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Welfare of Vulnerable People

For The British Octopush Association



DOCUMENT INFORMATION

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1 Introduction

Octopush (underwater hockey) is a game enjoyed by many people from a range of ages regardless of sex, religion or ethnic background. Members of the British Octopush Association (BOA), (and some not affiliated to the BOA) enjoy the team spirit and close camaraderie of the sport, and many long lasting friendships have grown around the game. The majority of underwater hockey players are fit adults who are strong swimmers and very capable of looking after themselves but the game is not restricted to just them as more and more clubs are encouraging younger players, ladies teams and not so strong swimmers to come and try our enjoyable sport.

Underwater hockey is played in a swimming pool with participants scantily dressed in swimming costumes, the competitive nature of the game involves the potential of some close contact when tackling or swimming for the puck, and situations may arise which could be exploited or misinterpreted. The game could also involve strong tackles where boisterous play could be misinterpreted as an assault, or a fracas between rivals could end in an unwelcome confrontational situation, so we need to set guidelines to help us deal with any untoward situation which could arise.

A person aged over 18 is considered to be an adult, and young people below that age are considered vulnerable - with the need for special attention to their welfare. Some adults could also be vulnerable and we must consider their well being as well. It could be a lady playing in a men's team, someone not well, someone suffering from a personal situation at home, or a person who may be mentally vulnerable - even if they appear physically fit and strong.

This document has been written to give advice to all underwater hockey players in case a situation arises concerning the conduct of another person (or people) in the pool, changing room or any social event connected to the underwater hockey club. Included are procedures and advice to avoid getting into a situation which might be misinterpreted, or where a false accusation may be made, and the appropriate action and precautions to be taken when playing or training so that unwelcome incidents are avoided.

If any person thinks they have been touched or treated inappropriately this document lays out the course of action to ensure that proper procedures are carried out, it tells you exactly who to complain to and how to carry that complaint further if not satisfied with the first step, and it tells club officials the necessary actions to take if confronted with a complaint.

Unwelcome incidents during underwater hockey games or training are thankfully very rare but if you feel uncomfortable with an incident in any way you are encouraged to follow the procedures in this document –

Do not keep quiet and hope it will not happen again.

If an incident arises from a person exploiting the close nature of underwater hockey they must be stopped immediately in case your silence encourages them to continue with further abuse.

All underwater hockey clubs are advised to give every existing member and any new or potential member's access to this document to ensure everyone involved with the game has a clear guide to acceptable behaviour, and a clear procedure to follow if they need help or advice in the future.



2 Preventing Abuse

Most people enjoying a game of underwater hockey act in a proper and decent manner with no question about their conduct. However the fact that only swimsuits are worn in a swimming pool during a close contact game may cause someone to become sexually aware and their behaviour could become inappropriate or interpreted as inappropriate. The rough and tumble of the competitive game might also cause some over boisterous behaviour that may not be appreciated. Sometimes a brush past, accidental contact, or a rough tackle may be misconstrued as deliberate causing embarrassment or complaint. The best way to avoid any misunderstanding is to instill in every member of the BOA that inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated under any circumstances and any incidents will be taken quite seriously and dealt with by the proper authorities under the following guidelines.

Each underwater hockey club should nominate at least 3 responsible persons and ensure their contact details are available to all club members. If ladies, mixed teams or youths play it is recommended that at least one responsible person is female.

At least two responsible persons should be present at any Octopush meeting including one female if ladies or children are playing. If one or more of the named responsible persons cannot be present it is recommended that a stand in be nominated for that meeting.

