



## Level 2 Certificate in Fitness Instructing:

Health, safety and welfare  
In a gym environment

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## Health, safety and welfare in a gym environment

### Introduction

This unit explores how to maintain health, safety and client welfare in a fitness environment, looking at relevant policies and procedures relating to these areas. It is designed to give health and fitness professionals an understanding of the requirements so they are able to effectively carry out their role within the industry.

### Understanding emergency procedures in a fitness environment

In this section, we will look at the different types of emergency that may occur in a fitness environment. We will also look at the roles and responsibilities different parties may play during such emergencies and how best to react in an emergency situation.

### Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- identify different types of emergency that may occur in a fitness environment
- describe the roles and responsibilities of both staff and external services during an emergency
- describe internal accident and emergency procedures
- describe how to contact emergency services
- describe how to report the incident or accident in an emergency
- list the instructions to be given to both internal staff and external services
- list the different types of emergency that may occur in a fitness environment.

There are many potential emergency situations that could arise during a fitness instructor's shift. It is important to be aware of the potential hazards in order to limit their likelihood. In addition, it is important to have knowledge of and be prepared for any emergency situation.

## Medical emergencies

In today's fitness environments, more participants are attending facilities with pre-existing medical conditions. Some participants with pre-existing medical conditions are actively encouraged by their GP to begin a fitness regimen. Common medical conditions that may be encountered include:

- hypertension - high blood pressure
- CHD - coronary heart disease (known and unknown to the individual)
- cancer - in remission
- recovery from major and minor surgical operations
- musculoskeletal injuries
- obesity
- diabetes mellitus.

With the increase in the number of participants with pre existing medical conditions comes the increased risk of a medical emergency happening during an exercise session. Possible medical emergencies and their symptoms are as follows:

- angina - chest pain, chest tightness when performing physical activity
- heart attack - chest tightening, pain spreading to shoulders, neck and arms
- asthma attack - severe wheezing and coughing, rapid breathing, anxiety and panic
- anaphylactic shock - itching, red raised blotchy skin, swelling and shortness of breath
- transient ischaemic attack (TIA) or minor stroke - sudden numbness, weakness to face, arm or leg, especially to one side of the body, sudden confusion or difficulty speaking, trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance and co-ordination
- hypoglycaemic episode - hunger, shakiness, nervousness, sweating, dizziness and weakness.

If any of the above occurs to a participant, dial 999, call for an ambulance and follow the facility's emergency procedures.

## Accidents

Fitness instructors should be familiar and confident with the equipment available on the gym floor, swimming pool, in a studio or outdoors. Instructors should have learnt how to use the equipment in a safe and effective manner and will also have taught countless participants how to use this equipment safely. This does not mean, however, that all instructors will always follow this advice and accidents often happen when least expected. In any facility with equipment, machinery and unsupervised or supervised exercise sessions, the potential for an accident to happen is present. Some of the more common accidents include:

- bruising or breaking of limbs caused by incorrect use of equipment
- fainting and banging the head caused by working at the incorrect intensity
- strains and sprains caused by incorrect use of equipment or over exertion

- heat exhaustion caused by dehydration, temperature or incorrect clothing
- cuts
- muscle spasms.

Even if precautions are taken to avoid incidents, there remains the potential for countless accidents to occur in any fitness environment. Fitness instructors need to be vigilant when supervising their areas and when an accident does occur, instructors must keep calm and follow the facility's emergency procedures.

Other emergency situations that could occur are:

- fire
- suspected bomb
- missing person
- chemical emergency (eg, in pools and plant rooms).

While these are relatively uncommon in the fitness industry, every fitness instructor needs to be aware of these potential hazards and the emergency procedures to follow if such a situation does arise. With the increase in families joining fitness facilities, the potential for missing persons (specifically children) is increasing.

## The roles and responsibilities of staff and external services during an emergency

### **General manager**

The general manager has overall responsibility for the facility on a day-to-day basis. He or she is also responsible for the implementation and enforcement of all accident and emergency procedures.

Should an accident or emergency situation arise, the general manager should be informed of the situation immediately. He or she has the duty to ensure that all members of staff follow the company's emergency procedures correctly. This may include calling the relevant emergency services, looking after the patient, looking after any other members of the public affected by the situation, evacuating the building and making appropriate announcements, using the public address system if necessary.

### **Duty manager**

The duty managers are the facility's managers at any given time when they are on shift. They will deal with the day-to-day management issues, such as member complaints, operational issues and staff issues. They will also have overall responsibility for the facility at times when the general manager is absent.

During an emergency situation, the duty manager will be informed of the situation and will follow the company's accident and emergency procedures correctly. If the general manager is absent, the duty manager will have overall responsibility for the situation and will need to ensure that all members of staff follow the emergency procedures.

### **First-aid personnel**

In any facility, it is a requirement to have first-aid qualified personnel in the building in order to deal with any accident or emergency situations that may arise. There is a range of different first-aid qualifications that permit certain first-aid procedures to be performed, including administering CPR and the use of defibrillators. A list of first-aid qualified staff and their contact details should be kept in the facility.

During an accident and emergency situation, it is the responsibility of first-aid qualified personnel to administer first-aid to the patient. They must follow the appropriate protocols according to their role and first-aid qualification. If they are not qualified to use a defibrillator, they should pass this responsibility on to a suitably qualified first-aider.

### **Local GP surgery**

If the accident is not serious but the patient requires medical attention, a first-aider or member of staff designated by the general manager may accompany the patient to their local GP surgery for medical attention by a doctor or practice nurse. Alternatively, the patient may choose to take themselves to their own GP in their own time.

## **Emergency services**

The three key emergency services and their responsibilities are:

- fire brigade - attends fires, floods, chemical emergencies, trapped persons, etc.
- ambulance service - saves lives and provides care and treatment to anyone injured at the scene or if there is a risk of anyone becoming injured
- police - may move people to a safe place, keep people away from the scene and co—ordinate the activities of the other emergency services.

These emergency services can be contacted by dialling 999, whereupon the caller will be asked which emergency service is required. It is the responsibility of the emergency services to respond to the situation as quickly as possible and to prevent further harm, injury or damage to persons and property.

## **Managing the accident or emergency situation**

To manage an emergency situation effectively, those responsible should remain calm. Remaining calm is the only way to be able to stay focused on the steps that are needed. The responsible instructor should be able to help any injured or ill individuals until the arrival of the qualified first-aider, or be able to contact the emergency services and explain the situation in a calm and effective manner so they can help administer first-aid over the phone, if necessary.

It is also important that fitness instructors familiarise themselves with their organisation's health and safety manual, which will contain the appropriate accident and emergency procedures. Any updates to the manual will be communicated to all instructors by a member of staff and it is important to review the manual regularly to ensure familiarity with these procedures.

