

SAFE
& FAIR
SPORT

Safeguarding Policy
**FLEXIBILITY
TRAINING**



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British
Gymnastics



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FLEXIBILITY TRAINING

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Introduction

- Everyone in gymnastics has a responsibility to create safe and uplifting experiences for all. British Gymnastics acknowledges we all have a duty of care to safeguard the physical, emotional, and mental health of gymnasts.
- In gymnastics, flexibility is an integral part of the sport and should be encouraged as part of gymnastics training. Flexibility training performed safely and progressively will increase the range of movement necessary for many skills, increase performance potential and may reduce the risk of an injury.
- The compulsory requirements on flexibility training 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 is to prevent inappropriate practices related to flexibility training.
- 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 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 groups, UK Sports Institute practitioners and other external groups to ensure gymnasts welfare is at the centre of any decision making around flexibility training.
- 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 practices around flexibility training (Best Practice in Flexibility Training course).



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 in relation to flexibility training. Clubs and coaches are encouraged to discuss and clarify their stance within these parameters, which should then be reflected in their own policies and practices.
- The Rights of the Coach must be respected, for example, if a club allows facilitated stretching, a coach should always be afforded the opportunity to choose not to adopt this method if they do not feel it appropriate, or if they feel it may cause themselves (or the gymnast) injury or harm.
- To ensure safe practices around flexibility training are implemented, supporting information for parents/carers and gymnasts can be found in 'What do I need to know'.

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](#)

[Pain, Injury & Illness Guidance for Good Practice document](#)

Key definitions

- **Flexibility Training**

Training that intends to maintain or increase the range of movement around a joint.

- **Direct Supervision**

When working under direct supervision, you can take your own group of participants (based on participant ratio guidance) whilst the Lead Coach or a nominated Level 2 or above coach supervises you and the activities that have been planned for your participants. In a direct supervision situation, the Lead Coach (or Level 2 or above) will not have their own group, so they can provide constant supervision.

Please note, direct supervision is used for Helper coaches, and coaches 'in training' so they can practise the syllabus skills of the qualification they are training for (except at Level 3 and above in England, Northern Ireland and Wales where they do not need a more qualified coach).

- **Indirect Supervision**

When you are a qualified Level 1 you can take your own group of participants (based on participant ratio guidance) whilst the Lead Coach or a nominated Level 2 or above coach indirectly supervises you and the activities that have been planned for your participants. In an indirect supervision situation, the Lead Coach and other Level 2 or above coaches in the session will also have their own group, so they are supervising their own group and you at the same time.

- **Direct assistance**

When directly assisting you will be working with another more qualified coach and assisting them in the delivery of their session to their assigned group

of participants. Depending on your qualification, and the qualification of who you are assisting there are slightly different regulations.

In all situations it is your responsibility to understand what you are allowed to do with your accreditation. You should therefore spend time familiarising yourself with your syllabus and the restrictions you should work within. Any coach practising skills, movements, or activities outside of these boundaries and not included in the syllabus regulations will be deemed to be operating outside of their accredited syllabus. Consequently, the skill would not be deemed to be a recognised activity within a recognised environment and any insurance cover (through British Gymnastics or any other provider) would be rendered void.

- **Peer**

Another gymnast

- **Mild discomfort**

A feeling of not being comfortable or a slight feeling of pain.

- **Gaslighting**

Manipulating someone into questioning their own perception of reality.

- **Scope of practice (coaching)**

The limit of your knowledge, skills, and experience within your level of qualification.

- **Physical preparation**

Activities that improve the physical qualities of a gymnast to ensure they are prepared for the demands of the sport.

Flexibility Training



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

1.

'Gymnast-centered and coach-led' approach

Flexibility training must be 'gymnast-centered and coach-led'. **Coach-led** as coaches receive appropriate training on how to safely assess a gymnast's needs, plan the training to meet these needs and they also have the legal responsibility for the gymnast's duty of care. It must be **gymnast-centred** as their needs are central; the gymnast's thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and opinions must be actively sought, listened to, valued, and respected by the coach, and they must guide collaborative decisions made during training.

2.

Collaborative relationships

The coach should proactively encourage two-way communication with the gymnast, to promote collaboration, appropriate challenge, and praise effort and improvement.

3.

Maturation

During periods of rapid growth, flexibility is likely to decrease. During periods of rapid growth, the emphasis should be on the maintenance of flexibility rather than improvement.

