

SAFE
& FAIR
SPORT

Safeguarding Policy
**TRAINING
+ HOLISTIC
DEVELOPMENT**



British
Gymnastics



Welsh Gymnastics
Gymnasteg Cymru

What's included in the Safeguarding Policy:

TRAINING + HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

- Everyone in gymnastics has a responsibility to create a safe and uplifting gymnastics experience for all. British Gymnastics acknowledges we all have a duty of care to safeguard the physical, emotional, and psychological health of gymnasts.
- The mandatory requirements for training and holistic development detailed in this document are underpinned by the British Gymnastics Safeguarding Policy or Home Nation equivalent, which contains information about who this policy applies to, the scope and purpose. After reading this document, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Welfare and Safe Sport team at British Gymnastics or Home Nation equivalent.
- The need for this document and good practice guidance is to prevent inappropriate practices related to training and holistic development. Inappropriate training practices can lead to overtraining, burnout and/or injury.
- For clarity and conciseness, the term 'coaches' used in this document represents British Gymnastics members who are Coaches, Helpers and Gymnastics Activity Instructors (GAI), unless stated otherwise. The term 'clubs' used in this document represents registered clubs, this includes all gymnastics activity providers and environments. The term 'welfare officers' used in this document represents British Gymnastics members who are welfare officers, safeguarding officers or equivalent. The points in this document apply to all clubs or venues affiliated with British Gymnastics or Home Nations, and at any events affiliated with British Gymnastics or Home Nations.
- This document was developed for the gymnastics community following consultation with advisory panels, Home Nations, UK Sports Institute practitioners and other external organisations to ensure gymnasts are at the centre of any decision-making around training and holistic development.
- This document also contains information about additional support and preventing poor practices, with further information about the complaints process detailed in the British Gymnastics Complaints and Disciplinary Policy and Procedures or Home Nation equivalent. Alongside this document, clubs and coaches should implement good training and holistic development practices (**Training & Holistic Development Guidance for Good Practice document**).

Key responsibilities

- Clubs, coaches, and support practitioners must ensure they follow the points contained in this document within gymnastics sessions or activity, to ensure they implement safe practices related to training and holistic development. All clubs and coaches are encouraged to discuss and clarify their own approach to training, which may differ from other clubs and coaches, but must always follow the policy points contained in this document.
- To ensure safe practices related to training and holistic development are implemented, supporting information for parents/carers and gymnasts can be found in the ‘What do I need to know’ resources.

Associated policies & guidance

British Gymnastics

[British Gymnastics Safeguarding Policy and Procedures](#)

[British Gymnastics Standards of Conduct for Coaches, Officials & Instructors](#)

[British Gymnastics Standards of Conduct for Registered Clubs](#)

[British Gymnastics Complaints & Disciplinary Policy & Procedure](#)

Scottish Gymnastics

[Scottish Gymnastics Child Wellbeing & Protection Policy & Guidance](#)

[Scottish Gymnastics Code of Practice for Coaches & Officials](#)

[Scottish Gymnastics Complaints: Process and Guidance for clubs affiliated to Scottish Gymnastics](#)

Welsh Gymnastics

[Welsh Gymnastics Safeguarding & Wellbeing Policy & Procedures](#)

[Welsh Gymnastics Code of Conduct for Coaches, Volunteers, Officials and Staff](#)

[Welsh Gymnastics Membership Rules](#)

[Safeguarding Policy: Pain, Injury & Illness](#)

[Safeguarding Policy: Academic Education](#)

Additional reading

- [Soligard T et al. How much is too much? \(Part 1\) International Olympic Committee consensus statement on load in sport and risk of injury. Br J Sports Med. 2016;50\(17\):1030–41.](#)
- [West S et al. More than a Metric: How Training Load is Used in Elite Sport for Athlete Management. Int J Sports Med. 2021;42\(04\): 300–306.](#)
- [Brenner, Joel S., et al. Overuse injuries, overtraining, and burnout in young athletes. Pediatrics 153.2 \(2024\).](#)

Key definitions

- **Burnout**
Physical and/or emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of achievement and a decreased interest in a sport.
- **Coerce**
When someone tries to make you agree to something you don't or may not want to do.
- **Elite gymnast**
Gymnast representing Great Britain at the senior level.
- **Holistic development**
An overarching philosophical approach to athletic talent development that aims to develop young athletes in three interrelated domains:

Health & Wellbeing

The promotion, development, safeguarding and maintenance of physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing.

