



**SCOTTISH  
GYMNASTICS**

# Code of Practice for Coaches and Officials

updated March 2015

## POLICY STATEMENT

Sport can and does have a very powerful and positive influence on people - especially children. Not only can sport provide opportunities for enjoyment and achievement, it can also develop valuable qualities and skills such as self-esteem, leadership and teamwork. These positive effects can only take place if sport is in the right hands i.e. in the hands of those who place the wellbeing of children and young people first and adopt practices that support, protect and empower them.

## CODE OF PRACTICE FOR CLUBS, COACHES AND OFFICIALS

Adherence to good coaching practices, aligned with open communication with parents children and young people should ensure that a safe and enjoyable environment is established and sustained.

Clubs should operate a Code of Practice (CoP) specific to the clubs needs which all members should sign up to. However, the Club CoP should fall in line with the Scottish Gymnastics Code of Practice for Coaches & Officials.

**It is important to note that: Duty of Care commences from the point of receipt of the child to the point of return to the parent or guardian and the duty of care is nontransferable.**

## CONDUCT FOR SPORTS COACHES – KEY PRINCIPLES

- **Rights:** coaches must respect and champion the rights of every individual to participate in sport.
- **Relationships:** coaches must develop a relationship with athletes (and others) based on openness, honesty, mutual trust and respect.
- **Responsibilities:** personal standards – coaches must demonstrate proper personal behaviour and conduct at all times.
- **Responsibilities:** professional standards – to maximise benefits and minimise the risks to athletes, coaches must attain a high level of competence through qualifications and a commitment to ongoing training that ensures safe and correct practice becomes the norm.

## RIGHTS

### Coaches should:

- Create an environment where every individual has the opportunity to participate
- Create and maintain an environment free of fear and harassment

- Recognise the rights of all athletes to be treated as individuals
- Recognise the rights of athletes to confer with other coaches and experts
- Promote the concept of a balanced lifestyle, supporting the well-being of the athlete both in and out of the sport.

## RELATIONSHIPS

### Coaches:

- Should promote the welfare and best interest of their athletes
- Should empower athletes to be responsible for their own decisions
- Should clarify the nature of the coaching services being offered to athletes
- Should communicate and cooperate with other organisations and individuals in the best interests of athletes
- Must not engage in or tolerate behaviour that constitutes any form of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, bullying).

## RESPONSIBILITIES – PERSONAL STANDARDS

### Coaches:

- Must be fair, honest and considerate to athletes and others in their sport
- Should project an image of health, cleanliness and efficiency
- Must be positive role models for athletes.

## RESPONSIBILITIES – PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

### Coaches will:

- Gain NGB coaching qualifications appropriate to the level at which they coach
- Make a commitment to ongoing CPD
- Be professional and accept responsibility for their actions
- Promote safe and correct practice
- Provide a safe environment that maximises benefits and minimises risks to athletes

- Make a commitment to providing a high quality service to their athletes.

## **ABUSE OF POSITION OF TRUST**

**This guidance is primarily intended to protect young people over the age of sexual consent but, also includes those less than 18 years of age and vulnerable adults where a relationship of trust with an adult exists.**

In Scotland young people aged 16 years can legally consent to sexual activity but they may still be relatively immature emotionally. It is essential that those who may be in a position of responsibility and trust recognise this vulnerability and ensure that it is not exploited. There is no simple definition of a vulnerable adult but the position of trust and the vulnerability of adults must not be abused.

The principles and guidance apply irrespective of sexual orientation: neither homosexual nor heterosexual relationships are acceptable in a position of trust.

**A Relationship of Trust** can be described as one in which one party is in a position of power or influence over another by virtue of their position. A genuine relationship can start between two people within a relationship of trust but the relationship of trust must end before any sexual relationship develops.

## **ABUSE OF TRUST AND SEXUAL OR OTHER ABUSE**

Any sexual activity, which is not freely consenting, is criminal. The sexual activity covered by abuse of trust may be ostensibly consensual, but rendered unacceptable because of the relative positions of the parties concerned. There is also the **abuse of trust** - where young people are indoctrinated with attitudes to training, drugs and cheating, or social, political and religious views which are unacceptable, to the young, the community or rules of the sport.

### **Conduct on sexual activity between individuals in a relationship of trust aims to:**

- Protect a young person or vulnerable adult from an unequal and potentially damaging relationship.
- Protect the person in a position of trust by preventing him/her from entering into such a relationship deliberately or accidentally by providing clear and enforceable guidance on what behaviour is acceptable.