All workplaces should have an accident/incident record book. Any accidents or injuries must be recorded in this book, along with details of any first-aid that was administered, however small or insignificant. This serves as a record of the incident for reference, should the individual suffer additional complications at a later time, and helps protect instructors and the organisation if any legal action is taken by the individual at a later date.

To recap: whomever is the first on the scene at any incident must follow the organisation's accident and emergency procedures correctly. This may involve contacting the duty manager, contacting a qualified first-aider and/or calling the emergency services. It is important to remain calm, ensure any instructions or information that is provided is clear and easily understood and that any instructions given are recorded in the accident report book after the emergency is over.

## **Maintaining the safety of individuals in an emergency, including children, older people and disabled people**

As a fitness instructor, it is important to be aware of boundaries of competence and capability in an emergency situation. To administer first-aid at work, one must hold a recognised first-aid at work qualification. In addition to this, there are qualifications that enable individuals to administer CPR, use a defibrillator and administer first-aid to special population groups, such as children. When

attending to an accident or incident, one should only operate within the limits of personal competence and qualifications. Leave the administration of first-aid to qualified personnel only.

If first on the scene at an accident, ensure that the type of injury or illness is identified, as this is essential for giving the correct information to emergency responders. Priorities should be to assess the situation without putting oneself in any danger, making sure the area and the casualty are safe, assessing the casualty and sending for help immediately. The first responder will need to decide whether the casualty requires the help of a qualified first-aider or the emergency services. If the casualty is unconscious, having difficulty breathing or appears to have a serious injury, it is important to call the emergency services without delay.

If the casualty is a child or disabled person, it is important to contact their parents/guardians, as they are legally responsible for the individual and are required to give their consent for any treatment or action taken in an emergency situation. If the parent or guardian is not present at the scene and the participant's condition is considered serious, it is important that they are called immediately to inform them of the situation and to gain their consent for treatment. If it is a minor incident (eg, a small graze), it should be recorded in the incident book, and the parent or guardian should be told about the incident and any treatment given by qualified personnel. Ask the parent or guardian to sign the record book, acknowledging the incident and confirming that they have consented to the treatment given.

In any accident or emergency situation, it is vital to provide comfort and reassurance to the casualty. This can be verbally (eg, using appropriate language in a calm manner) or physically (eg, holding the casualty until assistance arrives). There are situations where some physical contact may be deemed inappropriate such as when dealing with children and disabled persons. If the casualty does not understand English or has a learning difficulty, then it is important to try to ensure that the casualty is able to understand what is being said as well as their situation.

It is also important, where possible, to be aware of any medical issues, including medications or mobility restrictions, that may affect the casualty's immediate safety.

# Health and safety in a fitness environment

## Introduction

In this section, we will be looking at why health and safety is important in a fitness environment, the legal and regulatory requirements for health and safety relevant to working in the fitness environment and key individuals' roles and responsibilities relating to the fitness organisation's health and safety policies and procedures.

## Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- outline why health and safety is important in a fitness environment
- identify the legal and regulatory requirements for health and safety in a fitness environment
- describe the duty of care and professional role boundaries in relation to special population groups
- describe the typical roles and responsibilities for health and safety in a fitness environment
- describe security procedures that may apply in a fitness environment
- describe the key health and safety documents relevant to the fitness environment.

## Health and safety overview

It is the fitness instructor's responsibility to ensure that health and safety is treated as a priority within the fitness environment, regardless of which area, including: indoors, outdoors, fitness suite, studio and pool areas.

Not only should the fitness instructor be aware of the potential hazards in the fitness environment and what to do in the case of an accident or emergency, but they also have a responsibility to participants to ensure a safe working environment.

A fitness instructor is responsible for doing their utmost to ensure that any potential risks of an incident occurring are minimised. This may include checking equipment is well maintained and in good working order, ensuring pathways are kept clear from obstructions, keeping the wet side areas of a pool as clean and dry as possible and monitoring participants exercise techniques to avoid injury and being observant around the pool area.

## **The legal and regulatory requirements for health and safety relevant to working in a fitness environment**

There are several legal and regulatory requirements specific to your role as a fitness instructor that you need to be aware of, as detailed below.

### **1. Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974**

This act is the basis of British health and safety law and sets out the general duties that employers have towards their employees and members of the public, as well as those employees have to themselves and each other relating to health and safety. The responsibilities can be summarised in the following two sentences:

**Employer's responsibility** - To ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all its employees.

**Employee's responsibility** - To take reasonable care of themselves in the workplace and to be mindful of the effects of their acts and omissions.

### **2. Register of Exercise Professionals' (REPs') code of ethical conduct**

All fitness instructors who are REPS' qualified and are REPS' members sign up to the code of ethical conduct. Its aim is to establish, publicise and maintain industry standards and to inform and protect members of the public and customers using the services of exercise professionals. In short, it sets the industry standards. There are five principles relating to the code:

Principle 1 - Rights

Principle 2 - Relationships

Principle 3 - Personal responsibilities

Principle 4 - Professional standards

Principle 5 - Safe working practices

The full version of this code can be found on the REPS' website, [www.exerciseregister.org](http://www.exerciseregister.org).

Note: Also see the section 'Know how to support clients who take part in physical activity' in this manual.

### **3. Criminal Records Bureau — CRB checks**

The Criminal Records Bureau provides access to criminal records and other relevant information to employers. The results of the checks carried out by CRB helps employers to make more informed decisions when recruiting people to work with children and vulnerable populations. As a fitness instructor who may work with children and vulnerable adults, an employer will carry out a CRB check.

## **The duty of care and professional boundaries of a fitness instructor that apply in relation to special population groups**

### **1. REPS'**

As mentioned above, REPs' registered fitness instructors are bound by the REPs' code of ethical conduct relating to all members of the public, including special population groups.

### **2. Qualifications**

Fitness instructors are only allowed to work within the limits of their individual qualifications and competence. As a level 2 fitness instructor, the qualification is permissible for work with apparently healthy adults. To work with specific population groups such as children, older adults, ante and post-natal women and disabled participants, an instructor must have a REPs' level 3 qualification. Without this, the instructor should refer anyone from the special population groups to an appropriately qualified fitness instructor or personal trainer. The level 2 fitness instructor qualification will give the instructor an awareness of the special population groups and this should equip the instructor with sufficient knowledge to judge whether the session being delivered is suitable for any participant who falls into one of those groups.

### **3. Informed consent**

Informed consent is a legal procedure to ensure that the participant knows the risks involved in any assessment, exercise or treatment they are about to perform or undergo. Informed consent includes informing the participant of the nature of what is about to happen, possible alternatives and any potential risks and benefits. For the informed consent to be deemed valid, the client must be considered competent and the consent given voluntarily.

