



FLEXIBILITY TRAINING POLICY

Version 1.1



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1.Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Policy

The Independent Gymnastics Association (IGA) is committed to providing a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment for all participants in its gymnastics programs. Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is our top priority, and this policy aims to ensure that all flexibility training conducted within IGA adheres to the highest standards of safety and professionalism. This policy outlines the framework for safeguarding during flexibility training, focusing on the protection of gymnasts, the responsibilities of coaches and staff, and the collaboration with parents and guardians to create an environment free from harm.

Flexibility training plays an essential role in gymnastics, enhancing performance and preventing injury. However, flexibility exercises can place physical demands on the body, so it is vital that they are conducted with the utmost care and appropriate supervision. This policy aims to safeguard against any potential risks and to ensure the safety and well-being of every gymnast.

1.2 IGA Commitment to Safeguarding

At the IGA, we have a clear commitment to safeguarding gymnasts of all ages, particularly in areas where there is a risk of physical harm or emotional distress. This policy ensures that every person involved in gymnastics, whether as a coach, volunteer, gymnast, or parent, is equipped with the knowledge and tools to uphold safeguarding practices. We actively promote a culture of respect, trust, and accountability.

Our safeguarding practices extend beyond responding to incidents of harm to proactively preventing them through training, education, and clear protocols. Our safeguarding team works with clubs, coaches, and parents to implement the best practices and maintain a safe training environment.

1.3 Importance of Safe Flexibility Training

Flexibility training is an integral part of a gymnast's development and performance. However, it must be approached with caution to avoid potential risks, such as overstretching, muscle strain, and joint injuries. As such, it is important that flexibility exercises are tailored to the individual needs of each gymnast and are supervised by qualified coaches who understand both the physical demands of the exercises and the safeguarding requirements involved.

A gymnastic training environment must foster not only physical skill development but also the emotional well-being of gymnasts. All flexibility sessions should respect the dignity of participants, ensure they feel safe and supported, and prioritise their health.



1.4 Overview of Policy

This policy provides detailed guidelines on the safe conduct of flexibility training within the IGA. It includes the roles and responsibilities of coaches, gymnasts, and parents, the types of flexibility training, safeguarding practices, reporting mechanisms, and educational support for coaches and gymnasts. By following these guidelines, we can ensure a safe, respectful, and positive environment for all involved.

Purpose

2.1 Aims of the Policy

The main aim of this policy is to establish a comprehensive framework that promotes the safety and well-being of gymnasts during flexibility training. Specifically, this policy aims to:

- Provide clear, actionable guidelines for flexibility training that prioritise safety and well-being.
- Ensure that all stakeholders understand their responsibilities and are equipped to safeguard gymnasts.
- Establish reporting procedures for any safeguarding concerns or incidents.
- Foster an open and transparent environment where gymnasts can express their concerns and feel heard.

2.2 Preventative Measures

In addition to responding to safeguarding concerns, this policy places a strong emphasis on prevention. Preventative measures include:

- Training and certification for coaches on proper flexibility training techniques and safeguarding best practices.
- Clear protocols for monitoring gymnasts during flexibility sessions to detect any signs of discomfort, fatigue, or potential injury.
- Regular reviews of the training environment to ensure it meets safety standards.
- Developing a culture where gymnasts, coaches, and parents are educated about safe practices and their role in safeguarding.



2.3 Educating Stakeholders

The IGA believes in providing ongoing education to all stakeholders—coaches, gymnasts, parents, and volunteers—on safeguarding practices. This includes:

- Regular safeguarding training for coaches to stay current with best practices and regulations.
- Providing resources to parents to help them understand the importance of safe flexibility training and how they can support their child's training.
- Ensuring gymnasts are educated on the physical demands of flexibility training, including how to stop a stretch when it feels uncomfortable.

2.4 Ensuring Safe and Effective Flexibility Training

Flexibility training should improve a gymnast's mobility and strength without posing undue risk. This policy outlines clear practices for achieving that balance, such as ensuring warm-up routines precede flexibility exercises, gradual progression in flexibility programs, and the use of appropriate techniques to avoid injury.

