

Safeguarding considerations for changing rooms

Schools briefing

February 2022

Introduction

Individual schools should write their own guidelines on keeping children and young people safe while they are getting changed, and make sure these are understood and followed. We've put together some information about the things you need to consider and include.

Clear guidelines are recommended because:

- getting changed can make some children feel vulnerable
- getting changed can cause anxiety for some children
- staff and volunteers can feel unsure about changing supervision and how to ensure that all children and adults are safe.

For sports clubs and organisations who use changing facilities as part of their activities, guidance is available from the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) website.

› [Learn more about safe use of changing facilities](#)

Child protection

Some signs of abuse may become apparent while children and young people are getting changed. For example, you might notice changes in behaviour, children being

uncomfortable getting changed or unusual marks and bruises. Staff and volunteers should be trained to recognise the signs of abuse and know what procedures to follow if they have any concerns about a child and young person.

Changing areas could be places where young people are more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse such as bullying or harmful sexual behaviour, especially in secondary schools where there is less supervision. School staff need to be able to keep children safe while allowing them privacy.

Changing areas

Schools need to consider the following things when organising changing facilities for children.

- Mixed gender changing areas are less appropriate as children get older. Be sensitive to those who physically mature at a much earlier or later age than their peers. Children usually begin puberty at any point between the ages of 8 and 14 (NHS, 2021).
- Schools need to treat everyone fairly and with respect for their privacy and dignity.
- Schools should make adequate and sensitive arrangements for changing which take into account the needs of all children. This should include those with disabilities, those who are transgender, non-binary or questioning their gender identity and those from different religions, beliefs and cultural backgrounds.
- Adults must always change or shower privately; never in the same space as children.

Separating children of different genders

In **England**, the **School Premises (England) Regulations 2012** state that schools must provide suitable changing accommodation and showers for children who are aged 11 or over at the start of the school year and who receive physical education. They must also provide separate toilet facilities for boys and girls aged 8 years or over, except where the toilet facility is intended for use by one pupil at a time and can be secured from the inside. The Department for Education (DfE) has provided guidance on the **standards for school premises** (DfE, 2015).

In **Northern Ireland**, there is no specific guidance on providing school changing rooms. However schools are required under the **School Premises (Standards)**

Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1973 to provide separate sanitary fittings for boys and girls over the age of 6.

In **Scotland**, the **School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967** require all mixed gender schools to make sure half their toilets are for boys and half are for girls. There is no specific guidance for changing facilities.

In **Wales**, the **Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999** state that schools must provide readily accessible changing accommodation (including showers) for pupils who are aged 11 or over and who are receiving physical education. There must also be separate washrooms for male and female pupils who are aged 8 and over.

Transgender and non-binary children

Schools should be aware that using gendered changing facilities can be a source of stress for transgender and non-binary children. Schools should strive to meet young people's wishes on a case-by-case basis and in a considered and mindful way.

› **Learn more about safeguarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ+) children and young people**

Staff supervision

Schools need to decide what is appropriate supervision based on the age and developmental needs of the children and young people getting changed.

It should not be necessary for adults to remain in the changing room in order to maintain good behaviour; being in close proximity and students being aware of this may be enough.

Students should know that adults are in earshot of what is happening in the room and will enter if necessary - in response to a disturbance or bullying, for example.

Staff should also consider the following principles of best practice.

- It may be possible to leave the door of designated changing rooms slightly open so that nobody can see inside but staff outside can hear if there is a disturbance.

- If an adult needs to enter the room they should alert children in advance and give children the opportunity to cover up if they want to.
- Where possible, the adults who are supervising children getting changed should be of the same gender as them.
- Adults should never stand in the changing room watching children and young people, or go in and out repeatedly without good reason.
- You should establish a clear code of behaviour and make sure students understand your expectations about their behaviour while they are unsupervised.
- Children and young people should know who to talk to if they have concerns about the behaviour of a member of staff or other young people. If concerns are raised these should be taken seriously, and the nominated child protection lead should take appropriate action.

Children and young people who need help getting changed

When organising changing areas for children who need extra support to get changed, schools should:

- have a written intimate care policy and review these arrangements regularly
- involve children, parents or carers in making decisions which involve intimate care
- ensure all staff and volunteers are aware of any intimate care issues for individual children and young people and understand the school's policy for assisting children who are disabled or require additional support
- encourage children of all ages to be as independent as possible - consider prompting and giving verbal help and encouragement before offering physical assistance
- be especially careful when helping children with underclothes, tights and swimming costumes.

If it's necessary to give a child assistance, adults should always do so openly and in sight of others.

› [Read our information about safeguarding and continence issues](#)

Using off-site changing rooms

Schools should think about what safeguards need to be put in place to protect children when visiting other sites. As well as the guidance above, the following principles may be helpful.

- It is not appropriate for schoolchildren to share changing facilities with members of the public unless this has been carefully risk assessed (for example at school swimming sessions).
- If school sessions are before or after public sessions, enough time should be booked either side of the session to allow children to get showered and changed before the public are allowed in.
- If changing areas are shared with students from another school, particularly those who are older/younger, all schools involved should conduct a thorough risk assessment together.

References

Department for Education (DfE) (2015) **Standards for school premises**. [Accessed 13/10/2021].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/standards-for-school-premises>>

NHS (2021) **Early or delayed puberty**. [Accessed 13/10/2021].

<<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-or-delayed-puberty/>>

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