



Stockport Tigers Fencing Club

Safety Policy & Risk Assessment

Stockport Tigers Fencing Club ('Stockport Tigers') is intended to provide children aged 8 - 13 years+ with a safe and worthwhile introduction to basic fencing skills, sufficient to permit competition entry appropriate to age and ability. Stockport Tigers is a not for profit club associated with Stockport Sword Fencing Club. We hope that the children will enjoy fencing with us and progress to Stockport Sword Fencing Club in due course. Regardless whether a child does continue with fencing, our objective is to have provided a positive experience of sport, beneficial to physical and personal development. Safety and child welfare are paramount concerns.

Safety

Fencing is a sport with a remarkably good safety record and significant accidents are very rare indeed. Tremendous advances in blade technology, ballistic cloth and mask construction have also occurred in the last 25 years. There is also a longstanding culture of safety in British Fencing, which we wish to continue. It is important to instil this attitude in children from the onset; fencing is only fun when it is safe.

Of course, any sport does involve an unavoidable risk of injury. Fencing is a competitive, combat sport and the prospect of contact is immediate. Indeed, the objective is to strike your opponent with a metal weapon. Anything more than an occasional bruise is unlikely but we cannot preclude the possibility that something worse could happen one day. It seems to us that the social and physical benefits of participation in fencing within a well regulated club environment vastly outweigh the attendant risks. However, it must be for individual parents to weigh these risks for themselves. We positively invite all parents to watch sessions whenever they wish and to speak with us if they have any queries. Observation is not only welcome so that parents may determine that fencing is the right activity for their child. It also helps improve safety and behaviour. If anyone ever feels there is a way to improve our assessments or manage the risks of the activities we undertake them please tell us!

Medical Fitness

We ask parents to declare any medical conditions relevant to their child's participation in exercise in general and fencing in particular, e.g. asthma, heart conditions, allergies, diabetes, behavioural issues. Stockport is an inclusive club and we would not turn any child away provided that we can reasonably look after them. It is likely that all medical issues can be addressed with the co-operation and attendance of parents. However, we do need to ensure that children are not inadvertently put at risk and that the safety of the group as a whole is maintained.

First Aid

Didsbury MMU always has a qualified first aider on site. Several of the coaches also have first aid accreditation.

Child Protection

All Stockport Tiger coaches are registered, CRB checked and have undergone child protection training. All sessions can be observed by parents and more than one adult coach is always present.

If you have any concerns regarding child protection issues, whether in relation to safety, conduct or otherwise, then we positively encourage you to raise them. You may do so with:-

- The Coaching Staff at the Club
- The Staff at Didsbury MMU
- The Welfare Officer at British Fencing
- The NSPCC
- The Police

Risk Assessment & Control

The main hazards associated with fencing are as follows:-

- Broken Blades (or other equipment failure)
- Unsupervised and/or incorrect use of equipment
- Being struck by weapons
- Injury to spectators/non-combatants by weapons or collision
- Slips and trips

Control of Hazards

Broken Blade/Equipment Failure

A broken blade is an obvious safety hazard. Historically, it has been the source of fatality, most notably in 1982 with the tragic death of Vladimir Smirnov, a foil World Champion. He was hit (extremely forcibly) on his mask by a broken carbon steel blade, the hilt section of which then penetrated the mesh, which was in poor condition. This accident provoked major changes in all aspects of kit requirements. Blade construction is now better than ever - but constant bending and stress of any blade from normal usage will result in eventual failure. The moment of blade failure is not predictable and may not necessarily follow, as one may expect, from a hard hit. Regular visual inspection of blades is sensible but will not be informative of impending breakage. It is therefore imperative that all children fence correctly and know what to do if a blade does break:-

- Stop fencing immediately
- Immediately hold up non sword arm to emphasise a 'Halt'
- Carefully point the broken sword down to the floor
- Calmly shout for a coach to assist

Fencing clothing needs to be regularly checked for any wear and tear which might compromise

safety. Full fencing kit should always be worn when using weapons (mask, plastron, jacket, glove, breeches, long socks). Girls over 12 are required to wear chest protectors. Although not required by British Fencing, we also prefer all U12 boys and girls at our club to wear chest protectors. Doing so diminishes discomfort caused by accidental hard hits to the chest and provides an additional protection for young children. We do recognise however, that few boys over 12 wear chest protectors and they are almost unheard of to be worn in senior male competitions.

Safety requirements of fencing kit are part of the syllabus for the Proficiency Scheme. We adopt and adhere to these rules, expect the children to know them and try to reinforce the message about kit safety on a regular (not a week goes by without it) basis. This reinforcement is achieved by example, repeated instruction and - if necessary – intervention.