## **Guidelines on abuse of trust:**

- Any behaviour, which might allow a sexual relationship to develop between the person in a position of trust and the individual(s) in their care, must be avoided.
- Any sexual relationship within a relationship of trust is unacceptable so long as the relationship of trust continues.
- All those in an organisation have a duty to raise concerns about behaviour by coaches, staff, volunteers, managers and others, which may be harmful to those in their care, without prejudice to their own position.

It is acknowledged that in some situations a shared attraction may develop between two people within a relationship of trust. In such circumstances, it is essential that the individual who holds the position of trust behaves in an open manner, makes the CPC aware of the situation, and resigns from this position of trust if the parties involved wish the relationship to develop beyond the existing professional one. This will ensure that the previous power differential is not a factor in any future relationship. It is strongly advised that the young person is given an opportunity for reflection before any sexual relationship develops. It is the responsibility of the adult to ensure that his or her conduct is fully in line the SGA Child Protection Policy.

## **GROOMING**

These are practices which may appear to be carried out with the best of intentions but are used by people who sexually abuse children to 'groom' their victim:

### **How abusers "target and groom" – they:**

- Engineer 1-1 situations
- Develop a special friendship
- Make promises of success
- Engage family, other coaches, people of influence
- Use texts via mobile phone
- Befriend on Social Media
- Have "special secrets"

- Extend the relationship from the gym to socialising
- Buy gifts to buy affection
- Have unnecessary physical contact with young people e.g. excessive handling/supporting, cuddling, kissing, "friendly" taps
- Alienate gymnasts and coaches from their peers

### **GOOD PRACTICE**

- Always work in the open when working with children to avoid situations where a coach and an individual child or vulnerable adult cannot be observed.
- There should be at least two responsible adults present at all times during training sessions. One appropriately qualified coach plus one other responsible adult (preferably one female and one male). The second adult does not have to be a coach but must be aged 18+.
- Keep up to date with your qualifications, knowledge and technical skills
- Only work within the level of your competence and qualifications
- Create a safe environment so that participants can enjoy their activity.
- Adhere to the recommended coach/gymnast class ratios
- Care should be taken when providing manual support (spotting). Recognised / advised techniques for spotting should be used to avoid inappropriate contact.
- Where possible parents should be responsible for young children in the changing rooms or toilets.
- If a group of children must be supervised in the changing rooms try to ensure that adults work in pairs to supervise the children.
- Mixed teams of gymnasts should, where possible be accompanied by a male and a female coach / pastoral carer
- Where residential stays apply increased supervision, care and attention must be adopted (refer to SGA CP Policy)
- Always place the safety and welfare of the participants as the highest priority.

- Behave in an exemplary manner and be a role model for excellent behaviour.
- Treat all young people equally, with respect and dignity and put their welfare first, before winning.
- Recognise the stage of psychological and physical development of the individual and avoid excessive training and competition, pushing children against their will and putting undue pressure on them
- Motivate through positive and constructive feedback.
- Obtain written consent from parents to act as a reasonable parent if the need arises for the administration of emergency first aid. Consent forms should be obtained from parents/guardians before children commence training.
- If children have to be transported then a male and female coach/pastoral carer should accompany them. Request written consent from parents (refer to the SGA Child Protection Policy).
- Maintain a written record of any incident or injury together with any subsequent treatment and immediately complete an SGA Accident Report or Incident Report form.

### **Practice to be avoided**

- Spending excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others.
- Having 'favorites' – this could lead to resentment and jealousy by other children and could be misinterpreted by others
- Entering children's bedrooms on trips away from home, unless in an emergency situation or in the interests of health & safety.
- Issuing nicknames to children

### **PRACTICE WHICH SHOULD NEVER BE CONDONED**

#### **You should never:**

- Make contact or hold discussions with gymnasts via social networking sites or texting.
- Cause a child or young adult to see or hear an indecent communication.