2.5 Promoting a Safe and Positive Training Environment

It is essential that gymnasts feel emotionally and physically safe in every training session. This policy supports the creation of an environment where gymnasts feel encouraged, respected, and valued. This includes fostering positive relationships between coaches and gymnasts, clear communication, and maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Scope

3.1 Applicability to Coaches, Gymnasts, Parents, and Clubs

This policy applies to all individuals involved in IGA-affiliated gymnastics programs, including:

- Coaches and Volunteers: All coaches, staff members, and volunteers who are directly involved in training must adhere to the practices outlined in this policy.
- Gymnasts: All participants in flexibility training, regardless of age or skill level, are covered by this policy.
- Parents/Guardians: Parents must be informed and actively involved in the flexibility training process to support their child's safety and well-being.
- Clubs and Affiliated Organisations: IGA-affiliated clubs are required to implement this safeguarding policy at their facilities and events.



Implementation of Procedures

3.2 Responsibilities of Coaches and Volunteers

Coaches and volunteers are expected to maintain professional conduct at all times. They must:

- Be trained in both gymnastics and safeguarding best practices.
- Supervise all flexibility training sessions and ensure that gymnasts are performing exercises safely.
- Foster a supportive and respectful environment for gymnasts.
- Report any concerns or incidents in accordance with the reporting procedures outlined in this policy.

3.3 Role of Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians play a critical role in ensuring the safety of gymnasts. They should:

- Stay informed about the training program and discuss any concerns they have with coaches.
- Ensure their child is physically prepared for flexibility training.
- Provide written consent for their child to participate in flexibility exercises.
- Support their child in understanding the importance of speaking up if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe during training.

3.4 Impact on Clubs and Affiliated Organisations

IGA-affiliated clubs are responsible for implementing this policy at the local level. This includes:

- Ensuring that all staff are trained and adhere to safeguarding protocols.
- Providing resources and support to both gymnasts and parents.
- Conducting regular reviews of training practices and the environment to ensure compliance with the policy.

3.5 Coverage of Training Environments

This policy applies to all training environments, including:

- Gymnasiums: Safe training spaces with appropriate equipment.
- Competitions and Events: External events where flexibility training may take place.
- Camps and Training Clinics: Any IGA-sponsored or affiliated camp or clinic where flexibility training is involved.



Key Principles

4.1 Child-Centered Approach

Every gymnast is an individual, and their well-being is our highest priority. This principle ensures that all decisions regarding flexibility training are made with the gymnast's physical and emotional needs in mind. The gymnast should always feel valued, safe, and empowered in the training environment.

Athlete-Led Flexibility Training: Gymnasts must be given choices, and flexibility sessions should be shaped by their comfort, feedback, and physical capabilities. Coercion or pressure is not acceptable under any circumstances.

4.2 Qualified Supervision

Only coaches with appropriate qualifications and experience should lead flexibility training sessions. All coaches must be trained to recognise the signs of strain, overexertion, or discomfort and be able to adjust training to prevent harm. They should also be trained to support the mental and emotional well-being of gymnasts.

4.3 Informed Consent and Transparency

Before any flexibility training begins, gymnasts and their parents must be fully informed about the training regimen, its potential risks, and the expected outcomes. Written consent must be obtained, and all parties should have the opportunity to ask questions and receive clear answers. All parties have the right to remove consent at any time.

4.4 Open Communication

Clear and open communication between gymnasts, coaches, and parents is essential. Gymnasts should feel comfortable reporting discomfort or concerns during flexibility sessions. Coaches should maintain an open-door policy, encouraging gymnasts to speak up if they feel unsafe or uncertain about any aspect of their training.

4.5 Respect, Dignity, and Boundaries

Every gymnast has the right to be treated with respect and dignity. Coaches must maintain appropriate professional boundaries with gymnasts and ensure that training does not place gymnasts in uncomfortable or compromising situations. Emotional boundaries must also be respected to promote a positive and supportive environment.



Guidelines for Flexibility Training

5.1 Types of Stretching

Flexibility training involves various types of stretching exercises aimed at improving a gymnast's range of motion and flexibility. The following are the primary types of stretching used in gymnastics, each of which must be performed correctly and under appropriate supervision:

5.1.1 Static Stretching

Static stretching involves holding a stretch for a period of time, typically between 15 to 60 seconds. This is the most common type of flexibility training, and it is highly effective for increasing flexibility. However, it is important that static stretches are performed only after warming up the body to avoid muscle strain or injury.