4.

Informational & educational approach

Clubs and coaches should endeavour to educate gymnasts and parents/carers on the importance of flexibility training, and should have easily accessible methods for raising questions, concerns, or requesting any adjustments to practice.

5.

Amount and timing of flexibility training

The proportion of training spent on flexibility should be in line with the level of the gymnast, discipline requirements and meet the gymnast's needs.

6.

Warm-up

Regardless of when it is scheduled for, before commencing any flexibility training, a gymnast's joints and muscles should be thoroughly warmed-up.

7.

Perception of discomfort

Flexibility training is likely to feel uncomfortable in the targeted joint structures and connective tissues involved, especially if the objective is to improve flexibility. However, flexibility training does not need to always cause any discomfort, especially if the objective is to maintain flexibility levels.

8.

Monitoring & evaluation

Monitoring the effects of flexibility training is important to assess the gymnast's response to the stimulus, levels of soreness and adaptation. After flexibility training the coach should check-in with the gymnasts involved to ensure the activity met the desired objectives.

Summary Table

The table below gives an overview of the different types of flexibility training, the definitions, coaching level required to use each method and which sections of this document clubs and coaches need to follow for each method.



Type of flexibility training	Definition	What coaching level is required to use this method?	Which sections of the document applies to this method?
Self-directed	The gymnast stretches themselves using their own body weight or strength, uses equipment such as wall bars and blocks or platforms, or training aids such as resistance bands.	Coaches of all levels are permitted to adjust alignment or technique during physical preparation and flexibility training activities.	Section 1 – Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 2 – Safe Coaching Practises for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 3.1 – Self-directed stretching
Adjustments to alignment	Verbally or manually directed adjustments to the alignment of the body during stretching activities are a critical aspect of coaching, to ensure the correct position is learnt and practised, and to reduce the risk of injury from poor technique.	Coaches of all levels are permitted to adjust alignment or technique during physical preparation and flexibility training activities.	Section 1 – Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 2 – Safe Coaching Practises for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 3.2 – Adjustments to alignment
Coach-facilitated	The coach applies appropriate force to stretch the gymnast manually.	Level 2 (or equivalent) and coaches above this level are permitted to use this method. They will have completed the British Gymnastics recognised eLearning on flexibility in addition to or as part of their qualification. *Please read Section 3.3 for more information on Level 1 coaches (or equivalent) completing the additional eLearning to enable them to use this method indirectly supervised, and GAI or helpers directly assisting Level 2 coaches (or equivalent).	Section 1 – Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 2 – Safe Coaching Practises for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 3.3 – Coach-facilitated stretching
Peer-facilitated	The peer applies appropriate force to stretch the gymnast manually.	Level 2 (or equivalent) and coaches above this level are permitted to use this method. They will have completed the British Gymnastics recognised eLearning on flexibility in addition to or as part of their qualification. *Please read Section 3.4 for more information on Level 1 coaches (or equivalent) completing the additional eLearning to enable them to use this method indirectly supervised, and GAI or helpers directly assisting Level 2 coaches (or equivalent).	Section 1 – Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 2 – Safe Coaching Practises for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 3.4 – Peer-facilitated stretching
Ballistic	The gymnast uses a high degree of appropriate force at their end range of movement, therefore taking the gymnast past or outside of their range, with the aim of increasing the range of movement in the associated joints. It is characterised by forceful ‘bouncing’ type actions at the gymnast’s end range of movement. Ballistic stretching should not be confused with dynamic stretching which though may look ‘bouncy’ at times, by comparison is performed with a high degree of control e.g., kicks, pike walks.	Level 3 (or equivalent) and coaches above this level are permitted to use ballistic stretching using only self-directed methods. Ballistic stretching facilitated by coaches or peers is not a recognised method.	Section 1 – Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 2 – Safe Coaching Practises for all Flexibility Training Methods Section 3.5 – Ballistic stretching

Safeguarding Policy:

FLEXIBILITY TRAINING

The points in this document apply to any form of flexibility training or stretching methods used in clubs or venues affiliated with British Gymnastics or Home Nations, and at any events affiliated with British Gymnastics or Home Nations.

