

Background

The Eagle Ski Club wishes to promote in children as well as adults an enjoyment of the mountains and remote regions in winter, and in particular to encourage them to try ski touring once they have adequate skills. The Club is committed to ensuring that children who participate in Club meets do so in as safe an environment as is practical.

The Club, its officers, leaders and members at large have a responsibility under the Protection of Children Act 1999 to protect the welfare of children who participate in the Club's activities, and this document sets out the Club's policy in this respect.

Snowsport England Child Protection Policy and Procedures

As a member Club of Snowsport England, the Club is bound by Snowsport England's policy and procedures¹. Committee members, leaders and guides who have contact with children should be aware of the Best Practice Guidance contained in this document and follow it where practical.

Understanding the risks

Children who attend meets, their parents and guardians must accept that ski mountaineering is a dangerous sport; accidents in the mountain can lead to injury and, in extreme cases, to death. Club leaders will, through their skills and experience, minimise those risks but they cannot be eliminated completely.

Social, walking and cycling meets in the UK have the lowest level of risk. Tours and training courses that take place in the UK and in ski resorts are safer than sustained tours in remote areas, while professional mountain guides have higher levels of skill and experience than most club leaders. Children, parents and guardians must ensure, through comparison and discussion with the leader or with a Club officer, that they have clearly understood the level of risk associated with the activity to be undertaken.

Safety on Club tours

Club meets are led and/or co-ordinated by Club members (some of whom are guides); where a group on a Club meet or tour makes use of a mountain guide in a professional capacity, the guide must always be fully qualified under UIAGM² or local rules, and it is the responsibility of the members to ensure that the guide is qualified and has sufficient knowledge of the area for the activity to be undertaken. The Club does not itself employ guides or other professionals.

It is the Leader's or Guide's responsibility to ensure that the group does not assume unnecessary risks in the context of the group's goals; those goals should be clearly understood by all participants (including participating children) and revised when necessary in the light of prevailing conditions.

The Club does not normally promote competition in ski mountaineering. Club leaders must ensure that group members do not indulge in competition that would be inappropriate in the context of the group's goals. Children may often be motivated by a degree of competition, in particular competition against themselves, but leaders must ensure that this is never harmful and that it would not lead to over-exertion or additional risk-taking.

Welfare of children

Children may only be accepted on tours and meets if the Leader / Guide has completed the necessary registration procedures and CRB checks, OR if the child is accompanied by a parent or guardian who accepts responsibility for them at all times.

Leaders have full discretion as to whether to accept children on their meets and are not required to do so. In addition to verifying the levels of fitness and skills, which a leader is

¹ See <http://www.snowsportengland.org.uk> (November 05 edition)

² Union International des Associations de Guides de Montagne

required to do for all participants, leaders must satisfy themselves that any child is sufficiently mature to understand the risks and to cope, both physically and mentally, with the conditions that may be met on the tour or meet.

Leaders and guides who accept children must assume a higher level of care for the children than for other members. The parent or guardian may sometimes be tired or less skilled and may not always be able to make the best decisions on behalf of their ward. It is the leader's duty to monitor the child's behaviour and to assess his or her physical and mental ability to continue safely.

The duty to ensure a child's welfare extends to "off-the-snow" time, when exhaustion and mental stress may often show. Leaders should avoid situations where a child may be vulnerable to abuse, by the parent/guardian, any other member or other persons. Leaders should exercise particular care over sleeping arrangements in mountain huts and similar accommodation. All members should be alert to signs of abuse and should alert the parent/guardian and the Leader.

If the Leader detects signs of excessive stress in the child, he or she should first discuss it with the parent or guardian if they are present. Under the Club's rules, each member on a member-led tour is responsible for their own behaviour and decisions; the leader may influence but may not instruct. A professional guide assumes a higher level of responsibility for his or her charges and may, for example, require participants to withdraw or to rest.

Incident reporting

Leaders are required to report to the Club's officers any incidents that led to, or could have led to, injury. Incidents involving children's welfare should be reported by the same route.

Child Welfare Officers

The Club has two designated Child Welfare Officers:

Anna Seale, annaseale@hotmail.com, tel: 020 8785 9790

Mike Hendry, toursec@eagleskiclub.org.uk, tel: 01932 248628

The role of the Child Welfare Officers is to:

- receive information from club leaders, guides, children or parents and carers who have child protection concerns and record it;
- assess the information promptly and carefully, clarifying or obtaining more information about the matter as appropriate;
- consult initially with a statutory child protection agency, to test out any doubts or uncertainty about the concerns as soon as possible;
- where necessary make a formal referral to a statutory child protection agency or the police, without delay;
- report the concerns to Snowsport England

Any child (or parent on their behalf) who feels that their welfare or safety is at risk or has been jeopardised during a club activity should contact the Child Welfare Officer(s) at the earliest opportunity. The Child Welfare Officers shall follow the procedures set down in the Snowsport England Child Protection Policy.