



SAFEGUARDING & JUNIOR MATCH OFFICIALS

Verbal, Emotional and Physical Abuse

The RFL encourages young people to take up refereeing at an early age and this is intended to be an enjoyable and positive learning experience. However, coaches, club officials, players, parents/spectators in both adult and junior Rugby League often lose sight of the fact that a junior match official who is under 18 is still legally a child! As a consequence, young match officials are open to experiencing abusive behaviour verbally, physically and emotionally. This behaviour is not acceptable in adult, junior or youth Rugby League. The increased potential harm that verbal, physical and emotional abuse can cause to children and young people in these roles needs to be recognised. **Remember at all times that a young Match Official is 'the child in the middle'**

It is important that clubs acknowledge their role in ensuring that club officials, coaches, players and spectators behave appropriately towards young people who take on match officials' roles. It is necessary to recognise that, like adults, children and young people can and do make mistakes when they are learning, and overly critical and unsupportive responses may constitute verbal and or emotional abuse.

Some young match officials have experienced physical abuse from coaches, spectators and players. Please make use of the Respect Codes of Conduct to guide appropriate behaviour and ensure those who fail to adhere to their code are dealt with accordingly.

Remember failing to take action means you can become part of the problem! Everyone has a duty of care to all children in our sport

Inappropriate behaviour unchallenged can often become the norm – everyone needs to take responsibility for creating change and ensuring positive and supportive environments for children and young people involved in Rugby League, whatever their role. Young match officials should be provided with advice on safeguarding and reporting inappropriate behaviour. Unfortunately too often young match officials feel that verbal and emotional abuse is “part of the game”, this is not the case and adults within Match Officials Societies and Clubs must make sure that young match officials are encouraged to report such abuse to the RFL.

Communicating responsibly with young Match Officials U18

Many young people play a significant role as match officials, their role could create additional vulnerability if we do not ensure communications and interactions with adults are carried out appropriately both on and off the field and in the online environment.

They are likely to need to communicate frequently with other colleagues and the RFL recognises that the use of social networking sites, forums and message boards may form an integral part of these communications and may be beneficial to their professional development within Rugby League. Making effective use of these mediums is a positive step as long as it's done appropriately.

It's important that we recognise they are not 'adults' and as such we have a responsibility to safeguard them as we do any other young person involved in Rugby League. Following this guidance will put in place helpful safeguards.



Read the RFL's guidance on social media and communication and make sure that it is applied.

Match Officials Societies (MOS) Meetings & Training Sessions

By the nature of a club environment children and young players are in different teams to adults however in most MOS children, young people and adults will meet and train together. It is important that good safeguarding principles are applied at all times, for instance U18s should shower and change in a separate facility or separate time to adult match officials.

Transport

The RFL guidance on transport also applies to junior match officials. Any Match Official who takes a young Match Official to games must ensure that there has been parental consent for this to happen. Young Match Officials should be picked up in a mutually agreeable place and they should sit in the rear seat of the car. Match Officials should ensure that they take the young Match Official straight to the venue and not carry out other duties or chores whilst transporting young people. If more than one young Match Official is being transported, then all efforts should be made to pick them up and drop them off at the same point together.

Mentors

The mentoring of young match officials is particularly helpful in supporting them if they are faced with abusive behaviour and indeed preventing the continuation of such behaviour. The mentor's role is to support, assist and help the young referee develop their confidence and offer effective guidance. They can offer support should the young referee be subjected to abusive side-line behaviour and be on hand to prevent this. The mentor should develop a relationship that is open and honest and encourages the young Match Official to discuss any concerns they may have around touchline behaviour and reporting. It's vitally important the mentor ensures the referee is able to enjoy the game as much as the players.

The mentor role should be clearly defined and should never involve the mentor being on their own with a young match official.

Relationships of Trust

The RFL Safeguarding Policy rules on Relationships of Trust apply to match officials as much as any other Relationship of Trust in the game and all match officials taking a leadership, coaching and/or mentoring role must ensure that they are fully aware of the these Rules.

Referees contact details

Mobile phone and email contact details for match officials under the age of 18 should not be hosted on Web Pages that can be accessed by the general public and must be held securely and displayed within private areas for the purpose of the activities they are undertaking with the written permission of their parent/carer.

The RFL recommends the following as best practice in relation to communication with junior match officials.

- 1 Signed parental/carer consent should be given prior to email, social networking and mobile phone communications with young match officials. Ideally the adult(s) who will be



communicating in this way should be named. The purpose for the communication should be made clear

- 2 Both parties should only communicate for the purpose of their refereeing role
- 3 Email communications between the parties should copy in a named designated person (this could be parent/carer or Match Officials Society Welfare Officer)
- 4 Leagues appointing young referees to games should copy in another league official, parent or carer to their communications

If any inappropriate communication or content is shared between an adult and an U18 this should be reported immediately to the Match Officials Society Welfare Officer or the RFL Safeguarding Manager who, where necessary, will seek advice from the statutory agencies as appropriate.

Reducing the Potential for Vulnerability

In view of the above it is important for **both** Match Officials Societies and Clubs to be extra vigilant in creating a safe culture, including:

- Acknowledging that abusive behaviour directed towards a minor whilst they are refereeing is not acceptable and will be reported to the appropriate designated person as poor practice and/or abuse
- Raising awareness of what discriminatory bullying is, how you will respond and ensure effective reporting systems are in place to enable members to report incidents
- Implementation of a club code of conduct for spectators and players
- Acceptance of the special role club officials have in setting a good example of the way in which people should behave towards children and young people in leadership roles.

It's recognised that empowering children and young people helps to protect them; ensure your Match Officials Society is a Listening Society and is effectively communicating with its young members and listening to their needs and suggestions for change. You can access the RFL Listening Club guidance [HERE](#).

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