

DID YOU KNOW?

Gyms play a vital part in protecting children.

Gyms and fitness centres play a positive role in supporting health, wellbeing and community connection for young people. They are also open, accessible environments where young people may attend independently, often for extended periods and sometimes with reduced supervision. This means staff may notice situations and behaviours that others do not.



National and local safeguarding partners, including the NWG Network, have identified a growing concern that some individuals may seek to misuse community spaces, including gyms, when safeguarding awareness and controls are not strong. This includes use of facilities such as locker areas to support criminal activity.

This is why gyms are a focus for safeguarding activity. By strengthening awareness and processes, gyms can help deter misuse, identify concerns earlier and protect young people.

In Essex, partners are working directly with gyms to build safeguarding awareness, support staff confidence and strengthen preventative approaches in partnership together.



What to do if something doesn't feel right

If something doesn't feel right, don't ignore it, staff are not expected to prove concerns, just report them. Call 999 if a child is in immediate danger, 101 for non-emergencies, or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111. Concerns, patterns and suspicious activity should always be shared with police, certainty isn't needed.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and by working together, gyms can help reduce exploitation, build staff confidence and create safer spaces for young people.

See it. Report it. Protect a child.



ESSEX
Safeguarding
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BOARD

What we've learned from visits

Through visits across Essex, partners have identified both positive safeguarding practice and areas where arrangements can be strengthened.

Opportunities to strengthen include tackling:

- Limited staff visibility at certain times
- Unsupervised access for young people, particularly during quieter periods
- Unclear reporting processes for staff
- Limited awareness of safeguarding risks in environments such as locker areas

Where gyms had clear processes, staff awareness and consistent supervision, the potential for misuse was significantly reduced.

Why strengthening safeguarding helps

Strong safeguarding arrangements help to:

- Deter misuse of facilities
- Protect young people who use the gym
- Support staff to act with confidence
- Reduce risk to the business, staff and members
- Support a safer environment for everyone
- Stop any risk of venue insurances being compromised
- Prevent reputational damage

How gyms can strengthen safeguarding

Small, practical steps can make a big difference.

Build staff awareness

- Make sure staff know the signs that something may not be right
- Encourage staff to trust their instincts
- Reinforce that concerns are about patterns, not proof

Clarify safeguarding roles

- Identify who staff should report concerns to internally
- Make reporting routes clear and accessible
- Ensure staff know they are not expected to investigate

Strengthen supervision and environments

- Be aware of quieter times or areas
- Review how locker areas are monitored
- Reduce opportunities for misuse where possible

Encourage early reporting

- Reinforce that sharing concerns early helps prevent harm
- Promote reporting routes clearly for staff

Gyms are not responsible for exploitation but they can play a crucial role in preventing it.

Further information

Feel free to ask partners questions if they visit your venue.

Scan the QR code to access further information and resources via the ESCB webpage or #CEAwarenessWeek26.



Active Essex are available to support the sports sector to access guidance, training and development; www.activeessex.org

#CEAwarenessWeek26