- Cause a child or young adult to hear inappropriate conversation
- Cause a child or young adult to look at a sexual image
- Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games.
- Take children to your home where they will be alone with you.
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching.
- Make sexually suggestive remarks to a child or vulnerable adult – even in fun.
- Allow children to swear or use sexualised language unchallenged
- Allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Do things of a personal nature for a child or vulnerable adult if they can do it for themselves, unless you have been requested to do so by the parents (do so with the utmost discretion).
- Never depart from the premises until you have supervised the safe dispersal of the children (for SG squad sessions a parent / guardians signature must be obtained).
- Abuse your privileged position of power or trust with children or vulnerable adults.
- Cause a participant to lose self esteem by embarrassing, humiliating or undermining the individual.
- Reduce a child to tears as a form of control
- Have favorites.
- Compromise your position by suggesting anything is your and your gymnasts "special secret"
- Share a room alone with a child

### **SAFE PRACTICE IN UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES**

If any of the following incidents should occur, you should report them immediately to another colleague and make a written note of the event, signed and dated. Parents should also be informed of the incident:

- If you accidentally hurt a child.
- If a child misinterprets something you have said or done.
- If you have to restrain a child (please note: minimum force must only be used).

Many concerns have been expressed recently about what is acceptable practice with regards to stretching exercises and flexibility training for gymnasts. To protect the gymnasts in our care and to protect ourselves against possible allegations of poor practice, coaches must carefully consider their actions and how they might be perceived by an observer.

### **IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR A SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL GYMNASTICS FLEXIBILITY PROGRAMME:**

- Encourage a good flexibility programme from the beginning as young children are more flexible and once a good range of movement is achieved it is easier to maintain.
- For a flexibility programme to be effective the gymnast must be motivated and want to improve in this area.
- Develop an understanding of why flexibility is essential for gymnastics. The gymnast must understand that if they do not improve / maintain their flexibility it will limit their skill development, the quality of their work and make them more susceptible to injury.
- Always remember there are a variety of ways to stretch, not just 'hands on' passive stretching. Situations where the gymnast is using their own body weight are usually more effective and longer lasting.
- It is important to maintain a balance between passive and active stretch.
- Stretching must only be done in a suitably warm environment and only when the gymnast is thoroughly warmed up.
- Regular, gradual and progressive stretching with a focus on achievable and measurable targets is likely to be far more effective.
- Expectations must be consistent with all other factors related to gymnastic development i.e. age, potential, physiology and training situation.
- It is not necessary or desirable to experience extreme discomfort in order to become more flexible – in fact it is this aspect of a flexibility programme that is likely to put the gymnast off and make it less effective.

- In all situations the gymnast must be in control and able to say **STOP**.

**To be avoided:**

- Unrealistic expectations for a 'quick fix'.
- Situations where gymnasts may feel 'exposed' i.e. for stretching box splits it is better to have a gymnast lying on their stomach as opposed to lying on their back, gymnasts should also be allowed to wear shorts.
- Coach stretching gymnast to the point of excessive pain or extreme discomfort.
- Exercises that place the coach's and gymnast's bodies in "close proximity" and could be considered inappropriate.

**The coach should never:**

- Touch a gymnast's inner thigh, groin area or buttocks during stretching exercises.
- Use their full body weight to push down on a gymnast.
- Work alone and with only one gymnast.
- Work alone in a secluded or separated area in the gym where they cannot be observed by other adults.

**It is impossible to establish guidelines for every situation that may occur in our sport and common sense should be used at all times. If you are unsure of the appropriateness of any stretching activity do not be afraid to discuss it with someone you trust or alternatively contact the Ethics Welfare & Conduct department at Scottish Gymnastics.**

**Abuse may become apparent in a number of ways:**

- Through observation
- A child may tell you
- A third party may have reported an incident, or may have a strong suspicion
- You may have a suspicion

**It is not your responsibility to decide whether or not a child is being abused but it is your responsibility to act if you have concerns.**

**IF AN ALLEGATION IS BROUGHT TO YOUR ATTENTION:**

**STEP 1 – LISTEN AND REASSURE**

**Do: - Stay calm**

- Reassure the child – that it's not their fault.
- Emphasise - that it's alright to tell
- Listen - to what the child says and take what they say seriously.
- Keep questions to a minimum - Use open ended questions
- Ensure - that you clearly understand what the child has said so that you can pass it on to the appropriate agencies.
- Explain - what happened is wrong, you were right to tell and explain what you will do next. That you can't promise to keep what you have been told to yourself but you will only share it with people who need to know
- Consult - with the appropriate child protection authority (e.g. Police, Social Work or CPC, depending on degree of urgency) ensuring that you communicate all the information accurately. They will advise as to your next step
- Maintain confidentiality

**Don't: - Panic**

- Show shock or distaste
- Speculate or make assumptions
- Criticise the alleged perpetrator
- Approach the alleged perpetrator
- Probe for more information
- Assume they can tell someone else
- Ask intrusive questions

- Make promises you can't keep
- Delay.