1. **Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments for all Flexibility Training Methods**

Clubs and coaches must follow the points below to create a safe and positive environment when performing any form of flexibility training method to support their practice:

- 1.1 All activity must be practised in an open environment where a minimum of two responsible adults are present, regardless of the age of the gymnast:
 - 1.1.1 For British Gymnastics & Welsh Gymnastics, one of the adults must be at least a Level 2 (or equivalent) coach and the second adult must not be one of the participating gymnasts, as per the **Health & Safety Guidance: Coaching Practice**.
 - 1.1.2 For Scottish Gymnastics, training sessions must have a minimum of two coaches, one of which must be a minimum of a Level 2 (or equivalent) in every discipline offered, as per the Scottish Gymnastics Minimum Operating Requirements.
- 1.2 Flexibility training must account for individual abilities, acknowledge anatomical differences, be progressive and achievable.
- 1.3 Clubs must monitor flexibility training practices within their club to ensure they are aligned to the points set out in this document.
- 1.4 Clubs must be transparent and clear regarding the flexibility training methods used at their club or facility, which must align to this document.
- 1.5 Clubs and coaches are responsible for the support staff they deploy and must understand their professional boundaries and Codes of Conduct, as well as ensuring they follow the mandatory points set out in this document when engaging with any gymnastics flexibility training activity.

2.

Safe Coaching Practices for all Flexibility Training Methods

In addition to the points detailed in Section 1 to create safe, positive, and healthy environments, specific practices must be employed by coaches when performing any form of flexibility training or stretching methods to support their practice:

- 2.1 The gymnast must be able to reduce the intensity of a stretch or stop a stretch entirely, at any time, if they perceive it to cause more than mild discomfort. See the [Pain, Injury & Illness Guidance for Good Practice](#) document for more information on helping gymnasts understand mild discomfort.
- 2.2 The activity must not compromise the gymnast's safety.
- 2.3 The coach must minimise any risk to the gymnast's physical, mental, and emotional health during flexibility training. If the activity causes emotional distress the activity must stop immediately.
- 2.4 The activity and positions practised must not compromise the gymnast's dignity.
- 2.5 The gymnast must be able to safely move out of a position whenever they choose.
- 2.6 The coach must encourage the gymnast to move through all positions performed during flexibility training in a controlled manner.
- 2.7 The gymnast must always be given choice regarding the method of flexibility training, and the use of any apparatus, or training aids.
- 2.8 Discrimination, the use of threats, coercion or any behaviours that could be deemed that of gaslighting, abuse of power imbalance or emotional abuse with regards to flexibility training must not occur under any circumstance.
- 2.9 If a coach perceives a gymnast to be actively ignoring the requirement to only experience mild discomfort, subsequently putting themselves at risk of injury, they must ensure the gymnast reduces the intensity of the stretch or stops as per their Duty of Care.

3.

Safe Coaching Practices – Scope of Practice and Different Flexibility Training Methods

Coaches and support practitioners must always work within their scope of practice, and only use flexibility training methods in line with their qualification and the education received.

Details are provided in each of the sections below outlining the specific method, the definition of the method and coaching level required to use each method. In addition to Section 1 (Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments for Flexibility Training) and Section 2 (Safe Coaching Practices for all Flexibility Training Methods), clubs and coaches must ensure they follow any specific points detailed in each of the respective sections for different flexibility training methods they are employing. Different methods of Flexibility Training include:

- 3.1 Self-directed stretching
- 3.2 Adjustments to alignment
- 3.3 Coach-facilitated stretching
- 3.4 Peer-facilitated stretching
- 3.5 Ballistic stretching

3.1 Self-directed stretching

What is self-directed stretching?

The gymnast stretches themselves using their own body weight or strength, uses equipment such as wall bars and blocks or platforms, or training aids such as resistance bands. Coaches may be seen to manually facilitate adjustments to alignment during self-directed stretching. Please refer to section 3.2 for more detail on adjustments to alignment, which differs from coach and peer-facilitated stretching.

What coaching level is required to use this method?

Coaches of all levels are permitted to adjust alignment or technique during physical preparation and flexibility training activities.

Which sections do I need to follow for self-directed stretching:

- **Section 1 (Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments)**
- **Section 2 (Safe Coaching Practices for all Flexibility Training Methods)**

3.2 Adjustments to alignment

What are adjustments to alignment?

Verbally or manually directed adjustments to the alignment of the body during stretching activities are a critical aspect of coaching, to ensure the correct position is learnt and practised, and to reduce the risk of injury from poor technique.

What coaching level is required to use this method?

Coaches of all levels are permitted to adjust alignment or technique during physical preparation and flexibility training activities.

