PHOENIX SCHOOL OF MARTIAL ARTS

Preventing Abuse in Positions of Trust

Guidance for instructors, coaches, volunteers and everyone working with young people

Adapted for Phoenix School of Martial Arts from the supplied safeguarding guidance

Introduction

As parents, instructors, coaches, officials and volunteers working with young people at Phoenix School of Martial Arts, we must all help to promote responsible relationships within martial arts and prevent the manipulation and exploitation of young people.

Young people aged 16 and 17 may be particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation in certain situations. This includes sexual activity and manipulation by adults who hold a position of trust, responsibility or authority in relation to them, and, as a result, have a considerable amount of power and influence on their lives.

Those in authority positions within Phoenix School of Martial Arts can have a positive influence on the welfare of a young person by providing role models or someone to turn to if they have a concern. Clear boundaries must nevertheless be maintained for the safety of both young people and adults, so that exploitation cannot take place.

The law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland states that those in a position of trust in sports organisations, such as a coach, cannot legally have a sexual relationship with young people they look after who are under 18. The legislation came into force on 28 June 2022 in England and Wales and 27 November 2023 in Northern Ireland.

Within the relevant legislation, sport includes any game in which physical skill is the predominant factor and any form of physical recreation engaged in for purposes of competition or display. Either definition can be sufficient.

What is a position of trust?

Someone in a position of trust is a person in a position of authority or responsibility over another person. Those in positions of trust have a considerable amount of power and influence on a young person's life.

At Phoenix School of Martial Arts, this can include an instructor, coach, trainer, assistant instructor, senior volunteer, mentor, assessor or another adult who has responsibility, authority or significant influence over a young person.

A young person may be dependent on an instructor, coach, mentor or other adult for their martial arts development, progression, success, grading opportunities or position within the club.

What does the law say?

Sexual offences legislation underlines that sexual activity between adults and children under 16 is illegal and constitutes abuse. In defined circumstances, young people aged 16 and 17, despite reaching the age of consent for sexual activity, are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.

The law includes a wider range of roles where adults hold a position of influence or power, including sports coaches and others working in sporting environments.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the law states that those in positions of trust within sports organisations cannot legally have a sexual relationship with young people aged 16–17 for whom they are in a position of authority.

What should Phoenix School of Martial Arts do?

Phoenix School of Martial Arts should clearly define within its codes of conduct that abuse of positions of trust is unacceptable behaviour and may result in disciplinary action and/or prosecution where applicable.

Breaches should be robustly addressed in line with the law and the organisation's safeguarding procedures.

Codes of conduct and linked disciplinary processes should include wording that supports healthy and positive relationships between instructors, coaches, volunteers and young people.

The code of conduct should identify roles that constitute positions of trust and reflect the law concerning sexual relationships or sexual activity between adults in those roles and 16–17-year-olds for whom they have authority.

The position of trust provisions should be considered according to the nature of the adult's role in relation to the young person, rather than simply the frequency of contact.

Safeguarding training for people working with young people in martial arts should include information about abuse of positions of trust and maintaining appropriate boundaries between adults and young people.

Relevant roles can include instructors, coaches, trainers, supervisors, assessors, mentors and other adults with authority or responsibility for young people.

What can instructors, coaches and others in positions of trust do?

As someone in a position of trust, an instructor or coach has a responsibility to maintain a positive, healthy relationship with the young people under their authority.

- Read, understand, sign up to and comply with the Phoenix School of Martial Arts code of conduct and any relevant safeguarding requirements.
- Maintain relationships with all participants that are appropriate to the role and reflect positively on Phoenix School of Martial Arts. Relationships should be supportive, positive and aimed at improving the young person's skills, confidence and progress.
- Do not seek to or engage in sexual activity, sexualised communication or sexualised image sharing, including through social media or messaging, with 16- or 17-year-olds for whom you are responsible.
- Keep communication with young people appropriate, professional and capable of being transparently explained to parents/carers or the safeguarding lead.
- If a young person's behaviour indicates that they are seeking to develop or engage in an inappropriate relationship, immediately bring this to the attention of the Phoenix School of Martial Arts Welfare Officer/Designated Safeguarding Lead or manager. Do not respond in a way that could be interpreted as encouraging the young person. Make a written record of concerns and relevant details.

Dealing with a concern about abuse of trust

If you suspect that an abuse of a position of trust has, is or may happen, you should:

- immediately report the concern to the Phoenix School of Martial Arts Welfare Officer or Designated Safeguarding Lead;
- make a written record of your concerns and relevant details;
- if you are unable to contact the Welfare Officer/Designated Safeguarding Lead, or if you believe someone is at immediate risk of harm, report the concern to the police or children's social care.

If you believe your concern has not been dealt with appropriately, or there is no safeguarding officer available, concerns should be escalated to the appropriate statutory safeguarding service.

In England and Wales, this may include contacting the Designated Officer whose details are available through the relevant local authority's Children's Social Care Department.

If a child is in immediate risk or harm, call 999. Otherwise, the NSPCC Helpline is available on 0808 800 5000.

Phoenix School of Martial Arts: expected boundaries

To support a safe martial arts environment, adults in positions of trust should:

- avoid private or secretive relationships with young people;
- avoid unnecessary one-to-one contact in circumstances that cannot be appropriately supervised or explained;
- use appropriate professional communication channels and language;
- avoid sexualised jokes, comments, messages, images or conversations with young people;
- never use their authority, grading role, competition opportunities or other influence to pursue a personal or sexual relationship;
- report concerns about boundary-testing or inappropriate relationships promptly rather than attempting to manage the matter privately;
- maintain accurate records of safeguarding concerns and pass them to the appropriate safeguarding lead.

Review and responsibility

This guidance forms part of the safeguarding arrangements of Phoenix School of Martial Arts and should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding Children Policy, Safeguarding Adults Policy, Safe Practice Policy, Codes of Conduct, Complaints procedures and other relevant safeguarding procedures.

Everyone involved in Phoenix School of Martial Arts has a responsibility to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and to report concerns. The Designated Safeguarding Lead/Welfare Officer is responsible for receiving and escalating safeguarding concerns in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures.

Policy owner: Phoenix School of Martial Arts

Designated Safeguarding Lead/Welfare Officer: Abigail King

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Source and adaptation note

This document has been adapted for Phoenix School of Martial Arts from the supplied publication “Preventing abuse in positions of trust – Guidance for everyone in sport”. The substantive safeguarding principles and the legal-position-of-trust guidance have been retained, while organisational references have been changed to Phoenix School of Martial Arts and Phoenix-specific placeholders have been added where the source did not provide information about Phoenix.

This document should be used alongside Phoenix School of Martial Arts' wider safeguarding policies and procedures. It does not replace statutory safeguarding procedures or professional/legal advice.