Unsupervised and/or incorrect use of equipment

Supervision and correct use of equipment is achieved by:-

- Qualified and/or responsible observation of children and intervention, as appropriate
- Safety instruction and child education, externally assessed by proficiency awards
- Good coach to child ratios
- Development of appropriate peer group norms at the Club
- Disciplinary measures to include, if necessary, exclusion

Stockport Tigers is invariably attended by at least 2 registered coaches. This arrangement permits one coach to give individual lessons and for the other to supervise group activities. Individual lessons are, by their very nature, directly supervised and throughout controlled by the coach concerned. If one coach were absent, no individual lessons could be given but group activities could still continue.

We also make use of some competitive cadet/senior fencers and parents to assist the children, in addition to the qualified coach supervision. Much of fencing safety is common sense and the involvement of responsible adults, duly instructed in matters of basic safety, is an obvious advantage for all concerned. A qualified coach will always be present and in charge. However, it is invaluable to have the involvement of other fencers and adults helping with basic tasks (e.g. clipping children on/off boxes, presiding, scorekeeping) and providing a further layer of safety observation (e.g. jackets done up, gloves velcro tied, masks secure). It is our experience that the involvement of role model fencers and supportive parents improves behaviour, safety and performance.

Even at the highest level of competition, standards of personal behaviour should be exemplary and are enforced; the FIE retains the honour code as part of the rules. In part, this is an aspect of the strong safety culture in fencing. Fencing requires participants to behave in a responsible and considerate manner towards those around them at all times. In our experience, children who make a voluntary election to participate in fencing are usually well motivated to comply with peer group norms and rational coach instruction. But if a child were unwilling or unable to observe the behavioural compact that permits usage of fencing weapons, they simply cannot take part in the sport.

Fencing Kit & Weapons Handling

We permit steam foils to be used for training and lessons without breeches, provided that stout

trousers are worn. Otherwise, full fencing kit must be worn at all times for epee fencing. The most serious accidents in modern fencing have resulted from combinations of broken blades AND incomplete/poor equipment, e.g. no plastron, cut down plastron, soft mask.

We require all clothing to be 350N or better and recommend use of chest plates by all children at the club. They are compulsory for girls over the age of 12 years.

Fencing has an excellent culture of safety and there are basic messages that are endlessly repeated at every reputable club. We are no exception.

- PUT WEAPONS DOWN WHEN NOT FENCING
- NEVER POINT A WEAPON AT A PERSON UNLESS YOU ARE ABOUT TO FENCE AND THEY ARE WEARING A MASK
- NEVER FENCE WITHOUT FULL EQUIPMENT
- STOP FENCING, CALL HALT & LOWER YOUR WEAPON IF A BLADE BREAKS
- HOLD UP YOUR HAND TO INDICATE 'HALT' IF THERE IS ANY PROBLEM
- NEVER RUN WITH A WEAPON

The need for observation of these rules and intervention in the event of default is explained to ALL children, parents, coaches and helpers.

The need to wear full, correctly fastened fencing kit is emphasised from the very first taster session. Basic safety is a part of induction (which all children undertake) and basic proficiency certificates (which all children undertake). It is a message reinforced during every session, by example, instruction and observation/intervention. It is an important cultural aspect of the sport, followed at all levels, which we endeavour to inculcate from the outset.

Being struck by weapons

Hitting your opponent is actually the objective of fencing, so this risk is actually a certainty. Modern blades weapons are designed to bend upon impact and will do so most readily when the hit is scored with correct technique. Provided full safety kit is worn, no significant injury should result. Even in competitive adult fencing, the worst one tends to see is occasional light bruising. But quite apart from safety considerations, a child's enjoyment of fencing is also influenced by whether it 'hurts'. It should not! We aim to minimise the risk of accidental injury and ensure that fencing is fun.

- Correct technique is taught from the outset and praised.
- Hard hitting is identified as a fault and explained.
- Full safety kit and chest plates are worn.
- Box sessions are supervised or refereed.

Injury to spectators/non-combatants by weapons or collision

We are fortunate to have the use of a very large sports hall at Didsbury MMU, covering the space of 5 badminton courts. Benches are available for parent or spectator seating. Group exercises and box sessions can be given ample space for safety.

From the outset children are taught not to walk across piste areas and to maintain a safe (weapon at

arms length) distance from others who are fencing.

Learning to referee is an integral part of the sport, which is on the British Fencing Syllabus for children's proficiency awards. Children learning to referee will stand a safe distance from fencers (i.e. over 2m, which is approximately combined arm and sword length) and have responsibility for control of an individual bout. Development of this control will naturally be supervised and observed but self-refereeing by children who have demonstrated appropriate responsibility and proficiency is a norm in junior fencing. Overall control of box sessions will always remain with a qualified coach.

Collisions between fencers incidental to permissible competition during a fight are inevitable but fairly unproblematic. Any violent behaviour should be stopped immediately as a safety hazard and rule infraction.

