



4 DUTY OF CARE

The reasons why people become coaches are many and varied. Some people coach at their club and regard coaching as a rewarding hobby, others are coaching their paddlers to become elite athletes, some are making a living from coaching paddlesports. As coaches we must accept that we have a duty of care and responsibility for all those who put themselves under our care and guidance.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing concern that some coaches are giving up because they are concerned about the 'duty of care' issue! Their concern being that they might become involved in litigation.

Most of these worries and concerns are largely unfounded and as long as you are aware of the issues and your coaching follows 'current best practice' then the perceived risk of having a claim made against you should never arise.

Over the past few years many voluntary organisations have struggled to find volunteers to lead activities; this is especially true of organisations that take children and young people into challenging environments, such as scouts, guides and canoe clubs. Thankfully this situation is presently being turned around.

The government have realised that young people need to be exposed to a certain amount of risk in a controlled yet challenging environment, in order to be able to manage risk and solve problems in their own lives. Although we, as coaches should not be afraid to take people paddling we do need to be very aware of the issues involved. The bottom line is, as long as you are not negligent and follow current best practices, you have little to fear. So how do we know what these current best practices are?

All the information is on the BCU website. Coaching forums are a great way to get expert advice as well as network with other coaches. Sports Coach UK offer various workshops. Once you make the initial step, keeping up to date isn't such a daunting task – if in doubt, ask!

DUTY OF CARE

The BCU wishes to ensure that all those taking part in canoeing are able to do so, protected and kept safe from harm while they are with staff, coaches and/or volunteers. This is particularly true in respect of children and vulnerable adults.

With this in mind, the BCU recognises that they have a duty towards all those taking part in paddle-sport activity and to any club providing paddling opportunities. That is to ensure that support is provided to enable all to do so with the highest possible standards of care.

All coaches and clubs should have a clear understanding of operating within an appropriate code of ethics, aware of what their 'duty of care' is and how this relates to their position in providing activities and being responsible for others.

As an organiser of activity, there is a possibility of someone in your care being harmed. In a small percentage of cases action may be taken against you if the person decides to make a claim. This action may result in financial losses but can also harm your reputation or the reputation of your club and the BCU itself.

A good definition of 'duty of care' is:

"The duty which rests upon an individual or organisation to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the safety of any person involved in any activity for which that individual or organisation is responsible"

In an activity such as canoeing, safety and keeping people safe is all about risk assessment and minimising the risks involved at all levels of participation. While all taking part in activity have a duty to their neigh-



Photo 1 Working with children is very rewarding and involves an enhanced duty of care.

bours, in organised activity we all have a heightened duty of care and as such we should be aware that the principal risks extend to the quality of control exercised by those in charge. Trainers, coaches, referees, umpires or administrators should all take 'reasonable' steps to safeguard those directly taking part in activities and at any time they may be deemed responsible for those in their charge - in vehicles, during journeys to and from the activity, during events, team training events and camps etc.

THE COACHES' CHARTER

- 1. Coaches must respect the rights, dignity and worth of every person and treat everyone equally within the context of their sport.
- 2. Coaches must place the well-being and safety of the performer above the development of performance. They should follow all guidelines laid down by the British Canoe Union and hold appropriate insurance cover.
- 3. Coaches must develop an appropriate working relationship with performers, especially children, based on mutual trust and respect. Coaches must not exert undue influence to obtain personal benefit or reward.
- 4. Coaches must encourage and guide performers to accept responsibility for their own behaviour.
- 5. Coaches should hold up-to-date nationally recognised governing body coaching qualifications.
- 6. Coaches must ensure the activities they direct or advocate are appropriate for the age, maturity, experience and ability of the individual.
- 7. Coaches should at the outset clarify with performers, and where appropriate their parents, exactly what is expected of them and what performers are entitled to expect from their coach.
- 8. Coaches should co-operate fully with other specialists (e.g. other coaches, officials, sport scientists, doctors, physiotherapists) in the best interest of the performer.
- 9. Coaches should always promote the positive aspects of their sport (e.g. fair play) and never condone rule violations or the use of prohibited substances.
- 10. Coaches must consistently display high standards of behaviour and appearance.



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Photo 2 Involving parents and carers

This Charter is reproduced by courtesy of Sports Coach UK. For more information on guides for sports coaches visit www.sportscoachuk.org.

BCU CHILD PROTECTION AND VULNERABLE ADULTS POLICY

It is recommended that all coaches make themselves familiar with the BCU Child Protection Policy, available to download from www.bcu.org.uk.

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

By following these guidelines you will help to protect both the children in our sport and our coaches/helpers from wrongful allegations.

⌚ Avoid situations where you are alone with one child. The BCU acknowledges that occasionally there may be no alternative, for example, where a child falls ill and has to be taken home. We would stress, however, that one-to-one contact must never be allowed to occur on a regular basis. Further guidance on this is contained in the BCU Code of Ethics/Sports Coach UK Code of Conduct.

⌚ If any form of physical support is required ask the paddler's permission, explain what you are doing and why to both the child and their parents/carers.

⌚ Where possible ask parents/carers to be responsible for children in changing rooms. Always ensure that whoever supervises young people work in pairs.

⌚ Where there are mixed teams/groups away from home, they should always be accompanied by an adult male and female coach/helper.

⌚ Don't allow physically rough or sexually provocative games, or inappropriate talking or touching.

⌚ If it's necessary to do things of a personal nature for children who are young or disabled, make sure you have another adult accompanying you. Get the consent of the parent/carer and if possible the child. Let them know what you are doing and why.

⌚ Ensure that any claims of abuse by a child are taken seriously and that it is dealt with by people who know what to do.

⌚ Ensure that the nature and intensity of training does not exceed the capacity of a child's immature and growing body.

⌚ Follow the BCU guidelines for photography and video use (see reference sheet 'Guidelines for use of Photographic and Filming Equipment' from BCU website).

CLUBS

Ensure your club adheres to the BCU best practice guidelines with particular reference to:

- The BCU Code of Ethics/Sports Coach UK Code of Conduct.
- The BCU guidance on child protection and the Paddlesafe Guidelines provided.
- The requirements for coaches and helpers to have undergone disclosure.
- Publicise the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline.

Regular Child Protection workshops are held at coaching forums, and Sports Coach UK offer a Child Protection workshop which is well worth attending, details from www.sportscoachuk.org.

0800 800 500

FURTHER INFORMATION

BCU Coaching Directory

BCU Coaching Code

Sports Coach UK Code of Conduct

BCU Duty of Care Policy

BCU Harassment Policy

BCU Articles of Association and Disciplinary Procedure

Child Protection in Sport Unit

NSPCC National Training Centre

3 Gilmour Close

Beaumont Leys

Leicester LE4 1EZ

Telephone 0116 234 7278/7280

Facsimile 0116 234 0464

Email: cpsu@nspcc.org.uk

PHIL HADLEY

Phil started paddling at about ten years old with the scouts and later at school. He started paddling seriously whilst completing a BSc Hons Degree in Sports Studies at the University of Wolverhampton, and has been associated with the University ever since as a visiting lecturer. Phil has been involved in the management of outdoor centres for the past ten years or so, and uses the experience gained to advise other centres and LEAs of the best ways to manage risk and unlock the potential of the outdoors learning environment. He now works part time as a Paddlesport Development Officer for the BCU, as an Outdoor Education Consultant for the local LEA, as well as coaching paddlesports as often as time (and a young family) permit. Phil holds coaching awards in four BCU disciplines, as well as yachting, dinghy sailing, windsurfing, climbing and powerboating.