5.1.2 Active Stretching

Active stretching is when a gymnast uses their own muscle strength to hold a stretch. This type of stretching is used to improve flexibility without overloading the muscle. It should only be performed once a gymnast has a sufficient base level of flexibility and should be gradually integrated into their training.

5.1.3 Passive Stretching

Passive stretching involves using external forces, such as a coach's assistance or gravity, to help stretch a muscle. This can be beneficial but should be done gently and with proper technique. Coaches must ensure that passive stretches are performed within the gymnast's comfort level to prevent injury. The gymnast can remove consent for passive stretch at any time. Coaches should look for signs of discomfort and stop passive stretching when signs of discomfort become clear. Passive stretching should be used to assist a gymnast with alignment and stretching effectively not to push a gymnast past their comfort zones.

5.1.4 Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF) Stretching

PNF stretching involves both stretching and contracting the muscle group being targeted. It is a highly effective technique for increasing flexibility but requires careful instruction and monitoring. PNF should only be performed by gymnasts who have been taught the technique and are under the guidance of a qualified coach. PNF techniques are only recommended for gymnasts over the age of 12 unless otherwise advised by a medical professional.

5.1.5 Dynamic Stretching — Involves active movements of muscles to bring them through their full range of motion. Best used in warm-ups to increase muscle temperature and decrease injury risk.



5.2 Best Practices for Safe Flexibility Training

5.2.1 Warm-Up and Cool-Down Protocols

Before any flexibility training, gymnasts should perform a proper warm-up to prepare their muscles and joints for the demands of stretching. A good warm-up will increase blood flow, raise the body temperature, and reduce the risk of injury. Similarly, flexibility sessions should always end with a cool-down period to gradually bring the body back to a resting state and reduce muscle tightness.

5.2.2 Tailored Flexibility Programs

Flexibility training should be individualised to meet the unique needs of each gymnast. Factors such as age, flexibility level, injury history, and training goals must be considered when designing flexibility programs. Coaches should develop progression plans and gradually increase the intensity and duration of stretches to avoid overexertion.

5.2.3 Age-Appropriate Flexibility Guidelines

"Training intensity, methods, and goals must be adapted based on the gymnast's developmental stage. Young gymnasts should focus more on mobility, technique, and gradual progression rather than extreme ranges of motion."

5.2.4 Ongoing Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms

"Coaches should record progress and gymnast feedback in flexibility logs. Gymnasts should be invited to reflect on how sessions feel physically and emotionally, and sessions should be adjusted accordingly."

5.2.3 Monitoring Progress and Adjusting Training

Coaches should regularly assess each gymnast's flexibility and adjust the training program as needed. Regular assessments allow coaches to identify any imbalances or limitations in flexibility that may require modification of the training approach. Feedback from gymnasts should also be taken into account, particularly regarding any discomfort or pain during stretches.

5.3 Importance of Rest and Recovery

It is essential for gymnasts to allow adequate rest and recovery time between flexibility training sessions. Overtraining or excessive flexibility exercises can lead to muscle fatigue, strains, or more serious injuries. Coaches must ensure that gymnasts have sufficient recovery time and that training loads are appropriately managed.



5.4 Autonomy in Training

While coaches provide guidance, gymnasts should be encouraged to listen to their bodies and take responsibility for their own training. Flexibility exercises should never be forced, and gymnasts must have the autonomy to stop a stretch or practice if they feel discomfort or strain. Coaches must foster an environment where gymnasts feel empowered to speak up about their physical limits. Coaches must also be vigilant for signs of distress or discomfort and must stop stretching exercises to address this to ensure the gymnast is comfortable continuing the exercise.

5.5 Peer-Assisted Stretching Guidelines

In some training environments, gymnasts may work together to assist each other with stretches. Peer-assisted stretching can be helpful, but it must be done under supervision and with clear guidelines. Gymnasts should never push each other beyond their individual limits, and all stretching should remain respectful and within safe boundaries. Peer-assisted stretching must always be same-gender, closely supervised, and opt-in only. Gymnasts must be educated on maintaining boundaries.

