be effectively taught and encouraged at all times.

Fast Track and Air Track

Please see the safety guidance which can be downloaded under Coaching, Downloads on the BG website.

Flexibility/Stretching Exercises

British Gymnastics has received a number of enquiries from concerned parents, regarding the techniques and types of exercise that BG promotes as correct practice. Concerns have been expressed about the coaches using their full body weight or excessive force during flexibility training. There are also concerns about the close proximity of the coach's body and hands to sensitive areas on the gymnast's body. Therefore BG has issued the Flexibility Training for Gymnasts document which can be downloaded from the Ethics and Welfare downloads section on the BG website.

Use of Weight Training in Gymnastics

British Gymnastics does not recommend the use of Olympic weight lifting "free weight" type training programmes or exercises with gymnasts, until the post pubertal stage of development.

British Gymnastics recommends that all physical preparation should be progressive and where possible, use the gymnast's own body mass as the resistance. This is particularly relevant in early childhood and periods of adolescent growth. Single weight discs, ankle, wrist and waist belts can be used to increase the resistance but this will depend upon the age and stage of maturation of the gymnasts.

The use of free weights (bar and weight discs) may be introduced with suitably prepared gymnasts once they have reached the post puberty stage of development. Appropriate types of weight training exercise are incorporated into the BG Coaching qualification courses where this is relevant to the particular discipline.

BG coaches are therefore qualified to deploy these exercises within the training programme.

Overuse and Growth Related Injuries

Due to the complex nature of the sport and the need for frequent, repetitive practice of skills or movements, participants in gymnastics are susceptible to overuse injuries. This is particularly relevant during the pubescent growth spurt periods. Coaches must be conscious of the need for meticulous physical preparation, a varied programme, use of appropriate techniques and a suitable environment to reduce the risk of overuse related injuries. Coaches must be continually vigilant in

observing the growth pattern of young participants and sensitive to signs of soreness or pain particularly in growth plate areas. Advice should be sought from a qualified physiotherapist or medical practitioner.

Excessively repetitive exercises, poor facilities or bad technique may lead to “overuse injuries”. Coaches must take the necessary precautions to reduce the possibility of this type of injury by varying the programme, ensuring correct techniques are taught, adequate fitness is developed and suitable apparatus is used. The coach must take into consideration the age, stage of maturation and psychological and emotional state of the performer with regard to the demands of the training programme.

Fatigue

The principle of “overloading” by gradually increasing the physical demands of training is an accepted process for improving fitness, but a coach must be conscious of the onset of fatigue during training as this may have a deleterious effect on performance and may increase the risk of injury.

Personal Training Kit

It is recommended that coaches frequently inspect gymnasts’ personal equipment. It is particularly important to check that the handguards do not show signs of deterioration, such as stretching or wear.