Which sections do I need to follow for adjustments to alignment?

- **Section 1 (Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments)**
- **Section 2 (Safe Coaching Practices for all Flexibility Training Methods)**
- **Section 3.2 (Adjustments to alignment) – Points detailed below**

3.2.1 Before applying manual adjustments to alignment, coaches are encouraged to use questions, give feedback, and provide visual demonstrations or cues to support the gymnast in adjusting their alignment by themselves.

3.2.2 It is not expected that clubs communicate the potential use of adjustments to alignment with parent/carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) prior to use.

3.2.3 Gymnasts have the right to say no and turn down having manual adjustments made to their alignment at any time. However, if a coach believes a position to be 'unsafe', risky or technically incorrect they must instruct the gymnast to stop the stretch and reset or change what they are doing.

3.2.4 When manually adjusting alignment, the coach must ensure this does not increase the intensity level of stretch beyond mild discomfort.

3.2.5 Manual adjustments to alignment must not be confused with or used to disguise coach-facilitated stretching. Adjustments to alignment should be brief and must not apply force to increase the depth of a stretch. However, any adjustments to alignment may increase the discomfort and therefore a reduction in intensity might be required.

3.2.6 A coach can utilise a gymnast's peer to make adjustments to alignment, however the coach must deem them competent and mature enough to follow points and be fully briefed to ensure they contribute to the maintenance of a safe, healthy, and positive environment. Coaches must actively and directly supervise any peer related adjustment activity.

3.2.7 A coach or peer must not directly contact: the front of the neck, between the pectorals to mid-rib cage (the chest), above the inside of the mid-thigh, on the buttocks or in any intimate areas.

3.3 Coach-facilitated stretching

What is coach-facilitated stretching?

The coach applies an appropriate force to stretch the gymnast manually.

What coaching level is required to use this method?

Level 2 (or equivalent) and coaches above this level are permitted to use this method. They will have completed the British Gymnastics recognised eLearning on flexibility in addition to or as part of their qualification.

Level 1 coaches (or equivalent), if required by their club or provider, can complete the additional training to enable them to use this method. Level 1 coaches must always be, as a minimum, indirectly supervised by a Level 2 or above coach. This Level 2 or above coach takes full responsibility for any Level 1 coach using this method. The Club Welfare Officers and coaching staff must be made aware of which Level 1 coach(es) have been requested to use this method and have completed the British Gymnastics recognised eLearning on flexibility, and which Level 2 or above coach(es) will be responsible for them.

Gymnastics Activity Instructors or Helpers can only directly assist a Level 2 or above coach in delivering this method, and this Level 2 or above coach must take full responsibility for any Gymnastics Activity Instructor or Helper assisting them. It is recommended that Gymnastics Activity Instructors and Helpers complete the training on flexibility to support them, however this does not then allow them to deliver this method either indirectly supervised or independently. In addition, a Gymnastics Activity Instructor cannot indirectly supervise a Level 1 coach to deliver this method.

Which sections do I need to follow for coach-facilitated stretching:

- **Section 1 (Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments)**
- **Section 2 (Safe Coaching Practices for all Flexibility Training Methods)**
- **Section 3.3 (Coach-facilitated stretching) – Points detailed below**

British Gymnastics promotes the use of self-directed methods but acknowledges the benefits and at times requirement to use facilitated methods where coaches apply appropriate force. If a club and coach choose to deliver using

facilitated methods, considerations regarding the perception of others must be made. This is where information, education, learning and development, opportunities for two-way communication and monitoring and evaluation can support clubs and coaches in creating safe and positive environments for all.

Before any coach-facilitated methods are used:

- 3.3.1 Any coach-facilitated methods must only be used if it is deemed an individual gymnast may require this.
- 3.3.2 Clubs must communicate the potential use of coach-facilitated stretching methods (including examples of body parts which may be stretched) to parents/carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) and follow the process outlined below:
 - i. Gymnasts and parents/carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) must be given appropriate time and opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have with the lead coach(es), club manager(s) or welfare officer(s).
 - ii. Informed consent and/or assent must be given freely by the gymnast and parent/carer (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk), to the use of coach-facilitated stretching before it is embedded into any gymnastics activity. If necessary, adjustments to practice must be made based on the discussions for the respective gymnast.
 - iii. If a gymnast or parent/carer (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk), requests adjustment to practice they must be able to do so without fear of consequence, or discrimination.
- 3.3.3 It is not expected that assent or consent is obtained from the gymnast each time coach-facilitated stretching is to be performed, assuming the club and coach has followed the process outlined in 3.3.2. However, a coach must ensure the gymnast has the right to choose not to take part in coach-facilitated stretching methods at any time without discrimination.