### **4. Informed consent by an appropriate adult, parent or guardian**

For fitness professionals working within a fitness environment, there are many situations that require the consent of an individual (eg, fitness assessment, exercise programme or treatment after an accident). In the majority of cases, the participant is able to provide their own informed consent. However, there are some situations in which the participant is deemed not to be competent, including:

- children under the age of 16
- participants with learning difficulties
- participants with dementia
- participants suffering from mental ill health.

In these circumstances, it is the fitness instructor's duty to obtain informed consent from the participant's parent, guardian or a designated appropriate adult (eg, family member or social/health care provider).

### **5. Confidentiality**

There are several situations in which a fitness instructor is in possession of confidential information relating to participants. This can include personal details, medical information, personal information relating to lifestyle or family matters. Instructors are duty bound to not share this data but to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the participant and show the utmost discretion in dealing with confidential matters.

## **Key individuals responsible for health and safety in a fitness organisation and their roles**

### **General manager**

He or she has overall responsibility for the facility and is responsible for ensuring that policies and procedures are implemented and followed.

### **Duty manager**

He or she may have overall responsibility for the facility in the absence of the general manager, is responsible for ensuring that policies and procedures are followed and for maintaining the day-to-day running of the facility.

### **'First—aid at work' qualified staff**

This individual can administer first-aid within the limitations of their qualifications and competence. CPR qualified staff administer CPR if required; they are first-aid trained.

### **Defibrillator-qualified staff**

This individual is qualified to use a defibrillator; they may also be first-aid qualified.

### **All on-duty staff**

All staff must ensure that all policies and procedures are adhered to and executed accordingly.

### **Health and safety officer**

He or she has specific responsibility for all health and safety matters, including risk assessments and compiling and implementing health and safety policies and procedures.

**Director of the company** He or she is ultimately responsible for health and safety within the organisation. If any legal proceedings are taken as a result of health and safety issues, he or she would be ultimately liable.

## **Security procedures in a fitness environment**

There are many different types of security procedure in most fitness environments that serve to protect members of staff, the public and the facility. Some of these measures include:

### **Opening and closing the facility**

Every fitness facility will have strict procedures to follow when opening and closing. This will include turning machinery on and off, checking lighting, equipment and alarms, ensuring the facility is empty of staff and participants and locking up.

### **Monitoring entry and exit**

Most facilities will have a reception area where the receptionists can monitor members of the public entering and leaving the facility. Some facilities will have a swipe card system to gain access to the facility, some will manually record names of participants and visitors and some will have a gated entry system. This serves several purposes:

- It ensures that if there were an evacuation of the building, there would be a record of who or at least how many people were in the facility so that the emergency services can identify if anyone is left in the building.
- It may help in logging participants attending group classes or pre-booked activities to ensure that classes are not overcrowded.
- It can prevent intruders from entering the premises.

### **Fire and evacuation procedures**

Every facility will have a fire and evacuation policy and procedure. All members of staff are required to know these procedures. These procedures will be practised regularly to ensure that they are adhered to by all on-duty staff.

### **Roll call procedures**

In the event of an emergency evacuation of the facility, there will be a roll call at the agreed meeting point to ensure that no one has been left or is trapped in the building. These roll calls will be practised regularly to ensure all on-duty staff are aware of the procedure and can perform their duties as quickly and as safely as possible.

### **Chemical spillage procedures**

Where there is a risk of chemical spillages occurring in a facility (eg, in a pool or plant room), there will be strict health and safety guidelines, policies and procedures that will need to be adhered to by all on-duty staff. These will vary between workplaces, but will be contained in the organisation's health and safety manual and must be adhered to by all on-duty staff.

### **Fire alarm testing**

All fire alarms in any business premises are tested regularly to ensure that they are functioning correctly. An announcement will be made prior to the test that the fire alarms will sound at a certain time but that it is only a test and individuals within the facility do not need to evacuate the building.

## **What are the key health and safety documents relevant in a fitness environment?**

### **First-aid book**

This is a quick reference guide to emergency first-aid and is most likely kept in or near the first-aid box. It covers how to deal with most incidents, including asthma attacks, bleeding, broken bones, burns, choking, CPR and diabetes.

### **Accident recording book**

This is required under UK health and safety legislation. It is important to be aware of where this book is kept. It is provided to record accident information and will be part of the organisation's management policy on health and safety. It is a legal requirement that any workplace must keep records of any reportable injury, disease or dangerous occurrence. When reporting an incident, it should be recorded in the accident record book with the following details:

- date and method of reporting
- date, time and place of the incident
- personal details of all persons involved
- brief description of the nature of the event.

All records are required to be kept for a minimum of three years from the date on which the report was made.

### **Accident report forms**

If your workplace does not keep an accident recording book on site, the legal responsibility remains the same - all incidents must be reported as above. In this situation, however, it is a requirement to complete an accident report form that will either be filed on site or to be sent to the person responsible for the organisation's health and safety implementation, who may be, in the case of larger organisations, at the company's head office. All instructors are responsible for ensuring that they know the process and procedures for reporting an incident.

Some accident report forms may be specific to an incident, including:

- report of an injury or dangerous occurrence
- report of a case of disease.

In these situations, it is essential to ensure that the correct accident report form is completed.

### **Manufacturer's guidelines on safe use and maintenance of equipment**

Fitness environments usually have a large array of technical and complex fitness equipment for participants to use during exercise. All such equipment will come with a manual detailing the manufacturer's guidelines on how to assemble the equipment, how to use the equipment correctly and any maintenance required to keep the equipment in safe working order. These documents will be filed and kept safe within the facility, and instructors should be aware of where they are kept and be familiar with the content. Fitness instructors are often required to carry out basic maintenance on fitness machines within the fitness environment as part of their roles and responsibilities. This is usually performed on a regular basis and is scheduled according to the manufacturer's guidelines. In some larger establishments, a senior instructor or manager may have

the sole responsibility of equipment maintenance. Instructors should be familiar with their employer's processes and procedures in this regard.

### **Health and safety policies and procedures manual in line with the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974**

Employers are legally required to provide a written health and safety document that includes the company's policy on health and safety in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974. This manual will be updated regularly in line with legislation and changes in the workplace but will always include the following information:

- the company's health and safety statement
- the management organisation and structure for health and safety matters
- the health and safety responsibilities of individuals
- health and safety rules relating to working practices, procedures and accompanying guidance expected to be kept by staff, visitors and any contractors that might enter the workplace
- risk-assessment procedures, including a set of generic risk assessments
- accident reporting and disease reporting procedures.

The documents listed above will be tailored to the company's needs and requirements. Policies and procedures will be different in every workplace - for instance, a fitness environment with a swimming pool is likely to have a different set of policies than one without, as employees will be expected to carry out different tasks.

