

Chapter 23

Gymnastic and Trampolining Activities

Although common safety principles prevail across both activities this chapter is divided into two sections – gymnastics in part A; .and trampolining in part B. It makes recommendations relating to key practice and equipment issues to assist safe delivery of gymnastic activity in schools.

Part A : Gymnastic Activities

Introduction

Gymnastic activity involves subjecting the body to a wide experience of movement challenges which might include at various times managing the body in flight; climbing, hanging, descending swinging, inverting and balancing, often at some distance from the ground; and rolling on sloping and narrow surfaces. The aim of gymnastic activities is to develop and refine a broad range of movement skills using the floor and large gymnastic apparatus.

It is recognised that work on apparatus provides a potentially more hazardous environment, with the majority of recorded incidents typically involving falls or mis-judged descents from gymnastic equipment. However, work at a low level – on the floor, or when using benches and mats – requires equally rigorous risk management.

Gymnastic activity in schools is characterised by two contrasting teaching and learning styles which generate different considerations in terms of health and safety. Most primary schools deliver the National Curriculum gymnastic activity programme of study through a task-centred or **problem-solving approach** building in some direct teaching where progress and safety issues require a specific focus. The ability of staff to set realistic and appropriate movement challenges based on the existing abilities of their pupils is key to safety in this approach. In secondary schools, partly reflecting specialist PE training of the staff involved, there is often more recourse to direct instruction of recognised **formal gymnastic skills** associated with vaulting and agility, and trampolining, although not to the exclusion of task-centred content. A sound knowledge of technical progression relating to specified skills is essential to safe practice here.

Whatever the teaching approach, or combination of approaches, used, staff involved in the teaching of gymnastics should be appropriately trained since technique and effective body management are fundamental to safe performance. Training in task-centred gymnastics is usually located within the context of Initial Teacher Training supplemented, where necessary, through Local Authority professional development programmes. This is also the case with secondary PE specialists who may additionally benefit from acquiring National Governing Body (British Gymnastics) coaching awards.

Wherever staff wish to offer formal gymnastics –primary or secondary school based - through an out-of-hours club, or when seeking to involve and prepare pupils for **competitive involvement**, then an appropriate British Gymnastics Coaching Award is essential.

NB It should be noted that a British Gymnastics Teachers Award does NOT accredit a school member of staff to coach within an external gymnastic club context

What Staff should know

People

Staff and coaches involved in the teaching of gymnastics should be appropriately trained and qualified to do so. Any identified lack of confidence or competence should be addressed through a suitable programme of professional development. Staff should only work at a level in gymnastics at which they feel comfortable about their **own expertise** and are able to effectively plan, deliver and evaluate the gymnastics programme.

Wherever practicable pupils should be involved in the management of risk in gymnastics and provision needs to be made for this to become part of the learning process. They should clearly understand the range and nature of movement activity that different gymnastic equipment is designed to facilitate and to apply this knowledge effectively.

Pupils should understand the importance of **body preparation**. Becoming stronger and more flexible will not only enhance performance but will also reduce the likelihood of injury

Context

The **working surface** should be clean, free from obstruction or hazard, and non-slip. It should be subjected to a systematic and regular maintenance programme. This is particularly important where the facility is multi-purpose and used for additional activities outside the physical education programme.

There should be **sufficient space** and equipment to match the needs of the group. In order to ensure safe practice strategies may need to be employed to accommodate large groups working in limited space through alternating periods of observation with practical involvement.

Gymnastics **apparatus** should conform to appropriate standards (eg BSI; BS EN). It needs to be stored safely and be readily accessible. Prior to the commencement of activity staff should ensure it is safe to use and, over the longer term, be subject to an annual specialist inspection (see also Chapter 12 'Equipment in PE' [pageetc](#)).

On no account must defective equipment be used. It needs to be clearly labelled as such and, wherever possible, securely stored. Equipment which is judged to be irreparable should be safely and immediately disposed of.

Care needs to be taken when using **mats** in gymnastics, particularly with regard to their placement. There is a concern that when an informed decision is made to use mats as a precautionary measure eg pupils are working at a height - using climbing frames or ropes - it may encourage some pupils to work beyond their capabilities. It is essential that all pupils fully understand the purpose as well as the protective limitations of mats used in this way and never to assume a false sense of security through their presence. In this sense particular care needs to be taken with pupils who consistently display poor discipline, or are known to be hyperactive, or suffer from ADHD. In such cases the activity of pupils at greater

risk may have to be modified or limited in the interests of their own safety and that of their peers.