Life Readiness

The development and application of attitudes and skills required to succeed in and outside of sport, now and in the future.

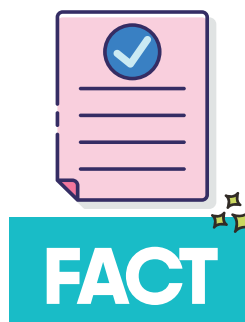
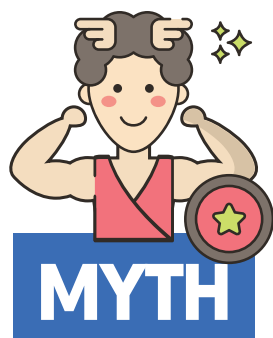
Athletic skills

The development of the skills and characteristics (i.e., technical, tactical, physical, psychosocial) needed to progress towards higher levels of athletic performance and competition.

(adapted from '[Guidelines to create holistic development environments icoachkids.org](https://www.icoachkids.org/)')

- **Gaslighting**
Manipulating someone into questioning their own perception of reality.
- **Overtraining**
An accumulation of stress (training or other) leading to long-term decreases in performance and potential disturbances to normal physiological or psychological functions, which requires several weeks or months of rest and recovery to restore.
- **Tapering**
Reduction in training load prior to a competition with the purpose of reducing fatigue whilst maintaining/enhancing training adaptations.
- **Training load**
The cumulative amount of stress placed on an individual from a single or multiple training sessions (structured or unstructured, technical, or non-technical) over a period of time to produce a desired training response (**Adapted from Soligard et al., 2016**). The stress placed on an individual can be physical and/or psychological and can be experienced differently by each individual.

The truth about hours



The number of hours a gymnast trains per week is a good way of quantifying gymnastics training.

The more hours a gymnast trains, the better they will be.

The number of hours a gymnast trains each week is linked to their ability.

British Gymnastics are able to provide guidance and limits on the number of hours a gymnast should train each week.

Although hours can determine the amount of time spent in a training environment, it fails to account for the intensity or content of a session. Therefore, the number of hours alone cannot determine what is required for an effective training programme or represent the training load experienced by a gymnast.

Whilst a high number of training hours may elicit performance gains, there is also an increased risk of fatigue, injury, overtraining and burnout when the volume is inappropriate for the individual. As a result, this can impact the progression and longevity of a gymnast, as well as compromise their short and long-term holistic development, both as an athlete and as a person.