Misunderstandings can be avoided by sticking to some simple rules:

1. Avoid training on a one to one basis, always have an independent observer,
2. If demonstrating a move during training always explain exactly what you are about to do before touching anybody,
3. Never allow or engage in any inappropriate touching,
4. Be publicly open if children are included – talk to their parents and explain what the game of underwater hockey involves.
5. Ensure parents take responsibility for their children when arriving, changing and leaving the premises,
6. Never stay in the changing rooms alone with a child or vulnerable person,
7. If you give someone - particularly a child - a lift home never be alone with them in your car, always ask someone else to accompany you. (If that is not possible then telephone the child's parents and tell them you are on your way and the time you expect to arrive).
8. Never engage in rough or sexually provocative horseplay,
9. Never make sexually suggestive comments or tell suggestive jokes,
10. Never do things of a personal nature for a person if they are quite capable of doing it for themselves,
11. Never invite a child or vulnerable person back to your home unless someone else is with you,

Always ensure any complaints or allegations are recorded and acted upon in accordance with the procedures in this document.



3 What Constitutes Abuse

Abuse

1. Incorrect or improper use, to use for bad effect or for a bad purpose.
2. Verbal insult or use of insulting language,
3. Unjust or corrupt practise,
4. Maltreatment or assault of a person (especially sexually).

There are many ways a person may be abused by another which may or may not result in physical or mental harm. Any unwanted attention or physical contact is considered to be abuse with vulnerable people more likely to be a victim as they are less able to defend themselves. This document mainly looks at abuse within the underwater hockey club environment, but you may be abused at home, at school or in any other place outside the club in which case these procedures can also be followed.

These procedures can be followed after abuse anywhere and at any time, not just within the underwater hockey club.

The main forms of abuse are: -

Bullying, Physical abuse, Sexual abuse, Emotional abuse, Neglect and Abuse of trust

3.1 Bullying

1. A person who uses strength or power to coerce others by fear,
2. Persecute or oppress by force or threats,
3. Pressure or coerce a person to do something against their will.

Bullying can take many forms so is not always easy to define but is usually a person using superior physical or mental strength to gain advantage over someone else. Often bullying goes on over a period of time and includes a certain amount of torment and distress to the victim. Within an underwater hockey game it could include a person continually picking on a weaker player, going in with a hard tackle, or continual harassment about that players positional play or ability. Bullying can be more common among youngsters so a careful watch on their behaviour during and after the underwater hockey meeting is essential by those in charge. Bullying can include sarcasm, nasty rumours, tormenting, ridiculing, humiliation, racial taunts, graffiti, gestures, pinching, biting, punching, offensive comments of a sexual nature or may take any of the other forms of abuse.

Bullying often goes unreported because of the victims fear, it must not be tolerated so keep a careful watch for any signs and act quickly to stop it.

3.2 Physical abuse

Physical abuse includes hurting or injuring a person by hitting, kicking, shaking, pushing, squeezing, biting, pinching, burning or any unwelcome physical contact.

As with bullying physical abuse may occur when a strong player pushes or barges another player during a game of underwater hockey causing hurt or upset, but care must be taken not to misinterpret the competitive nature of the game for physical abuse.



Giving or encouraging a young person to take alcohol, cigarettes, inappropriate drugs or a poisonous substance may also be considered physical abuse.

Octopush meetings often finish with a social gathering in the pub.

1. It is an offence to purchase alcoholic beverages for consumption by a person under 18 years of age in a bar or on licensed premises.
2. A person over 16 years of age may purchase Beer, Porter, Cider or Perry with a meal in an eating area or restaurant.
3. A person of 14 years of age may be in the bar of a licensed premises during permitted hours but they cannot consume alcohol,
4. A person under 14 years of age may be on a licensed premises provided they are accompanied by a person over 18 years old, it is before 9pm, and is in a room licensed with a children's certificate - but they cannot consume alcohol.

3.3 Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse includes any situation of an unwelcome sexual nature between any two or more people. Young people between puberty and the adult age of 18 are sexually immature but very sexually charged as they struggle to keep up with the changing emotional feelings within themselves. This makes them particularly vulnerable to attention from other people especially adults who may exploit the situation in the belief that the young person is a ready and willing partner.