5.6 Contraindications for Flexibility Training

Flexibility training should be avoided if a gymnast is injured, in pain, emotionally distressed, or experiencing significant fatigue. Coaches must be alert to these signs and adapt training accordingly.

Safeguarding Measures

6.1 Qualified Coaches and Instructors

To ensure that flexibility training is safe and effective, all coaches and instructors involved must be qualified in both gymnastics and safeguarding practices. This includes ongoing professional development and certification in areas such as injury prevention, anatomy, and effective coaching strategies. Coaches should also be trained to recognise signs of physical discomfort or emotional distress in gymnasts.

At least two adults must be present at all flexibility training sessions, one of whom must be a qualified coach with up-to-date safeguarding and flexibility-specific training.

This requirement ensures the physical safety, emotional welfare, and accountability of both gymnasts and staff during potentially sensitive or physically demanding sessions.

Key supervision principles include:

- Qualified Coach:
- The lead coach must hold a current, recognised coaching qualification appropriate to the gymnasts' level and discipline, and must have completed training on safe flexibility practices.
- Second Adult Presence:



- The second adult may be another qualified coach, a welfare officer, or a staff member with safeguarding training. This adult plays a supporting role, helps monitor interactions, and ensures transparency and safety in line with best safeguarding practices.
- Visibility & Accountability:
 - Sessions must take place in open or observable spaces, such as within a shared gym area or a room with clear viewing panels. Closed or isolated settings are not permitted.
- Peer Stretching Oversight:
 - If peer-assisted flexibility exercises are used, increased supervision is required to ensure gymnasts understand appropriate boundaries and give consent freely.
- Welfare & Reporting:
 - The presence of two adults reduces the risk of misconduct or misinterpretation and supports immediate response if a gymnast experiences discomfort, distress, or injury.
- Low Ratio Environments:
 - For 1:1 flexibility coaching, a second adult must always be in the room or within direct sight and hearing range. This includes private coaching scenarios or additional conditioning work.

6.2 Safe and Respectful Training Environment

All training sessions must be conducted in a safe and respectful environment, free from any form of abuse, bullying, or harassment. Coaches are responsible for creating a positive atmosphere that encourages open communication, mutual respect, and teamwork. Training spaces must be well-equipped, clean, and designed to prevent injuries.

6.3 Code of Conduct and Behavior Expectations

A clear code of conduct should be in place, outlining expected behaviors for all individuals involved in gymnastics training. This code should include guidelines for respectful behavior, physical boundaries, appropriate communication, and the responsibility of coaches, gymnasts, and parents to maintain a safe and supportive environment. All participants must sign this code of conduct to demonstrate their understanding and agreement.

Techniques involving excessive force, bouncing, or the coach placing their full body weight on a gymnast are strictly prohibited. Coaches should also receive training in trauma-informed care to recognise signs of distress and respond with sensitivity and support.



6.4 Reporting Mechanisms

There must be clear and accessible reporting mechanisms for any safeguarding concerns, whether they relate to the physical or emotional well-being of gymnasts. Coaches, gymnasts, and parents should know how to report any issues of concern, and the IGA should ensure that all reports are handled confidentially and with respect for all parties involved.

6.5 Clear Boundaries During Training

Maintaining clear physical and emotional boundaries is crucial in gymnastics. Coaches must never touch gymnasts without their consent, and any necessary physical adjustments must be done in a professional, appropriate manner. Emotional boundaries should also be respected to ensure that gymnasts feel safe and supported at all times.

6.6 Maintaining Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality must be maintained at all times, particularly when dealing with sensitive information or safeguarding concerns. Any personal details about a gymnast's health, history, or family circumstances should be kept private and only shared with relevant staff members as necessary. Breaches of confidentiality must be taken seriously and addressed accordingly.

Education & Training

7.1 Ongoing Coach Education and Development

Coaches must participate in ongoing education to stay current with developments in both gymnastics training and safeguarding practices. This includes attending regular workshops, courses, and certifications to maintain a high level of competence in both technical skills and safeguarding protocols.