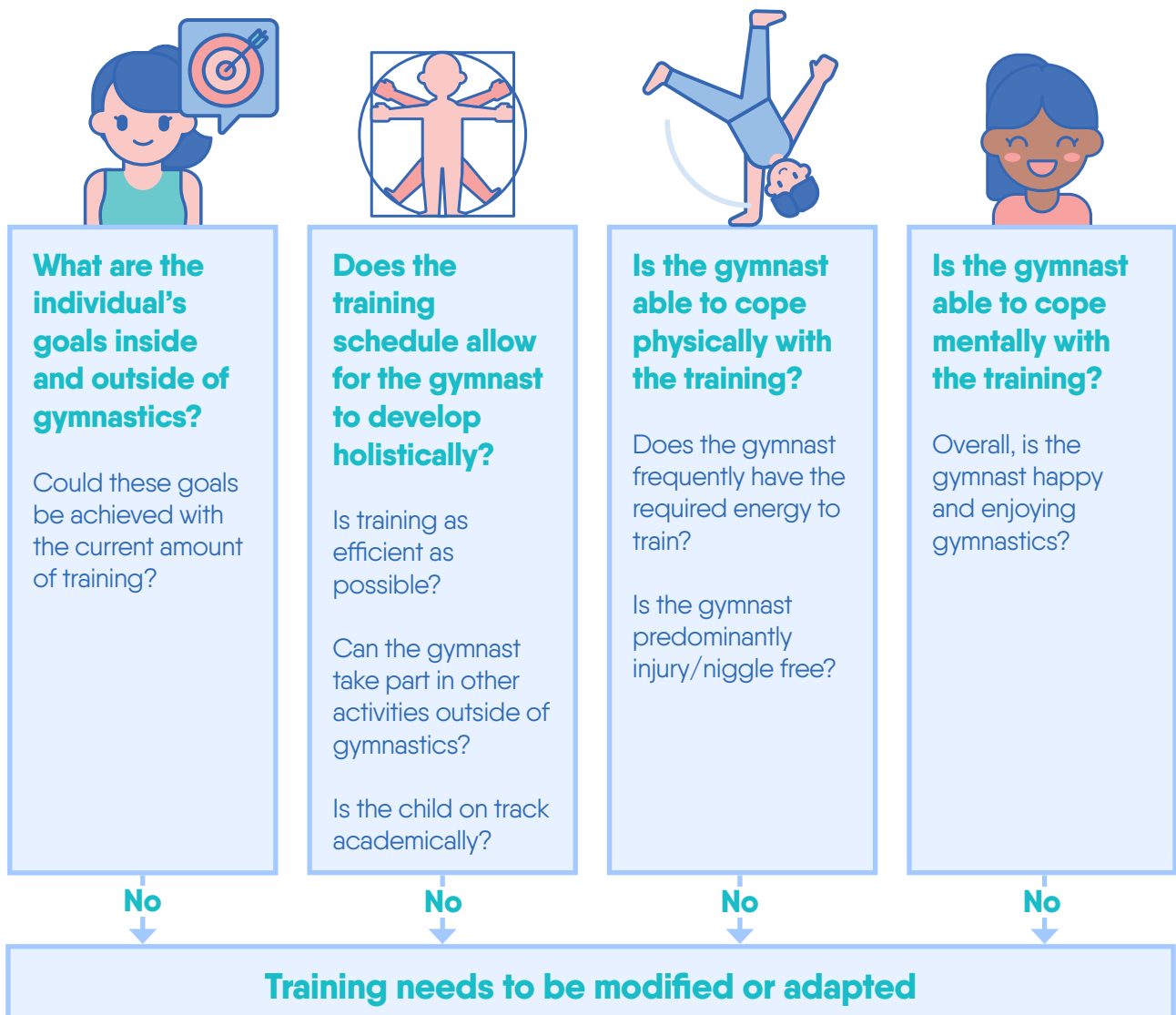
A gymnast's ability is not solely based on the number of hours of training completed each week. It is important to remember that each individual will require different amounts of training in order to reach their gymnastics goals and that the quality of training is more important than the quantity.

British Gymnastics is often asked to provide guidance on the number of training hours a gymnast should complete each week. As highlighted earlier, hours cannot determine what is required for an effective training programme or represent the training load experienced by each individual gymnast. Additionally, the amount a gymnast trains should be based on an individual's needs and goals inside and outside of gymnastics. Therefore, British Gymnastics are not in a position to provide guidance, or limits based on hours.

How do I know what the right amount of training is?

It is important to remember that doing more training will not always equate to better performances or guarantee that a gymnast will reach an elite level (see above for definition of elite gymnast). However, a certain amount of training will be required for a gymnast to reach their goals.

The right amount of training will depend on an individual gymnast and their needs. Below is a flow chart to help support decision-making around the amount of prescribed training. Remember individual needs can change over time, therefore it is important that these questions are part of an ongoing process rather than captured at one moment in time.