# How to control risks in a fitness environment

## Introduction

While the fitness environment is considered a place of leisure or enjoyment for the majority of participants, it is also an environment with many potential hazards. In this section, we look at the different areas of the fitness environment and the potential hazards the fitness instructor needs to be aware of in order to help to prevent them.

## Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- identify hazards and understand how to control risks in a fitness environment in relation to the facilities, equipment, working practices, client behaviour, security and hygiene
- describe how to risk-assess the types of possible hazard in a fitness environment
- describe how to control the risks associated with hazards in a fitness environment
- identify the appropriate person to contact within a fitness organisation when hazards and risks cannot be controlled personally.

## The potential hazards within a fitness environment

### 1. Facilities

#### Wet side

Water is a hazard, particularly where the pool has varying depths. Instructors need to be aware of the different hazards of the wet side, including:

- pH-testing of the water to stop the water becoming too acidic and causing eye injury
- correct pool temperature
- the changes in water depth (i.e. shallow and deep areas and how they are managed)
- the use of electrical equipment in wet areas.

#### Space within the environment

There should be sufficient space within the facility and in the different environments to ensure that activities can be performed safely. Be aware of possible obstructions such as pillars that people might walk into or that might obstruct their view of visual instructions. Clients' clothing, water bottles and other personal belongings can also cause obstructions if left lying around the environment. Clients should be encouraged to store, or leave, their personal belongings in the appropriate place so as to minimise the risks of any accidents.

### **Entry and exits**

Instructors must be aware of all the entry and exit points within the facility in case of an emergency. Ensure that they are kept clear at all times to allow immediate access or exit in the event of an emergency.

### **Hydration stations**

Instructors must be aware of where the hydration stations are in the facility and inform clients accordingly. Keep hydration stations clean and full at all times and encourage clients to drink throughout their session in order to avoid dehydration. Ensure areas around the stations are kept clean and dry - particularly the floor, to avoid clients slipping and falling.

## **2. Working practices within facilities**

The organisation should have a manual of operational procedures that all instructors are required to follow. Self-employed instructors are still required to adhere to the organisation's policies and procedures while on the premises.

### **Operational procedures**

Operational procedures are implemented to protect everyone within the fitness environment, including staff, clients and visitors. Failure to understand and follow the operating procedures can create hazards. Instructors should be aware of the organisation's operational procedures and how to comply with them. Failure to follow the operating procedures regarding the opening and closing of the facility could cause a potential fire hazard or security hazard.

### **Manual handling and lifting**

It is important to ensure that both the fitness instructor and clients handle and lift all equipment in the exercise environment in a safe and effective manner. Incorrect handling and lifting of any equipment, such as free weights, portable equipment and electrical equipment, has the potential to cause serious injury.

## **3. Equipment**

Fitness instructors should ensure that clients use the equipment appropriately for their own safety and that of others. Some general things to watch out for include:

- the incorrect machine set up
- incorrect size equipment for the client (eg, correct size for children to use safely)
- the weight stack falling unexpectedly during an exercise
- poor or uncontrolled exercise technique
- the use of inappropriate resistance and loss of exercise technique
- the use of collars on free weights
- of the presence of hazards that may hamper the operation of equipment (eg, water bottles, towels and bags)
- free weights are not returned to racks.

### **Cardiovascular machines**

Instructors should be familiar with the machines available within the facility and the hazards involved if they are not in good working order. Some general things to watch out for are:

- treadmill - loose or worn belt
- rower - damaged or worn cables and foot straps
- bike - damaged or worn foot straps.

Note: If the CV machine is powered by electricity, it is also important to watch out for loose connections and that the cable is not causing a trip hazard.

### **Resistance machines**

It is important to be familiar with the machines available within the facility and the hazards involved if they are not in good working order. Some general things to watch out for are:

- damaged or worn cables
- worn seats or pads
- worn or damaged adjustment pins
- stiff, jerky machine action.

### **Free weights**

Instructors should be familiar with the different free weights available within the facility and the hazards involved if they are not in good working order. Some general things to watch out for are:

- worn, loose or broken collars
- worn or broken benches
- unstable barbell or dumbbell racks
- weights left out after use.

### **Portable equipment**

All portable equipment should be checked to ensure that it is fit for purpose and safe to use, including the following types:

- gym - elastic exercise bands, dumbbells, Swiss balls, BOSU, foam rollers, kettlebells
- studio - elastic exercise bands, dumbbells, Swiss balls, BOSU, steps, skipping ropes
- water-based - paddles, noodles, jog belts, hand weights, ankle weights, mitts, kick boards.

Note: Any of the above items has the potential to cause an injury or accident if not properly managed.

### **Storage of equipment after use**

All equipment must be stored safely in the designated areas after use and, where appropriate, in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines. Remember that any equipment not stored correctly has the potential to cause injury.

### **Specific safety checks**

Regular safety checks should take place according to the manufacturer's guidelines and the organisation's requirements. These checks may include the facility and equipment. How often checks are carried out may vary between organisations. Usually checks are made against a checklist, which will be signed by the person carrying out the check and passed on to the duty manager, who will take any necessary action.

### **Reporting mechanisms**

There should be a reporting mechanism for the removal of damaged, faulty or out-of-order equipment. An 'out of order' sign should be clearly displayed or the machine/equipment should be removed from the environment.

### **Electrical equipment by poolside and wet areas**

All electrical equipment installed in wet areas should comply with health and safety regulations. The correct equipment leads should be used, and these must be appropriately insulated. Cables, plugs and electrical connections leading into the wet area should be managed according to the manufacturer's health and safety guidelines. Failure to correctly operate electrical equipment in wet areas could lead to a severe and potentially fatal incident, such as an electric shock.

## **4. Client behaviour**

Failure to ensure that clients behave appropriately within an exercise session could lead to many different hazards. As a fitness instructor, it is important to ensure that any etiquette policies are followed by all clients. Consider the following:

- Failure to implement an etiquette policy, such as participants not wiping the floor under their bikes after a spin class, could lead to another participant slipping and hurting themselves.
- The use of mobile phones could distract another participant from what they are doing, causing them to injure themselves.

Note: Clients who are putting themselves and others at risk and do not respond to a request made by a member of staff should be asked to leave the facility.

### **Young adults and children**

While we want to encourage young adults (teenagers) and children to use our facilities, it is important to ensure that they are using the facilities in a safe and effective manner in order to prevent them hurting themselves or others.

In a fitness environment, young adults and children may wish to push themselves harder than the fitness instructor has recommended. This can cause long-term harm to their developing bones, joints and muscles, and they should be closely supervised at all times, paying particular attention to intensity and duration of exercises.

Failure to correct technique in young adults and children could cause long-term injury problems and permanent damage to their musculoskeletal systems.