7.2 Engaging Parents and Guardians in Safeguarding Practices

Parents and guardians must be informed and engaged in safeguarding practices. This includes providing educational materials that outline the importance of safe training and what parents should look for in terms of healthy physical and emotional development. They should also be informed about the types of flexibility exercises and potential risks involved.

7.3 Training on Physical and Emotional Safety in Flexibility

Gymnasts, coaches, and parents should receive training on both the physical and emotional aspects of flexibility training. This includes understanding the importance of proper warm-ups and cool-downs, the risks associated with overtraining, and the need for open communication regarding any physical discomfort.

Mental well-being checks should be conducted regularly, and signs of overtraining or emotional fatigue should be considered in training adjustments.



7.4 Educational Materials for Gymnasts and Families

IGA will provide educational materials, including posters, and online training, to help gymnasts and their families understand safe flexibility training practices. These resources should be easily accessible and provide clear guidance on how to train safely and protect oneself from injury.

Develop a digital platform for logging flexibility training consent, injury tracking, and education completion. This will need to be inline with Data Protection Regulations.

7.5 Importance of Continuous Improvement

We recognise that safeguarding is a continuously evolving process, and it is essential to remain proactive in assessing and improving our practices. Feedback from gymnasts, coaches, and parents is critical in identifying areas for improvement, and regular policy reviews ensure that the IGA stays up-to-date with the latest safety standards and best practices.

Review & Monitoring

8.1 Annual Policy Review

This safeguarding policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains current and aligned with best practices in both gymnastics and safeguarding. Any necessary revisions will be made based on new research, feedback from stakeholders, or changes in relevant laws and regulations.

8.2 Stakeholder Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Feedback from coaches, gymnasts, parents, and other stakeholders is a vital part of the review process. The IGA will regularly seek input from all involved parties to understand how the policy is working and where improvements may be necessary. Surveys, meetings, and open forums are some of the tools used to gather this feedback.

8.3 Policy Updates and Revisions

Any updates or revisions to the safeguarding policy will be communicated clearly to all stakeholders. These updates will be incorporated into coaching training, parent meetings, and gymnasts' educational materials.



8.4 Compliance Monitoring

Compliance with this safeguarding policy will be monitored regularly to ensure that all clubs and coaches are adhering to the outlined practices. Any violations will be addressed promptly, and corrective actions will be taken where necessary.

8.5 Reporting and Accountability for Non-Compliance

There will be clear procedures for reporting any non-compliance with the safeguarding policy. Anyone found to be in violation of the policy will be held accountable, and appropriate disciplinary actions will be taken in line with the severity of the issue.

Contact Information

9.1 IGA Safeguarding Team Contacts

Email: safeguarding@igauk.com

9.3 IGA Support Resources

Office Number: 0345 319 7000

Email: info@igauk.com

9.4 External Agencies and Contacts

In cases where the issue cannot be resolved within the IGA, external agencies, such as local child protection services, may be contacted. Contact details for these agencies will be made available to all coaches, gymnasts, and parents.

Child Protection Services (UK)

NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)

- Website: www.nspcc.org.uk
- Helpline (for adults worried about a child): 0808 800 5000
- Childline (for children and young people): 0800 1111 (24/7, free)
- Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

Each Local Authority in England has a designated officer responsible for managing safeguarding concerns involving professionals working with children.

- Contact: Look up your local LADO via your Local Authority's website or council safeguarding page.
- Example: If in Birmingham, search "Birmingham LADO contact" online.



The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP)

For concerns relating to online abuse or exploitation.

- Website: www.ceop.police.uk
- Reporting tool: Report a concern

Police (Emergency and Non-Emergency)

- Emergency: 999
- Non-Emergency: 101
- For immediate danger to a child or vulnerable adult.

UK Government — Report Child Abuse

- Website: www.gov.uk/report-child-abuse
- Provides guidance and a search tool to report child abuse directly to local authorities.

Child Safeguarding in Sport (CPSU)

Run by the NSPCC, this service offers advice on safeguarding within sports environments.

- Website: thecpsu.org.uk
- Email: cpsu@nspcc.org.uk