Sexual relations with club members under the age of 18 years old should be avoided by adults who may be exploiting the innocence of youth.

Sexual abuse situations can include sexually suggestive comments or jokes, showing sexually explicit photographs or films, taking sexually inappropriate pictures, touching, fondling, exposing oneself, oral sex, masturbation or full intercourse.

An underwater hockey game involves physically close situations which could be used for sexual gratification or may be misinterpreted as unwanted sexual contact.

3.4 Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is assault of the mind including lack of love, affection or attention, teasing, taunting, criticising, threatening or shouting at someone. We do not all acquire top skills and ability or achieve constant success so we must not constantly criticise the same person for what we consider to be underachievement. A vulnerable person may also suffer from overprotection, preventing them from joining in and socialising.

A person may be suffering from emotional abuse outside of the club activities may have mood swings and/or refuse to talk or join in, close friends within the club may notice this and should bring it to the attention of a responsible person.

3.5 Neglect

Neglect is when a persons basic physical or emotional needs are ignored.

The health and safety of all players is paramount in any organised club activity and the failure to watch out for the basic needs of any club member is neglect. This could include allowing a player on the pool side to get cold, not acting to reduce risk of injury, allowing children to wander around the pool unsupervised, failing to ensure a young person leaves the swimming pool building safely, failing to listen to advice from others or failing to take notice of a persons concerns or complaints.



3.6 Abuse of trust

A relationship of trust occurs if one party in a relationship is in a position of power or influence over the other by virtue of their work or nature of their activity. Abuse of this trust may occur if a person uses his position of trust to gain advantage such as starting an inappropriate sexual relationship or demanding errands or services.

Abuse of trust may occur when a person possesses personal information about another person and uses it to their advantage - such as a club secretary using the club contact list to try to make contact for reasons other than club business.



4 Indications of abuse

It is not easy even for experts to recognise when abuse is occurring or has taken place so we must be extra vigilant to look out for any tell tale signs.

Indications of abuse may include:

1. The person tells you or someone else they are being abused or another person reports abuse to you.
2. The person has an injury inconsistent with their explanation.
3. The person's behaviour changes, either over time or quite suddenly, and he or she becomes quiet and withdrawn, or alternatively becomes aggressive especially to one or more particular people.
4. The person appears not to trust other people or a person they previously had a good relationship with, or does not seem able to make friends.
5. The person becomes increasingly neglected in their appearance, loses or puts on weight for no apparent reason.
6. A young person shows an inappropriate sexual awareness for their age and sometimes behaves in a sexually explicit way.

This is not a complete list of signs and the presence of one or more of these indicators is not proof that abuse is taking place. Sometimes a person may find difficulty communicating their concerns to you and may make hints, suggestions or use third party references to describe their own story.

We must be vigilant at all times and use common sense to try to notice any signs of abuse so that early action can be taken before further abuse takes place.

Your responsibility is to report any suspicions of abuse to the responsible person named by the club. The responsible person cannot decide alone whether abuse has taken place but must ensure the procedures set out below are followed and the appropriate action taken.



5 If You Have Been Abused

If you feel you have been touched or treated in an inappropriate manner you should report as soon as possible to one of your clubs responsible persons or to the person in charge of the underwater hockey meeting.

The person who you reported the incident to will take details of your complaint – tell them as much as you can, be as accurate and truthful as possible.

Do not make up details to add strength to your story – it will make the story implausible and might end with people not believing your version of events.

Keep a copy of the details you tell the responsible person so that you can remember everything yourself and repeat them to any other person who might require it.

Tell the person you are complaining to what action you want taken – some complaints might be adequately dealt with by the club official talking to the person involved, and some cases may have to be referred to the Police.

If you are not happy with the action being taken you may also:

1. Tell one of the other club officials,
2. Tell a pool attendant or official from the swimming pool,
3. Call the NSPCC on 0800 800 500 for advice,
4. Contact the local Police.