### **Approaching clients**

There may be certain situations in which you see a client, either on the gym floor or within a supervised exercise session, behaving in an unsafe manner. It is important to be able to approach them in a calm but effective manner and provide advice accordingly.

Clients performing an exercise with incorrect technique could cause themselves an injury or anyone else who tries to copy them. Therefore, it is important to advise them on how to perform the exercise safely and effectively. Clients who do not listen to instructions and are generally disruptive can cause themselves and others injury. In such cases, it is important to approach them and ask them to adhere to the etiquette policy or ask them to leave the area to prevent disruption and potential injury.

### **Referral to an appropriate colleague**

To work with certain special population groups, fitness instructors require specialist training and qualifications in that area. Clients of specialist populations may have certain contraindications to exercise and other special considerations that need to be taken into account when prescribing or supervising exercise sessions. It is important to recognise this and refer them to an appropriate colleague with the relevant qualification. This includes the following:

- children under the age of 16
- older adults
- ante and post-natal women
- vulnerable adults with disabilities
- certain medical conditions, eg, cardiac rehabilitation.

Note: in all cases, incorrect exercise prescription by an unqualified fitness instructor for these groups may lead to severe medical complications, which in some cases could be fatal.

## **5. Security**

Individuals who should not be in the facility or the session can be a hazard. Consider the following:

- They may cause damage to the facility, harm persons within the facility and/or cause an emergency situation putting themselves and others at risk.
- The session might not be suitable for the client, potentially leading to injury (eg, the session is an advanced session and the participant is a beginner).

### **Procedures in the event of a fire or other evacuation situation are hazardous**

In situations such as an evacuation, clients may panic and start running and many will not be thinking about other people's safety, rather just about exiting the building as quickly as possible. In these circumstances, clients may fall and hurt themselves or others. Instructors must assist people's exit of the facility in a calm and efficient manner.

### **Special considerations for children and vulnerable adults**

If the instructor suspects a vulnerable adult or child has gone missing from the session or facility, or there are any concerns regarding their safety and security, it is essential to immediately report any concerns to an appropriate person so that the necessary actions can be implemented immediately.

When reporting any concerns regarding an individual's security, especially children and young adults, it is important to remain calm and to follow the health and safety policy and procedures contained in the health and safety manual.

In some emergencies, it will be necessary to either open or close the facility to protect individuals (eg, in the case of a missing person), and possibly to limit damage to the facility or property (eg, in the case of a fire). In these cases, it is important to already be familiar with procedures for the opening and closing of the facility. Failure to close a facility in the case of a missing child could lead to the child leaving the facility unnoticed.

## **6. Hygiene**

It is important to ensure that maintenance and cleaning of all equipment is carried out regularly. This is usually done on a rota basis and reduces the risk of germs and disease spreading, as well as preserving equipment and ensuring it is in safe working order.

Clients should be encouraged to wipe down equipment after use for hygiene reasons (i.e. to reduce the spread of germs and disease) and for safety reasons (eg, to prevent another client slipping and hurting themselves on wet or slippery equipment).

All floors should be kept clean and dry, especially after group classes to prevent another participant slipping and hurting themselves on a wet floor. Clients should be encouraged to clean up the areas they used and the fitness instructor should check the area afterwards to ensure that it is dry and no longer a hazard.

It is important that there are adequate facilities for clients to clean equipment after use, and fitness instructors should regularly check any towel dispensers to ensure they are well maintained and stocked. If there are no towels available for members to use, then it is likely that the hazards above will be more prevalent.

To prevent the spread of germs, bacteria and disease, it is important that fitness instructors emphasise the importance of personal hygiene to clients and ensure that instructors themselves have the highest level of personal hygiene.

Appropriate footwear must be worn at all times by participants and instructors to prevent injury. This is particularly important at wet sides, as the area is wet and the risk of slips and falls is far greater.

## **Risk assessment**

To control risks associated with hazards in any kind of fitness environment, it is important to ensure that risk assessment procedures are followed. Every business must carry out a workplace risk assessment to check that the necessary precautions are in place. The law does not expect a business to eliminate all risk, but businesses are required to protect people as much as possible. A risk assessment helps the business to focus on the risks that could potentially cause real harm.

The following five-step risk assessment process should be followed.

1. Look for any hazards (eg, slips, falls, trips).
2. Decide who might be harmed and how.
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or whether more needs to be done.
4. Record the findings and implement any necessary changes.

## 5. Review the risk assessment and update as necessary.

The risk assessment can be carried out by the general manager or owner of the business, but in larger organisations, there is usually a responsible health and safety manager/executive or advisor employed by the company.

### **The basic principles of risk assessment**

#### **The principles and methods of identification**

When carrying out a risk assessment for any organisation, it is important to identify how people might be harmed. This can be done in several ways, including:

- walking around the fitness environment to see what can reasonably be expected to cause harm to employees
- asking the employees who work in the environment on a daily basis about any concerns
- visiting the Health and Safety Executive website - [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) - for practical guidance on where hazards occur and how to control them
- checking the manufacturer's guidelines on the maintenance and safe use of equipment and chemicals; they sometimes specify certain hazards
- reviewing previous accident record books, as they may identify less obvious hazards.

It is also important to ascertain who might be harmed, and the easiest way to do this is to group people into categories (eg, people working in the gym, people working in the exercise studios, other participants and lifeguards). In each case, identify how they might be harmed (eg, pool plant operators may be at risk of being exposed to dangerous chemicals).

#### **Assessment**

When assessing the risk, it is important to look at what is happening in the facility, what controls are in place and how the work is organised. This should then be compared with good practice to see if more can be done. The questions to ask are:

- Can the hazard be taken away completely?
- If not, how can the risks be controlled to make the hazard less likely to occur?

#### **Review**

Few workplaces, especially fitness environments, remain the same for very long; new equipment may be introduced to the facility or new procedures may be introduced, which can lead to new hazards. It is important to try to review the risk assessment every year or when an element of the facility changes (eg, a new spin studio is built).

When considering how to risk assess the types of hazards in any working environment including the fitness environment, reference should be made to the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974, published by the Health and Safety Executive. This is the UK legislation that covers all matters relating to health and safety at work and gives guidelines on risk assessment strategies, policies and procedures. Lastly, it is important to reduce the risks of hazards in the fitness environment by ensuring that regular checks are made on all equipment and on the facility itself.

### **Risk assessment for planned sessions**

In the same way that risk assessments are carried out on the workplace, it is the instructor's duty to undertake a risk assessment before any planned exercise session, whether in the gym, studio or pool. The principles will apply in the same way as above and the fitness instructor should follow a similar process.

- What are the hazards (eg, slips, falls, trips)?
- Who might be harmed and how?
- Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or whether more needs to be done - if possible, before the session begins.
- Review each session.