3.3.4 If a gymnast approaches the coach and requests to be stretched, providing the club and coach has followed the process outlined in 3.3.2, the coach can proceed with coach-facilitated stretching and must follow all relevant points in this document.

3.3.5 The coach must establish, respect, and abide by a common, clear, and simple language with the gymnast, to encourage and facilitate two-way communication.

During coach-facilitated stretching:

3.3.6 A coach must not directly contact: the front of the neck, between the pectorals to mid-rib cage (the chest), above the inside of the mid-thigh, on the buttocks or in any intimate areas.

3.3.7 A coach must not sit on, lay on, or stand on the gymnast.

3.3.8 A coach facilitating the stretch must respect the gymnast's rights, personal space, choice and be mindful of appropriate positioning to avoid any unnecessary contact or closeness.

3.3.9 A coach must ensure the gymnast is able to reduce the intensity of a stretch or stop a stretch entirely at any time if they perceive it to cause more than mild discomfort.

3.3.10 A coach must ensure that the appropriate force is applied in a controlled manner and the gymnast is able to counteract the force being applied e.g., pushing back against the force with active contractions or the use of their hands.

3.3.11 A coach must not apply force directly to a joint that is isolated e.g., the knee or elbow joint when extended.

3.4 Peer-facilitated stretching

What is peer-facilitated stretching?

When a peer applies an appropriate force to stretch the gymnast manually.

What coaching level is required to use this method?

Level 2 (or equivalent) and coaches above this level are permitted to use this method. They will have completed the British Gymnastics recognised eLearning on flexibility in addition to or as part of their qualification. The coach always assumes responsibility for the peer facilitating the stretching.

Level 1 (or equivalent) coaches may directly assist a Level 2 or above coach whilst delivering this method. Additionally, if required by their club or provider, Level 1 coaches can complete the British Gymnastics recognised eLearning on flexibility to enable them to use this method. Level 1 coaches must always be, as a minimum, indirectly supervised by a Level 2 or above coach. This Level 2 or above coach takes full responsibility for any Level 1 coach using this method. The Club Welfare Officers and coaching staff must be made aware of which Level 1 coach(es) have been requested to use this method and have completed the British Gymnastics recognised eLearning on Flexibility, and which Level 2 coach(es) will be responsible for them.

Gymnastics Activity Instructors or Helpers can only directly assist a Level 2 or above coach in delivering this method, and this Level 2 or above coach must take full responsibility for any Gymnastics Activity Instructor or Helper assisting them. It is recommended that Gymnastics Activity Instructors or Helpers complete the British Gymnastics recognised eLearning on Flexibility to support them, however this does not then allow them to deliver this method either indirectly supervised or independently. In addition, a Gymnastics Activity Instructor cannot indirectly supervise a Level 1 coach to deliver this method.

Level 1 coaches, Gymnastics Activity Instructors and Helpers (or equivalent) who are also gymnasts may be part of peer-peer stretching when they are participating in their gymnastics training, as they are being directly supervised by a Level 2 or above coach. When they are operating in their role as a coach, instructor, or helper, they must follow the points detailed in 3.4 when assisting with peer-facilitated stretching.

Which sections do I need to follow for peer-facilitated stretching:

- **Section 1 (Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments)**
- **Section 2 (Safe Coaching Practices for all Flexibility Training Methods)**
- **Section 3.4 (Peer-facilitated stretching) – Points detailed below**

British Gymnastics promotes the use of self-directed methods but acknowledges the benefits and at times requirement of using facilitated methods where peers apply force. If a club and coach choose to deliver using facilitated methods, considerations regarding the perception of others must be made. This is where information, education, opportunity for two-way communication and, monitoring and evaluation can support clubs and coaches in creating safe and positive environments for all.