Signs and symptoms of overtraining & burnout

Inappropriate training loads can lead to overtraining and burnout, here are some of the risk factors, signs and symptoms to look out for.

What causes overtraining and burnout?

Chronic imbalance between stress (training or other) and recovery.



Overtraining

Who is at an increased risk?

Female youth athletes, youth athletes, athletes in individual sports, high-performance athletes, athletes participating year-round, athletes experiencing other stressors (social, financial, family, academic), athletes participating in multiple sports.

What are the common signs & symptoms?

Persistent decrease in performance, mood changes, increased risk of injury and illness, fatigue and sleep disturbances.



Burnout

What are the risk factors?

High chronic training load and overscheduling, pressure or extrinsic motivation, focus on performance outcomes from peers, parents and/or coaches, perceived stress and perfectionism.

What are the common signs & symptoms?

Low mood and anxiety symptoms, loss of interest and motivation, irritability, lack of concentration, fatigue, sleep disturbances, weight changes, nonspecific musculoskeletal complaints, decreased performance (academic and sport), decreased enjoyment.

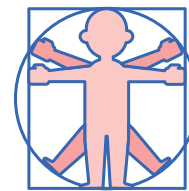
Where there is a concern regarding overtraining or burnout, clubs, coaches and welfare officers should liaise with the gymnast and parents/carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) and seek advice from appropriately qualified practitioners (GP, Sports Doctor, Physiotherapist, Nutritionist, Psychologist etc).

Safeguarding Policy

Training & Holistic Development

- 1.** Clubs, coaches and welfare officers must ensure gymnastics training does not compromise the holistic development of the gymnast. Training, including rest and recovery, must be planned (daily, weekly, and annually); taking into consideration a gymnast's individual long-term and short-term goals, inside and, where applicable (i.e., gymnasts training multiple sessions a week), outside of gymnastics (see [Gymnast Plan template](#)), and based on the needs of the individual gymnast.
- 2.** Clubs and coaches must inform and regularly collaborate with gymnasts and parents/carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) around training plans and requirements for training goals and/or competition whilst ensuring the holistic development of the gymnast is prioritised.
- 3.** If a gymnast chooses not to, or is unable to attend a training session, this must be respected.
- 4.** Gymnasts must have a minimum of one day off a week from structured gymnastics training.
- 5.** Clubs and coaches must never punish, ignore, discriminate against, control, coerce, threaten or gaslight a gymnast with regards to training and holistic development.
- 6.** No component of gymnastics training must ever be used as a means of punishment.

Factors to consider for Safeguarding Policy Training & Holistic Development



- 1.** It is recommended that a training session is planned and based on efficient training. Planned training should consider the intensity and content of the session, the gymnast's ability to concentrate and the gymnast's holistic development, rather than solely the time spent training.
- 2.** To improve performance and reduce the risk of injury, training should progress gradually from a physiological, psychological, sociological and technical perspective, whilst avoiding any sudden increases in training load. Gradual progression of training should be based on a combination of intensity, content, and duration, and not be based on an increase in training hours alone.
- 3.** Any planned gymnastics training must be flexible and adaptable, prioritising the gymnast's individual needs and holistic development. Examples of where training may need to be adapted or modified include, but not limited to, pain, injury, or illness, fatigue, concentration levels, preparation for competition, periods of rapid growth, holidays, religious/cultural reasons, exams, additional stressors, social events and/or other activities.
- 4.** Additional consideration around training should be taken for gymnasts experiencing periods of rapid growth (often referred to as growth spurts). During this time, training should be adapted or modified to reduce the risk of injury (see [**Training & Holistic Development Guidance for Good Practice document**](#) for further information).
- 5.** Adding extra, structured training sessions during school holidays should be done cautiously, considering the consequences of suddenly increasing training load, and the impact on a gymnast's overall holistic development.
- 6.** Competition preparation should progress gradually and taper towards a competition. The safety of a gymnast must always be prioritised, therefore competition routines must be adapted where necessary. This may include modifying skills/routines or withdrawing from competition.
- 7.** Where double sessions (two training sessions within one day) are programmed into training, extra consideration should be given around the purpose, content, intensity and, whether it is both necessary and the right decision for the individual.
- 8.** The time allocated for a break between double sessions should be based on the intensity of the first session, allowing enough time for the gymnast to rest, recover and refuel adequately (both physically and mentally) for the second session. This may vary depending on the content of a session and training phase.
- 9.** Physical and psychological rest and recovery must be scheduled daily, weekly, and annually. Consideration should be given to the time training sessions start and end, and the impact this has on a gymnast's holistic development (e.g. travel time, meals, education commitments, and sleep).