When assessing the risks of the planned activity, particular attention should be paid to the following areas and the five steps applied to each area:

1. Environment
2. Equipment
3. Other people exercising in the same area
4. Planned activities
5. Emergency procedures

Below is a table summarising some of the risks and hazards and what can be done to reduce or, in most cases, eliminate those risks:

	<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Reduce the risks</b>
Environment	Slipping due to water on the floor.	Wipe the floor before the session begins. Keep areas around hydration stations dry.
Equipment	Injury to a participant due to a frayed cable.	Make regular machine checks. Put an 'out of order' sign on the machine.
Other people	Bumping into other people in the area due to lack of space to perform the planned activities.	Change the session or activities so that the exercises performed require less space.
Planned activities	Planned activities chosen are no longer appropriate due to a change in the participant's medical condition. This could lead to an injury.	Choose alternative activities suitable for the participant.
Emergency procedures	Bags are blocking the door and exit from the studio.	Ask participants to move their bags and store them in an appropriate place.

### **Who to contact when hazards and risks cannot be controlled personally**

In any situation where an instructor becomes aware of a risk or hazard that he or she cannot control but have identified, it is important they know whom to contact within the organisation. The process for reporting any risks or hazards will be set out in the health and safety manual and should be adhered to at all times.

If the general manager (GM) is not on duty that day, then instead instructors should contact the duty manager (DM), who is responsible for the facility in the GM's absence. If there is more than one DM on shift, report your concerns to the most senior of the DMs.

If the risks or hazards identified concern the gym environment, then it may be useful to report it to the gym manager, who is responsible for the gym but also reports to the GM. If the risks or hazards relate to the exercise studios, then it may be useful to report any concerns to the studio co-ordinator, who also reports to the GM.

If working for a larger organisation with a health and safety officer, any matters relating to health and safety can be reported to them.

Finally, if working in an environment other than a fitness facility (eg, a church hall), any issues relating to health and safety or risks and hazards within that environment should be reported to the person responsible for the building. It is always important to obtain details of an emergency contact when using independent facilities for this reason and to ascertain who is responsible for health and safety matters at the site.

If the emergency services are required, follow the health and safety policies and procedures in place, dial 999 and request the services required. Refer back to the first section for further information.

# Safeguarding vulnerable people

## Introduction

As facilities are increasingly being made more accessible to all, as well as with the increasing focus by fitness operators on families and children, it is vital that fitness instructors are equipped to deal with a variety of population groups. In this section, we will look at the implications and additional responsibilities that fitness instructors need to be aware of when working with children, young adults and vulnerable adults, together with the legislation that is designed to protect them.

## Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- have a basic understanding of the legislation that protects children and vulnerable adults
- understand the responsibilities and limitations of a fitness instructor with regard to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults
- identify different types of abuse encountered with clients, including children and vulnerable adults
- understand the importance of an organisation's policies and procedures relating to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults
- identify the statutory agencies responsible for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults
- discuss the importance of maintaining confidentiality of all reports and information relating to suspected abuse of children and vulnerable adults.

## Legislation relating to safeguarding the welfare of children and vulnerable adults

Part of a fitness instructor's role is likely to involve working with children or vulnerable adults. In these circumstances, the instructor will have additional responsibilities in order to safeguard these groups. To do this, the instructor should be aware of the legislation that exists to protect children, young adults and vulnerable adults. While it is important to have a basic understanding of the legislation that protects these groups, it is not necessary to know their content in detail.

### 1. Legislation relating to children and young adults:

A child is legally defined as anyone under the age of 18.

#### The Children Act, 1989

This act provides legislation to ensure that the welfare and developmental needs of children are met including their need to be protected from harm.

The act serves to:

- re-enforce the autonomy of families through definition of parental responsibility
- provide for support from local authorities, in particular for families with children in need
- legislate to protect children who may be suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm.

### **The Children Act, 2004**

This act is an amendment to the above act. Each act has progressively attempted to improve the legal powers and official functions related to children, and to make official provision for children better and safer.

### **The Police Act, 1997**

This act contains the provision to set up the CRB for England and Wales. Under this act, it is a criminal offence for an employer to:

- not check an employee working with children or vulnerable adults
- give a job to someone who is inappropriate to work with children or vulnerable adults when they know this to be the case.

The Protection of Children Act, 1999 Under this act, childcare organisations (defined as those that are 'concerned' with the provision of accommodation, social services or health care services to children or the supervision of children) must make use of the disclosure service (using CRB) in their recruitment and reporting process and urge other organisations working with children to do the same.

### **Every Child Matters Initiative and The Children Act, 2004**

This legislation was published as a formal response to the report into the death of Victoria Climbié. Victoria was an eight-year-old girl killed by her guardians in 2000, after numerous agencies (including the police, NHS, social services, NSPCC and local churches) failed to follow up on evidence of abuse. As a result of an investigation into this failure, both the initiative and revised act set out the government's approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to 19. Their combined aim is to maximise opportunities and minimise risk for all children and young people by focusing services more effectively around the needs of children, young people and families. The four key themes of this legislation include:

- increasing the focus on supporting families and carers
- ensuring the necessary intervention takes place before children reach crisis point and protecting children from 'falling through the net'
- addressing the underlying problems identified in the report into the death of Victoria Climbié, including weak accountability and poor integration
- ensuring that the people working with children are valued, rewarded and well trained.

### **Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act, 2006**

This act came about as a response to the Bichard Inquiry report following the 2002 Soham murders of 10-year-olds Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. Under this act, new arrangements for people whose work brings them into contact with children and vulnerable adults were phased in from October 2009.

The aim of this act is to provide a more effective and streamlined vetting service for potential employees and volunteers. Under this legislation, there will be a single list of people barred from working with children. In addition, a separate but aligned list of people barred from working with vulnerable adults will be established. The two lists are called:

- the children's barred list
- the adults' barred list.

The application process will be run via the CRB, and decisions on who should be placed on the barred list lies with the Independent Safeguarding Authority. CRB and ISA have now merged to form the Disclosure and Barring Service.

### **The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), 1995 and The Disability Discrimination Act 2005**

These acts of Parliament make it unlawful to discriminate against people in respect of disabilities in relation to employment, the provision of goods and services, education and transport. The duties on service providers (which will include fitness operators) were introduced in three stages as the acts were developed, including:

- It is unlawful for service providers to treat disabled people less favourably for a reason related to their disability (1996).
- Service providers must make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled People: Such as making changes to the way they provide their services (1999).
- Service providers may have to make other 'reasonable adjustments' in relation to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access (eg, installing an appropriate lift).