## STEP 2 - RECORD

If the allegation is **ABUSE**, the following process should be followed:

- Make a full report of any allegations or suspicions on paper as soon as possible after the disclosure, do not use a computer, sign and date it.
- Give the report to the CPC (unless they are involved in the complaint). The CPC will involve the appropriate authorities as and when necessary and will record this, using the SGA incident report form, which can be found in the SGA Child Protection Policy
- SGA's Head Child Protection should also be informed and kept up to date with any local subsequent developments.
- Confidentiality must be maintained

If the allegation relates to **POOR PRACTICE**, please follow the guidance contained on the inside back cover of this booklet. Further guidance can be found in the SGA Child Protection Policy.

## STEP 3 – INVOLVE THE APPROPRIATE PEOPLE

Once you have completed your report you must ensure that the Child Protection Co-ordinator in your Club has been informed so a decision can be made as to the most appropriate action. This person must forward the report to the SGA Head of Child Protection indicating whether further action is required, thus allowing a disciplinary panel to be appointed. The CEO of SGA has the power to appoint a Disciplinary Panel as necessary

If you are unhappy with the Child Protection Co-ordinator's handling of the incident or the allegations are made specifically against this individual, you should contact the **Person in Charge** immediately and make a record of this.

This person might be the Club Chairman, the Head Coach, the Sports Centre Manager, or the Team Manager. The person in charge shall then consult with the appropriate child protection authority e.g. Police, Social Work or SGA Head of Child Protection depending on degree of urgency. A record of the name, and designation of the official informed, together with the time and date of the call should be kept in case future contact is required. Contact should also be made directly to the Head of Child protection at SGA.

## Emotions surrounding disclosure:

It is acknowledged that taking appropriate action is never easy and the discovery that a member of staff or colleague is, or may be abusing a child will raise concerns and emotional feelings among other colleagues.

These emotions may evolve around feelings of:

**Doubt:** Is it true?

**Confusion:** What will happen? What actions should be taken? What will be the effect?

**Guilt:** Should I have known? Did I miss something? Did I have any suspicions? Should I have said something?

**Fear:** Will I or others or I be suspected?

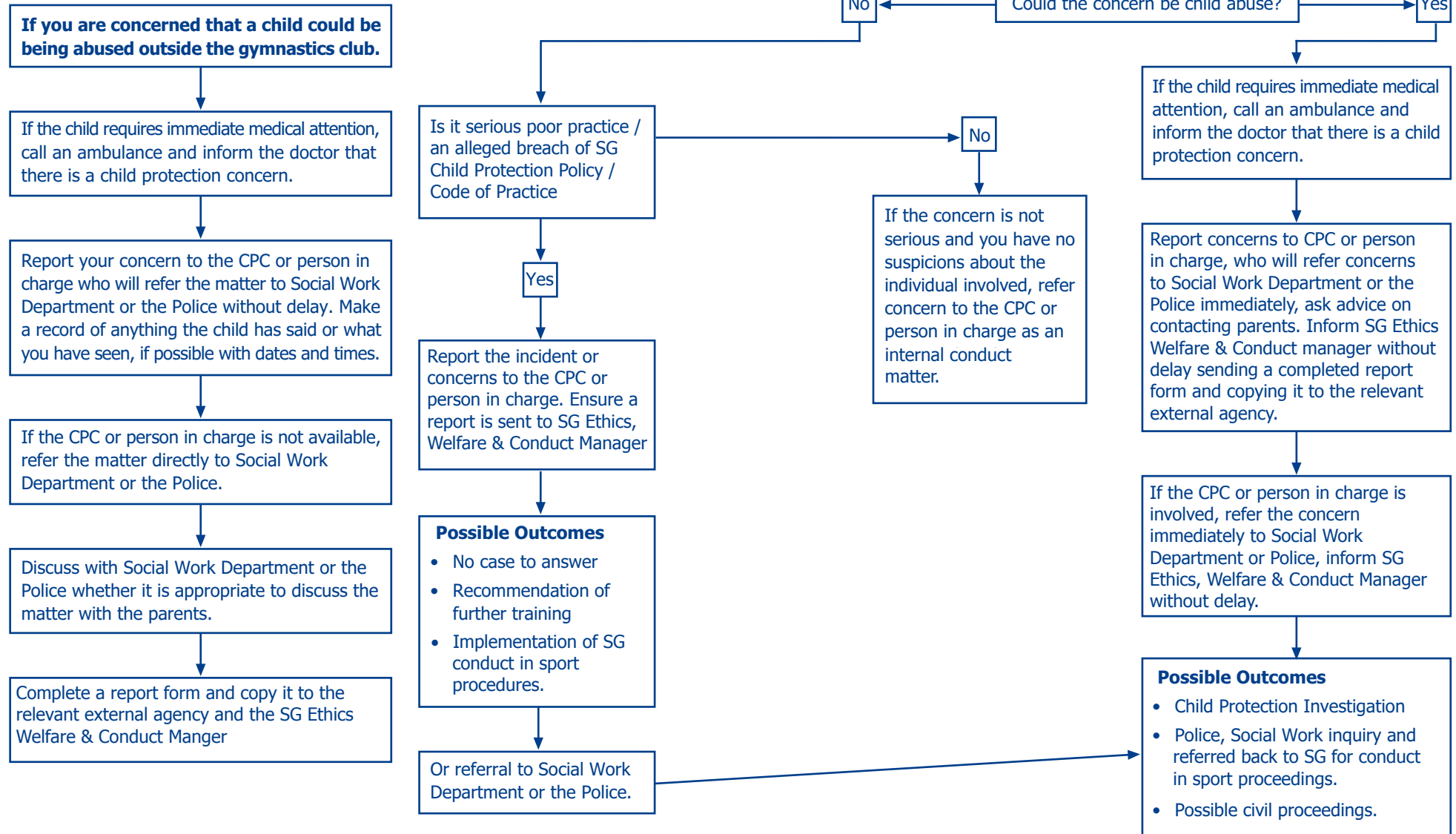
**Concerns:** What can I do to support all those people who may need support? How will it affect further relationships or contact with children? Are there systems in place to expose future situations?

There is clearly a need to have support mechanisms for all those involved in or surrounding the issue, including those making the allegation, those who may be being abused and those against whom the allegation is made.

**Scottish Gymnastics is primarily concerned with the well being and safety of all its members and participants and Scottish Gymnastics will support anyone who in good faith and where he/she has reasonable grounds for doing so, reports his or her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.**

## A QUICK GUIDE TO PROCEDURES IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE

This quick guide is designed to advise on the most appropriate action to be taken if you suspect abuse or witness repeated poor practice or breaches of SG Code of Practice for Coaches and Officials. If you are uncertain at any stage, contact SG Ethics, Welfare & Conduct Manager or NSPCC Helpline on 0800 800 5000. All reports should be made on the SG Child Protection Incident Report Form contained in the C P Policy.





## **USEFUL CONTACTS**

### **Scottish Gymnastics Head of Child Protection**

Lorna Whyte

Caledonia House

Redhueghs Rigg

South Gyle, Edinburgh

EH12 9DQ

Tel: 0131 271 9733

email: [lorna@scottishgymnastics.org](mailto:lorna@scottishgymnastics.org)

### **UK Safer Internet:**

[www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk)

### **Children 1st** Child Protection in Sport Unit

Tel: 0141 418 5670

### **Safeguarding Course Tutors**

Ross McGuire: 07429819696

Alison McFarlane: [amcfarlane005@btinternet.com](mailto:amcfarlane005@btinternet.com)

David Walker: [tutordavid@btinternet.com](mailto:tutordavid@btinternet.com)

### **ParentLine Scotland**

0808 800 2222

### **NSPCC Child Protection Helpline**

0808 800 5000

### **Childline Scotland**

0800 1111

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

### **Internet Safety:**

[www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)

### **The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)**

[www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)

### **respectme, Scotland's Anti-Bullying Service**

[enquire@respectme.org.uk](mailto:enquire@respectme.org.uk)

### **LGBT YOUTH SCOTLAND**

[info@lgbtyouth.org.uk](mailto:info@lgbtyouth.org.uk)

(Your) **Local Social Work Department** (including out of hours contact telephone number)

(Your) **Local Police Family & Child Protection Unit** Contact telephone number (in an emergency dial 999)