Remember you may leave the pool at any time if you feel unhappy about any aspect of your well-being. You do not need to explain immediately but should report your concerns to the club responsible person as soon as you feel able.



6 If A Person Reports Abuse to You

If anybody reports any incidents of abuse regarding themselves or others at an underwater hockey meeting or any other place you should:

1. Stay calm,
2. Reassure them that they are taking the correct action,
3. Ask them to tell you what happened but do not ask too many questions to ensure a clear and accurate understanding of what has been said,
4. Reassure but do not promise confidentiality which might not be feasible after further developments,
5. Make a full and written record of what has been said/heard as soon as possible,
6. Record the names of everybody around at the time of the incident.
7. Collect statements from anybody who witnessed the incident.

It is not your responsibility to decide whether abuse has taken place but once a complaint has been made to you it must be properly dealt with.

Tell one or more of the other named club responsible persons what has happened as soon as is practical and give them as many details as you have. The information you should record should include:

1. The nature of the allegation indicating the type of abuse suspected,
2. The names of any person involved and witnesses,
3. A description of any injuries or bruising – use simple descriptions, not medical terms,
4. The person's account if it can be given of what happened and how injuries may have occurred. Take care to listen and record what the person says rather than put your own interpretation of events,
5. Any times, dates or other relevant information,
6. A clear distinction of what is fact, opinion or hearsay,
7. Statements from any witnesses.

Do not make any declaration, discuss the incident or give names to anyone else apart from those involved with the correct procedures outlined in this document

You may then decide what action to take next, you may:

1. Discuss the incident with the person involved,
2. Discuss the offence at club committee level and decide the appropriate action within the club.
3. If a child is involved seek advice from the NSPCC or local Police,
4. Report the matter to the local Police.
5. In the case of a child report the matter to the Social Services Department.

The Social Services Department has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 to ensure the welfare of a child. When a child referral is made their staff have a legal responsibility to investigate. This may involve talking to the child and their family and gathering information from other people who know the child or who may have witnessed the incident. Enquiries may be carried out jointly by the Police.



Clearly Concerns about children must not be taken lightly.

Whatever actions you take must be reported back to the person making the complaint to see that they are satisfied with what you have done and it is appropriate for the abuse they feel they have been subjected to. If the abused person is not happy with your actions you must discuss further options with them and allow them to take the complaint further.

If you are unsure that you have taken the correct action do not hesitate to go to the local Police for their advice. This does not necessarily mean an official complaint has to be made to them but will ensure that you cannot be accused of stalling or covering the matter up to protect the club.

The accused abuser has a right to a fair investigation; do not release the name of anyone involved or any details to someone not concerned with the investigation. It may be prudent to suspend the alleged abuser's access to the club while an investigation is underway and ensure they do not try to make any further contact with the victim or try to influence the investigation in any way.

NSPCC 24 Hour Help Line Number 0800 800 500

Social Services Department Number 08456 023 023



7 Photography Policy

Photography including filming or video in or around the swimming pool may be used in an inappropriate manner especially if children or vulnerable adults are the subject. Therefore it is essential that the following guidelines are followed before any photography is allowed.

Anyone wishing to take photographs, film or video footage at any venue organised by their underwater hockey Club must seek permission from the responsible person in charge of the event.

Most pools used for underwater hockey have a policy of not allowing any photography without express permission from an authorised person. The Underwater hockey Clubs responsible person will insure that any intended photography is allowed at the pool or venue.

The club responsible person will ensure that consent from parents/guardians of all children or vulnerable persons present has been obtained prior to the activity.

The club responsible person will take details of the person wishing to take photographs including:

Name and address,
Name of company or organisation if appropriate,
Contact name, address and telephone number.

If there is the slightest doubt as to the acceptability of photography, filming or video then it must not be allowed.

End of Document