continued...

10. Extra consideration should be taken when planning and implementing any return to training from an injury or extended period away from gymnastics. Training should progress gradually, safely and appropriately (aligned to **Safeguarding Policy: Pain, Injury & Illness**). When training around an injury, it is important that training does not inappropriately overload any other parts of the body.
11. Two-way communication around day-to-day training should be encouraged to help gymnasts become accountable for their training.
12. Prior to a training session, individual wellness markers such as fatigue, soreness and or stress should be collected and discussed with the gymnast. As a result, any subsequent training should be adapted where required.
13. Completed training should be recorded. It is recommended that internal measures such as rate of perceived exertion (RPE) are also recorded each session. This should be used to understand the impact of prescribed training on an individual gymnast and subsequently, adapt training where necessary. (see **Training & Holistic Development Guidance for Good Practice** for further details).

Support & preventing poor practice

Everyone should feel able to ask a question, ask for help, or raise a concern; no matter who you are, or how you are involved in gymnastics. Use the information below to help say something if you see or experience something that doesn't feel right.



Query

If you are not sure or feel uncomfortable on a practice or comment you implemented, experienced, or observed, it is ok to raise a query with someone you feel comfortable with. This could be with a coach, gymnast, friend, welfare officer, parent or carer, or club manager.

Reflect

Take the time to reflect on what has happened and whether anything could have been done differently. Would it be acceptable outside of gymnastics?

Seek

It is ok if you are not sure or do not know the answer, there are lots of people that can help including other coaches, welfare officers and British Gymnastics Welfare Officer Team (welfareofficer@british-gymnastics.org), Scottish Gymnastics Wellbeing and Safe Sport team (safegym@scottishgymnastics.org), Welsh Gymnastics Safeguarding (safeguarding@welshgymnastics.org) or the Northern Ireland Welfare Officer (welfareofficergni@gmail.com). You can contact British Gymnastics, Scottish Gymnastics or Welsh Gymnastics for advice at any point, this will not be taken as an official complaint.

NOTE: All Home Nation governing bodies have a duty of care, therefore if they have any concerns this will be escalated appropriately.

Making mistakes

It is ok to make a mistake. If this happens, take accountability for it, apologise, and learn from it to stop it happening again.

Raise

If you believe you need to raise a concern, contact your club welfare officer. They will then be able to deal with your concern accordingly.

Recommendations

Create a psychologically safe environment for everyone in gymnastics by promoting open, honest, and transparent conversations, with regular opportunities for feedback. Encourage and promote an environment for asking questions and respectful challenge. Regularly reflect on the day, session, or an event (see the [British Gymnastics Positive Coaching module](#) for more information on reflective practice). Encourage everyone to reflect daily.



Useful links

[Click here](#) to access the following additional resources:

- [Training & Holistic Development Guidance for Good Practice](#)
- [Gymnast Plan Template](#)
- [Poster – Key policy points](#)
- [Poster – What do I need to know if I’m a gymnast?](#)
- [Poster – What do I need to know if I’m a parent/carer?](#)
- [Poster – What do I need to know if I am a club manager/head coach?](#)
- [Explainer video](#)

Contact information

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Regional Welfare Officer details

british-gymnastics.org/safesport/safeguarding#14