Clothing for gymnastics should allow free, unrestricted movement without being loose. Very loose clothing may snag on equipment and cause injury. Footwear needs to be light and flexible eg gymnastic slippers or plimsolls, enabling pupils to 'feel' the movement. Taking part in bare feet can enhance aesthetic awareness providing working surfaces are acceptably clean and free from hazard.

Training shoes with thick, inflexible soles are not suitable for work in gymnastics and pupils should never participate in **socks** on polished surfaces. Well fitting socks may be acceptable on a carpet surface if traction is not affected.

Long hair should be tied back and all personal effects removed before activity commences (see also Chapter 14 'Clothing and Personal Effects' page.....)

Organisation

Comprehensive and progressive schemes of work should inform and encourage a consistency of approach, and give direction to the work in gymnastics. Such schemes should be subject to periodic review and updated in the light of emerging practice, on-going risk assessments and accident reports.

Curricular gymnastic sessions should typically involve four phases:

1. A warm-up undertaken as whole class activity.
2. Development and/or consolidation of particular skills or movement task using the floor, or mats
3. Application of the skills focused upon to an apparatus setting OR progressed through partner/group work
4. Individual warm-down

Differentiated practice, taking into account the varying abilities and progress of individual pupils, provides the basis for safe and successful learning. Skills already learned will need to be re-visited on a regular basis and frequent **consolidation** should be a feature of planning. Care needs to be taken with pupils who have experienced a prolonged absence and wherever units of gymnastic activity are punctuated by long periods of time. A record of attendance, work covered and pupil achievement will help to ensure suitable progression and appropriate challenge.

Training schedules designed to support pupils involved in competitive gymnastics need to ensure their well-being, and care needs to be taken that the frequency, intensity and duration of the training programme reflects the physical and mental maturity of those involved. Injuries to young gymnasts frequently have their origins in fatigue and lack of concentration. Whenever pupils display any sign of physiological or psychological tiredness, staff should be prepared to stop, or modify, the activity.

It is considered good practice for pupils from the earliest ages to be involved as much as possible in the movement and assembling of **apparatus**. It is essential that pupils are given clear instruction about safe lifting technique and how to cooperate effectively with others in the process of setting out apparatus.

On no account should any gymnastic session ever be left unsupervised. In the event of an emergency, all gymnastic activity needs to cease immediately until the member of staff/coach is able to resume acceptable levels of supervision.

Effective communication between the class teacher and any support staff is essential and time should be allocated for joint planning activity. Both should understand their respective roles in ensuring a well-structured and disciplined working environment.

In the case of more **complex skills** eg rotational vaulting activities, physical support may be necessary to carry out movements safely, usually to prevent under- or over-rotation. Pupils need to be clearly informed about the manner and purpose of such support which should always follow accepted and common practice. Staff will need to have been appropriately trained in support technique and come equipped with a good understanding of the body mechanics involved.

In the event of an accident during a gymnastic session all activity should cease immediately and emergency procedures enacted. It is essential that a clear record of the incident is completed as soon as possible after the event in order to inform future practice.

What pupils should know

- Concentration levels need to be kept high in gymnastic activity with clear focus and attention maintained throughout the session
- To remain vigilant when working on apparatus and to alert staff immediately to any concerns relating to the safety and stability of apparatus.
- To work effectively and responsibly as a team when assembling, setting out and putting away apparatus, or when producing joint movement sequences with others
- To lift and move pieces of apparatus safely using accepted techniques
- To work within personal limits and capabilities always seeking advice and support from staff in areas of uncertainty.
- To understand that body preparation, practice and consolidation are essential in gymnastics to acquire reliable technique, confidence and freedom from injury.
- Never to work or practice in an unsupervised setting in gymnastics
- To accept that personal attire for gymnastics has to meet health and safety requirements for safe participation
- Good technique is the key to safe practice and the protective capacity of mats, mattresses and pads, is limited
- Different pieces of apparatus, including mats, have specific and different functions in developing skilled activity and performance needs to comply with these expectations