Before commencing or using peer-facilitated stretching:

- 3.4.1 Any peer-facilitated methods must only be used if it is deemed an individual gymnast may require this.
- 3.4.2 Clubs must communicate the potential use of peer-facilitated stretching methods (including examples of body parts which may be stretched) to gymnasts and parents/carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) and follow the process outlined below:
 - Gymnasts and parents/carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) must be given appropriate time and opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have with lead coach(es), club manager(s) or welfare officer(s).
 - Informed consent and/or assent must be given freely by gymnasts and parent/carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk), to the use of peer-facilitated stretching before it is embedded into any gymnastics activity. If necessary, adjustments to practice must be made based on the discussions for the respective gymnast.
 - If a gymnast or parent/carer (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) requests adjustment to practice they must be able to do so without fear of consequence, or discrimination.

- 3.4.3 It is not expected that assent or consent is obtained from each gymnast each time peer-facilitated stretching is required, assuming the club and coach has followed the process outlined in 3.4.2. However, a coach must ensure the gymnast has the right to choose not to take part in peer-facilitated stretching methods and only self-directed methods without discrimination.
- 3.4.4 If a gymnast approaches the coach and requests to be stretched by a peer, providing the club and coach has followed the process outlined in 3.4.2, the coach can proceed with peer-facilitated stretching and must follow all relevant points in this document.
- 3.4.5 The coach and peer must establish, respect, and abide by a common, clear, and simple language with the gymnast, to encourage and facilitate two-way communication.
- 3.4.6 A coach must ensure they actively and directly supervise all peer-facilitated stretching.
- 3.4.7 A coach must ensure any peer who is facilitating a stretch has been appropriately briefed and is competent to safely take part in the activity.
- 3.4.8 A coach must only allow gymnasts to be involved in peer-facilitated stretching if they deem them sufficiently psychologically and emotionally mature to follow the points in this document and contribute to maintaining a safe and positive environment.
- 3.4.9 A coach must consider the relationships between gymnasts and should avoid making gymnasts vulnerable to situations where imbalance of power, or abuse of position may occur e.g., where there is a substantial age difference between partners, or between an adult gymnast and child gymnast.

During peer-facilitated stretching:

- 3.4.10 A peer must not directly contact: the front of the neck, between the pectorals to mid-rib cage (the chest), above the inside of the mid-thigh, on the buttocks or in any intimate areas
- 3.4.11 A peer must not sit on, lay on, or stand on the gymnast.
- 3.4.12 A peer facilitating the stretch must respect the gymnast's choices, rights, personal space and be mindful of appropriate positioning to avoid any unnecessary contact or closeness.
- 3.4.13 A peer must ensure the gymnast is able to reduce the intensity of a stretch or stop a stretch entirely at any time if they perceive it to cause more than mild discomfort.
- 3.4.14 A peer must ensure that the gymnast applies the appropriate force in a controlled manner and is able to counteract the force being applied e.g., pushing back against the force with active contractions or the use of their hands.
- 3.4.15 A peer must not apply force directly to a joint that is isolated e.g., the knee or elbow joint when extended.

3.5 Ballistic stretching

What is ballistic stretching?

The gymnast uses a high degree of appropriate force at their end range of movement, therefore taking themselves past or outside of their range, with the aim of increasing the range of movement in the associated joints. It is characterised by forceful 'bouncing' type actions at the gymnast's end range of movement. Ballistic stretching should not be confused with dynamic stretching which though may look 'bouncy' at times, by comparison is performed with a high degree of control e.g., kicks, pike walks.

What coaching level is required to use this method?

Level 3 (or equivalent) and coaches above this level are permitted to use ballistic stretching using only self-directed methods. Ballistic stretching facilitated by coaches or peers is not a recognised method.

Which sections do I need to follow for ballistic stretching?

- **Section 1 (Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments)**
- **Section 2 (Safe Coaching Practices for all Flexibility Training Methods)**
- **Section 3.5 (Ballistic stretching) – Points detailed right**

3.5.1 Ballistic stretching must only be practised by gymnasts who have a high degree of body awareness, and an excellent degree of physical preparation. Flexibility activity of this nature must be clearly linked to the needs of the gymnast, e.g., a skill the gymnast is preparing to learn requires them to take their body to an extreme range of movement under great force i.e., Split change ring leap, or L-grip circles or giants.

3.5.2 It is for these reasons ballistic stretching is only to be used after thorough analysis of the performance requirements and the gymnast's capability to practise in a controlled way. It must always be directly supervised, the gymnast should be briefed, and monitored for safety by the coach.

4.

Considerations for specific groups

4.1 Preschool gymnast considerations

Which sections do I need to follow for?