## **2. The laws implemented under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act, 2006**

Under this act, anyone who works with or is applying to work with children or vulnerable adults must apply to do so with the CRB. Their names will be checked against the two lists mentioned above. All decisions on who should be placed on the barred lists will be made by the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), an independent statutory body. CRB and ISA have now merged to form the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Jobs that fall within the catchment of this act include:

- teaching, training or instruction, care or supervision of children
- teaching, training or instruction for vulnerable adults
- providing advice or guidance wholly or mainly for children, relating to their physical, emotional or educational well-being
- providing advice, guidance or assistance wholly or mainly for vulnerable adults
- any form of treatment or therapy provided to children or vulnerable adults
- driving a vehicle that is being used only for the purpose of conveying children or vulnerable adults and their carers
- any job where there is opportunity for contact with children or vulnerable adults in some specified settings (eg, catering, administrative or maintenance staff in a school setting, children's home, adult care home) and where the activity is 'frequent' (once a week or more, except in health or personal care services where frequent means once a month or more) or takes place on four or more days in a 30 day period ('intensive').

No barred individual may engage in any regulated activity, whether paid or voluntary. It is a criminal offence for employers to employ someone in a regulated activity if they are not registered with the ISA.

Laws, policies and acts are subject to government change and updates, so it is essential that research is carried out into the most up-to-date versions in order to obtain the most current information available. The information in this chapter is based on legislation in the United Kingdom.

## **The responsibilities and limitations of a fitness instructor regarding the safeguarding and welfare of children and vulnerable adults**

In line with the legislation outlined above, fitness instructors who are likely to work with children and/or vulnerable adults must have a CRB check, preferably prior to the commencement of their employment. The employer may request a CRB check on the instructor's behalf.

Even if the instructor already holds a CRB check with another employer/organisation, it is still necessary to have a CRB check with any new employer. CRB checks are no longer portable (except in some situations relating to education and schools). In addition, CRB checks do not have a period of validity because an individual's circumstances can change at any time. Most organisations will specify in their internal policies and procedures manual when CRB checks need to be updated; this will usually be between one and three years.

As mentioned above, most companies will have their own internal policies and procedures relating to the safeguarding and welfare of children and vulnerable adults. Please see below for more information regarding what this manual may contain. It is important for the role of fitness instructor working with children or vulnerable adults to be familiar with the organisation's policies and procedures and keep up to date with any changes in the relevant legislation. In addition, this manual should be made known to children and vulnerable adults and be made available in an accessible format to parents, carers, volunteers and all staff.

The safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults in the instructor's care is of paramount importance, and it is therefore important to be aware of what possible abuse looks like and to know who to report this information to. Guidelines relating to the reporting procedures of abuse will be set out in your organisation's policies and procedures manual. If you are working as a self-employed instructor and suspect abuse, it is important that you know who to contact and how (see 'Reporting procedures'). The important thing to remember is that any information regarding possible abuse must be acted upon immediately to protect vulnerable persons.

When deciding whether to report any concerns about possible abuse, it is important to consider the following factors:

- What is the definition of abuse? List the symptoms of abuse and compare them to what has been witnessed, heard etc.
- Consider who should be notified.
- How will records be made? Consideration should be made to the Data Protection Act, 1998.
- How will the child or vulnerable adult be treated? Ensure you are able to reassure them if the need arises.
- How will the confidentiality of the information and documentation be kept?
- Most importantly, remember that it is the responsibility of the local authorities to determine whether abuse has occurred and not the instructor or organisation.

If the instructor's organisation has a safeguarding policy and procedures in place, it is the instructor's responsibility to follow these and report their concerns to the designated safeguarding officer. This person will be responsible for recording any allegations or reported incidents and contacting the relevant agencies, local authority services, police and social services.

If working independently, the instructor will need to be aware of whom to contact, including the persons who provided informed consent, namely the parent / guardian or appropriate adult (except in cases where you believe the perpetrator of the abuse is this person), local authority agencies, social services and possibly the police. When contacting local authority services, it is important to advise them of the nature of the abuse and they will be able to direct the caller to the relevant department that will handle and record any information relating to suspected abuse.

Due to the nature and sensitivity of these issues, confidentiality of all information and records is vital. Access to the records of the allegation or incident is limited only to those individuals with a specific interest in the issue and who are legally entitled to see the documentation. Any documented reports or evidence should be stored securely and kept for a minimum of three years. Matters such as abuse should not be discussed with colleagues or friends who are not involved in the matter.

## **Types of abuse**

Abuse is the violation of an individual's human rights and can take many forms. It can be a single act or repeated acts and can be physical, sexual or emotional. As a fitness instructor, it is important to be aware of the different types of abuse and how to recognise the signs of abuse.

Types of abuse relating to children, older adults or vulnerable adults, including those with disabilities, include:

- physical abuse - unexplained bruising, injuries, cuts or breaks, fractures and repeated injuries
- emotional abuse - threatening behaviour directed at the participant, discriminating remarks, taunting
- neglect - developmental problems not attributed to a pre-existing medical condition, personal hygiene issues, lack of general care
- bullying
- sexual abuse.

If it is suspected that a participant is the victim of abuse, it is important to observe the participant's physical condition in a way that is sensitive to the person and the situation; try not to question the participant relentlessly or with leading questions, instead show support and encouragement and build trust and rapport. They may not want to disclose the abuse and may be doing their utmost to disguise or hide any symptoms. The perpetrator of the abuse may be someone close to the participant and they may not want to disclose this. Often a victim of abuse will blame themselves and not the perpetrator, loving them regardless. It is essential to observe the participant's condition discretely.

Fundamentally, do not accuse anyone of abuse. Follow the organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures at all times; if working independently, instructors should report any concerns to the Local Authority and let them handle the matter professionally. If it is seen that an instructor or

organisation is investigating the suspected abuse, it could actively damage the chances of the case reaching a resolution.

It is not an instructor's responsibility to decide whether or not abuse or bullying is taking place or has taken place. However, it is the instructor's responsibility to act on any concerns.

In situations where abuse is suspected, there may be other types of information to consider when noting signs and indications of possible abuse, including:

- have the participant's circumstances at home changed? (eg, a change in parental responsibility)
- have there been any other fundamental changes in the participant's life? (eg, change of schools, care home, recent bereavement)
- the age of the participant (eg, puberty)
- the relationship the participant has with their parents/ guardians or carers.

If there is any concern that abuse may be taking place, it is important to consider all the factors and information available before making a conclusion and reporting the allegation or incident. While there may be unequivocal signs of abuse, such as witnessing a person punching the participant, there are also signs that may be an indication of abuse but are not in themselves evidence of actual abuse taking place. An example of this is if the participant is withdrawn or has cuts or bruises that are unexplained. While these factors may be a sign of abuse, it should be recognised that the presence of one or more of these indicators is not necessarily proof of abuse actually taking place.

