

Toolkit – Sports Club Changing Room Guidance

Overview

For many, changing rooms present a very stressful environment and one that is completely different from any other aspect of club participation. It is important to remember that all members have the potential to feel vulnerable within the changing room environment. This includes:

- Men, women, non-binary members of all ages.
- Members of all different shapes and sizes.
- Members that are overweight or underweight.
- Early developers and late developers (especially relevant for youth members).
- Members that have scars, created through self-harm, surgically or by other means.
- Members that wear back braces, binders or have other medical devices such as stomas.
- Female members being self-conscious about wearing sports bras or not wearing sports bras where there may be a need to.
- Female members on their period who may worry about pads, strings or leaks being visible.
- Any member worrying about showing their underwear.
- Members with specific needs and disabilities that makes changing challenging, including those that are sensory sensitive (mainly the acoustics, levels of noise), those with organisational problems (such as ADHD, ASC, DCD (Development Coordination Disorder or Dyspraxia)) or those that may struggle with the lack of structure and order (ASC).

Remember: For all junior members under 18, safeguarding considerations must always take precedence when implementing changing room policies and procedures.

Anxieties

The causes of anxiety surrounding the use of changing rooms can be far reaching. There could be multiple reasons why a member is anxious, and they may not be able to fully articulate why they feel as they do. As such, it is important that club staff and coaches are respectful of each individual, regardless of how many there may be in a particular group that are struggling; never dismiss a concern by concluding they are only raising an issue because others in the club are.

Consideration for neurodiverse members

- The process of changing can also be very stressful for those with additional needs, such as development coordination disorder (also known as dyspraxia), attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Autism, who may have difficulty managing clothes and possessions or become stressed about the prospect of being late to the session when well-intentioned coaches are trying to hurry them along.
- Many members just take a long time to change, with no intent or desire to be slow.
- Distress can occur over the invasion of personal space, particularly in cramped conditions.

Personal Space

- Establishing routines of using the same changing area can help some members cope with the process of changing as it gives them a sense of control and expectation, particularly if they have a trusting relationship with someone that changes near them.
- However, this can be impacted for multiple reasons in a busy environment and cause further distress.
- Members can feel worried about their personal space being invaded; being touched, pushed, shoved, slapped on the back and other physical contact are all actions that are unacceptable.
- Even in a calm environment, the worry of the possibility can be hard to eliminate if the possibility remains.
- Comments, looks and proximity can all be used as subtle, yet powerful forms of intimidation by some members, particularly when it is known that the target is vulnerable or anxious.

Reflection Task for Club Staff and Coaches

Key Questions to consider:

- Which of your members, especially juniors, might struggle with their changing room experience?
- What adjustments can be made for these particular members to mitigate stress?
- How many of your members say the changing experience is the ultimate barrier to participation in club activities (even if they do not articulate this themselves)?
- For members that struggle with changing, how aware are they of others that feel the same? Do they feel as though they are the only ones that are experiencing this and so are less willing to share their concerns? Might they feel a sense of shame or feel their concerns are not valid?

Top Tips

- **Empathetic messaging** - Make clear to your members that it is natural for people to feel awkward or anxious about changing. We understand and take it seriously.
- **Expectations** - Be public and clear about all members having the right to feel safe and that everyone has a responsibility to ensure this is the case. Clear club expectations about respecting property, behaviour and conduct should apply.
- **Behaviour and conduct** - Insist on a calm and quiet manner when entering, during and leaving the changing rooms. There should be no physical contact and once changing, members should remain where they are.

Alternative arrangements

- Consider if you have any alternative provision for members that may not want to change in the main changing room.
- Consider changing the name of disabled toilets to accessible toilets, which is a more inclusive term that acknowledges they can be for anyone that feels the need to access it.
- Although an alternative changing area is exclusive (rather than inclusive), it might be the best arrangement for a member. Be led by the member's voice in each case.
- For junior members, ensure any alternative arrangements still comply with safeguarding requirements.
- Is there scope to build cubicles or convert unused shower areas within the existing changing rooms to provide more privacy?
- Use quiet corners for members if they want somewhere slightly quieter.

- Allowing members to arrive at the club already in kit can be effective at reducing stress. Could they change at home or at work before arriving, or are there other safe spaces within the facility where they can change?

Case Studies: Kit Solutions

1. **R Sports Club** implemented a "come ready to play" option for their junior members:
 - This has removed the need, concerns and time issues associated with changing, and has had a noticeable impact on engagement within club activities.
 - Parents particularly appreciated this option for their younger children.
2. **C Athletics Club** provides multiple changing options:
 - This supports members with changing issues as some have anxiety about communal changing.
 - They offer a range of options including private cubicles and family changing rooms.
 - The club notes the positive responses from members to addressing the issues to provide choice and ensure inclusivity.
3. **L Swimming Club** worked with their young female members to address kit and changing issues that were affecting participation:
 - Their current changing rooms consist of a big open space with toilets that members were using as changing cubicles, because they did not like to get changed in front of their peers.
 - The club agreed that members could come to sessions already wearing their swimwear under clothes to minimise changing time.
 - They also installed privacy screens in the changing rooms and designated quiet changing times.
 - Staff had positive feedback from parents of junior members noting the change really supported the children, reducing pressure around changing and the organisation and management of kit.
 - It has also ensured there is less washing of spare kit required by the club and not as much lost property.