- **Section 1 (Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments)**
- **Section 2 (Safe Coaching Practices for all Flexibility Training Methods)**
- **Section 3.1 Self-directed stretching**
- **Section 3.2 Adjustments to alignment**
- **Section 4.1 (Preschool gymnast considerations) – Points detailed below**

4.1.1 Please note for preschool populations, coaches must only use self-directed methods of stretching and must not use extra weight or force at this age. Activity using the child's own body weight is sufficient.

4.1.2 In addition, Bridge and Splits are prohibited for preschool children, and they feature in the Preschool Prohibited Skills List. If you teach these skills to preschool gymnasts, you will be compromising the gymnast's health and safety, be deemed to be operating outside of your accredited syllabus and any insurance cover would be rendered void.

4.2 Disabled gymnast considerations

Which sections do I need to follow for disabled gymnast populations?

- **Section 1 (Creating Safe, Healthy and Positive Environments)**
- **Section 2 (Safe Coaching Practices for all Flexibility Training Methods)**
- **Section 4.2 (Disabled gymnast considerations) – Points detailed below**
- **Depending on the stretching method used, the relevant points detailed in Section 3 for the specific method must be followed alongside the additional points detailed below**

- 4.2.1 The coach must primarily be concerned with the wellbeing, health and general safety of the disabled gymnast and must make decisions in the best interests of the disabled gymnast. As a result, the rationale for flexibility training must be clear.
- 4.2.2 The coach must ensure the method employed is suitable for the disabled gymnast based on their impairment(s), developmental age, ability, and potential vulnerability.
- 4.2.3 It should be acknowledged that consent or assent may look different for disabled gymnasts' populations e.g., written consent from parent/carer (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) and medical professional or use of alternative communication methods, such as sign language.
- 4.2.4 The vulnerability of the gymnast must be considered. The coach must be comfortable that the gymnast understands, has choice, and influences decisions. If the coach feels they do not understand, have not been given choice, or are vulnerable to others making decisions for them we suggest that the coach must not employ flexibility training methods such as coach or peer-facilitated stretching.

Physical disabilities and medical conditions

- 4.2.5 For gymnasts with physical disabilities or medical/health conditions that could be impacted by flexibility training, more

information must be obtained from parents/ carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) and where appropriate from medical professionals to ensure the gymnast is not at risk of harm. For example, gymnasts with dwarfism should not attempt any flexibility training where there is the potential to put pressure on or cause impact to the head or neck. As a result of this, it is not recommended that gymnasts with dwarfism do bridges.

- 4.2.6 A coach working with disabled gymnasts must be aware that a physical disability or medical need may mean that someone is above mild discomfort all the time, so flexibility training automatically takes them above mild discomfort. In this instance it is suggested coaches work with parents/ carers (in the case of a person under 16 or person at risk) and medical professionals to establish a suitable way of identifying and ensuring participants are not harmed.
- 4.2.7 Please see the **British Gymnastics Health & Safety Guidance: Safe Participation** document for more information on working with gymnasts with Down's Syndrome who have Atlanto-Axial Instability.

Intellectual impairments and communication considerations

- 4.2.8 The communicative methods used must be suitable for the individual gymnast; this may include sign language, the use of symbols or another alternative or augmentative communication method. The coach must be mindful of the questioning used, the amount of questioning and the processing time given to the gymnast.
- 4.2.9 The coach must be mindful of the developmental age of the gymnast they are working with; this may impact the response received. The coach must always be checking for facial expressions and body language, which may show that the gymnast is not comfortable with the flexibility training that is happening.

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 event (see the British Gymnastics Positive Coaching module for more information on reflective practise. Encourage everyone to reflect daily).



Useful links

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

- [Best practice in flexibility training course](#)
- [Poster - What do I need to do if I'm a club manager/head coach?](#)
- [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 – Creating safe, healthy & positive environments for flexibility training](#)
- [Poster – Self-directed stretching checklist](#)
- [Poster – Coach-facilitated stretching checklist](#)
- [Poster – Peer-facilitated stretching checklist \(for coaches\)](#)
- [Poster – Ballistic stretching checklist \(for coaches\)](#)
- [Explainer video](#)

Contact information

British Gymnastics

Welfare & Safe Sport

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Scottish Gymnastics

Scottish Gymnastics Wellbeing and Safe Sport

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Regional Welfare Officer details

british-gymnastics.org/safesport/safeguarding#14