The emotional signs and symptoms could be related to family issues, such as divorce or bereavement, and the physical signs could be from something as simple as the child falling off a bicycle. This highlights the importance of communication between the parties, including, where appropriate, the participant's parents/ guardians or carers.

## **Signs of abuse**

Physical signs and indicators may include:

- unexplained (or repeated) bruises, burns, fractures, lacerations or abrasions
- unexplained burns
- unexplained fractures, lacerations, abrasions
- swollen areas
- evidence of delayed or inappropriate treatment for injuries
- personal hygiene issues
- lack of adult supervision on a daily basis
- difficulty walking or sitting
- weight loss for no apparent reason
- a variation in eating habits (eg, overeating, loss of appetite).

Behavioural signs and indicators may include:

- stilted conversation, vacant stares, overly watchful
- wariness of adults
- arrives early, stays late for sessions and is reluctant to go home
- flinches if touched unexpectedly
- overly compliant and eager to please
- drug or alcohol misuse
- depression
- sudden outbursts of temper / aggressive behaviour
- inappropriate sexual awareness.

## **Safeguarding policies and procedures**

As mentioned previously, most large organisations that employ staff who work with children and vulnerable adults will have in place a safeguarding and welfare policy and procedures manual. The exact content of such a manual will vary between organisations, although legislation dictates that certain information must be included. The extent of how much detail and guidance the policy will provide will depend on the size of organisation and the type of contact it has with children or vulnerable adults.

The following basic information should be included in any policy and procedures manual:

- Why the safeguarding policy is important.
- Clarification that the policy refers to all children or vulnerable adults regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or religion.
- CRB checks, policy and procedures.
- What abuse is.
- How abuse might take place in the workplace.
- How to recognise abuse.
- What to do if there are signs or there is a suspicion of abuse.
- What to do if a vulnerable person reports abuse happening at home or elsewhere, and how to get in touch with local authority social services, in case a concern needs to be reported.
- Information on how to respond to the vulnerable person.
- What to do if there are allegations of abuse against an employee or volunteer, including any internal anti-bullying procedures and policies.
- Who to tell and how to respond to the person making the allegation.
- What safeguards are or will be put in place to protect children or vulnerable adults, including the level and type of supervision, providing clear guidelines and procedures and involving parents / guardians and carers.

- How children or vulnerable adults will be informed about their rights and what to do if they have any concerns.
- How employees will be supported in their understanding and awareness of safeguarding children or vulnerable adults' issues (eg, what sort of training will be provided).
- How the policy will be put into practice within all levels of the organisation and within all policies and procedures.
- How the policy will be monitored and reviewed.
- How confidentiality should be kept should an allegation be made (eg, how records should be kept and who will have access to them).
- How other sensitive or potentially sensitive information should be handled (eg, web-based materials and activities).

A person within the organisation should be appointed to deal with allegations or suspicions of abuse and it is essential that they get the correct training for safeguarding children or vulnerable adults. All employees should be clear about who this person is and they should be the first person staff, volunteers, children or vulnerable adults approach with concerns. This person will appropriately record an allegation or reported incident and they will be responsible for contacting the statutory child protection agency, such as the Local Safeguarding Children Board or the police, if necessary. This person can also ensure that the policies and procedures are implemented.

### **Procedures to help protect oneself from accusations of abuse**

Unfortunately, there have been several reported incidents involving false accusations of abuse. To protect oneself from false allegations, there are several measures available:

- Ensure that you have a current and up-to-date CRB check in place, even if an employer does not insist on this. This could be done annually.
- Ensure familiarity with the organisation's safeguarding policy and procedures relating specifically to physical contact with participants and being alone with participants. Avoid any unnecessary situations that could give rise to suspicion, such as by accompanying children to the bathroom or helping them change clothes. If required to perform such activities, it is always best if another adult is present and consent has been received from the parent/guardian or carer.
- Ensure to make a note of any evidence of possible abuse carefully and include this in any report you make. This may be used as evidence in any possible prosecution, so it must be accurate.
- When working with clients, it is important to obtain their informed consent for the activities or assessments that are to follow.
- When working with children and vulnerable adults, it is important to obtain the informed consent of their parents, guardians or an appropriate adult before commencing any assessment or exercise activity. See section 2 on informed consent for more information.

## **Statutory agencies**

There are various statutory agencies in the UK that are responsible for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. As a fitness instructor, it is important to be aware of these agencies in case their assistance is required at any time.

### **Ofsted**

This is a government agency whose role is to inspect and regulate the care of children and young people, Ofsted is often associated with schools, but it is also responsible for:

- checking places where children and young people are looked after
- the people who look after children and young people
- schools and colleges
- adult learning and training
- how teachers are trained.

### **Local authority (social services)**

Various local authorities will have different departments that deal with different policies and areas of local concern. They are bound by the laws laid down by the national government, but each will have its own budgets and administration procedures. The local authorities in each area have a duty to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable adults through departments such as social services. Most cases of abuse will be reported to the local authority in the first instance.

### **Police**

The police provide the mechanisms for agreeing how organisations will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. They will enforce the law relating to the protection of children and vulnerable persons. In some cases, reports of abuse may be reported to the police. They will work closely with local authorities to protect the local community.

### **Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)**

These are statutory bodies set up by local authorities. Every local area has an LSCB. Their aim is to make sure that key agencies work together effectively to ensure that children are properly safeguarded. The core members of the LSCB may include local authorities, health bodies, the police and others.

### **Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA)**

The ISA is an independent statutory body whose aim is to prevent unsuitable people from working with children and vulnerable adults. Please see above for further information.

If it is suspected that abuse has been or is being taken against a participant within the facility, it may be necessary to contact one of the organisations listed above. It is not the responsibility of the instructor to decide if abuse has occurred, only to report any allegations or founded suspicions to the relevant authority. They will investigate whether any abuse has occurred or is occurring and will take the relevant action.

Note: As of December 2015 the ISA and CRB were merged together to form the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). For more information go to [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/vetting-barring-scheme/](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/vetting-barring-scheme/)

**Confidentiality of information relating to abuse**

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1988, instructors are under a legal obligation to ensure where possible that any data including computerised, electronic and manual records are stored securely and not disclosed to any party without the client's consent. It is important that the confidentiality of the participant's information is not put at risk; failure to do so could result in a compensation claim made by the participant for breach of confidentiality. As well as the legal responsibilities outlined, an instructor also has a moral responsibility not to discuss with a third party any matters relating to the participant without the participant's consent.

Where reports have been written in relation to an allegation or incident of abuse, these reports may be given to any appropriate statutory agencies and/or their representatives in accordance with legislation protecting children and vulnerable adults.

Statutory agencies are subject to government change, so it is essential that research is carried out into the most up-to-date agencies in order to obtain the most current information available.