Collisions between fencers and bystanders should not occur provided bystanders keep a safe distance from pistes. It is conventional behaviour to go round the back of pistes rather than across them. It is also conventional behaviour only ever to walk in a fencing hall unless taking part in an exercise or activity which requires otherwise. Fencing weapons are always held point down unless in use and should then be put down on a bag until required again.

Slips and trips

At Didsbury MMU we are fortunate to have the use of a dedicated sports hall with a sprung floor which is very well maintained. Food and drink is prohibited in the hall (but we do allow and encourage the children to have water bottles in their bags). The hall is always well lit, absolutely clear and clean. We are the first users on a Saturday morning.

A short visual check of the area is made before the warm up session begins. The worst we have ever found are dead or dying wasps.

Kit bags are kept at the edge of the room, away from any area used for exercises, activities or fencing.

Benches are stored by Didsbury MMU in a separate area adjacent to the sports hall, where there are also a few other items of sports equipment (e.g badminton net stands). The benches are stacked and locked upon our arrival and a key has to be requested so they can be put out. The task of putting out and replacing the benches is carried out and/or supervised by the coaches/adults. The children like to help and can do so with appropriate direction. The children otherwise are not permitted to have access to the storage area.

Tripping over electric scoring boxes and spools does occur in club fencing, although more by way of occasional nuisance than serious accident. It is quite easy to be inadvertent and catch spool wires, whether going from A to B, or simply after handing over to the next fencer on the box in undue haste. The areas used for box fencing are therefore kept separate from other activities. Children are instructed and reminded to walk around the back of pistes and to assist each other safely to clip on and off the boxes. Coaching and parental assistance to clip on and off the boxes is provided, where possible and convenient, to assist, encourage and remind the children of safe practices.

We promote the sporting development and proficiency of the children at every level. In doing so there are immediate gains for behaviour and safety. All children at the Club are encouraged to take proficiency tests and to complete a basic certificate at the earliest stage. These certificates, albeit

elementary, are tested by external examiners and promote responsible behaviour and peer group safety. Almost all children wish to enter competitions and again will be required to comply with the behavioural and safety norms of the sport. We are fortunate to have cadet/senior role models at the Club with national or international ranking, again reinforcing the safety message.

Fencing is only fun when it is safe!

Nick Grimshaw

SUMMARY TABLE: RISK ASSESSMENT					
Activity	Risk	Who is at Risk	Level of Risk	Precautions Taken	Additional Measures (other than constant vigilance!)
Venue – Access Car Parking and flat access is available to building. However, stairs to sports hall.	Good access from car park with no significant tripping hazards. Well maintained by MMU. Stairs to Sports Hall require ordinary care, particularly when carrying a bag.	All visitors.	Low.	Slightly heavy items of equipment, such as boxes, need to be carried upstairs to the venue by adults or children who are able to manage them. This is unlikely to be a problem (and never has been) because the coaches bring the heavier equipment with them. Children's fencing bags are designed to be carried by children and can readily be taken up stairs without assistance.	None required
Venue - Use	Tripping/slipping hazards	All	Low	The Sports Hall is well maintained by MMU. A visual check of the hall is made before the session starts.	None required
Venue - Emergency	Fire Exits	All	Low	Emergency exits are identified and kept clear.	None required
Kit Usage - Bags	Tripping	All	Medium	Fencing bags are kept to one side of the hall, clear of areas in use for activity	None required
Kit Usage – Boxes & Cables	Tripping	All	Medium	Advice is given to avoid walking across pistes.	None required
Incorrect Weapon Handling e.g. carried point up, running	Injury to self or others	All	Medium	Clear instruction from day one, regular reminders, correction of lapses, coaches and senior fencers leading by example, establishing a culture of compliance.	None required
Broken Blades	Penetrating Injury	Fencers and immediate spectators (referee, coaches, children, parents)	Low – but where it occurs this has historically been the most frequent cause of serious injury in the sport. Even good quality blades can be subject of unpredictable failure	Ongoing monitoring of weapons used at the Club for any sign of impending failure e.g. very soft or heavily corroded. Coaches and children are encouraged to check the weapon they are using whenever they fence or referee. Children and parents are encouraged to check the integrity of their own weapons at home and to keep them well maintained. Spectators are kept well away from the pistes.	None required
Hard Hitting	Bruising	Fencers	Low	Correct technique is taught from the outset and praised. Hard hitting is identified as a fault and explained. Full safety kit and chest plates are worn. Box sessions are supervised or refereed.	
Exercise	Muscle/Joint Injury	Fencers	Low	Warmups, promotion of correct fencing technique,	None required

				warmdowns. Encouraging general fitness.	
Incomplete or incorrectly worn kit	Injury from weapon	Fencer	Medium	Induction training, proficiency, observation and intervention	None required
Slips and trips	Falling over	All	Medium	Good venue. Visual Inspection. Bags away from activity areas. Encouraging access via piste ends	None required