



**WE LISTEN, WE SUPPORT,  
WE TAKE ACTION**  
For Scotland's vulnerable  
children and families

safeguarding in  
**sport**

**Spectator Behaviour  
in Sport**



Since 2001, CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> has operated a national service promoting child protection in sport with the support and backing of **sportscotland** (the national agency for sport). The Safeguarding in Sport Service provides advice, information and guidance to Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport, local authorities, coaches and club officials across Scotland. We provide a national helpline service and manage a series of network meetings involving professional staff and volunteers responsible for developing sport in communities throughout Scotland. We deliver child protection training (at basic and advanced levels) through our network of accredited tutors and our website [www.safeguardinginsport.org.uk](http://www.safeguardinginsport.org.uk) has become an authoritative reference point for everyone involved in sport who seeks guidance and support on the topic of **safeguarding children in sport**.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Our thanks and appreciation goes, firstly, to the children and young people who took part in the children and young people survey and who also came forward to be involved in the follow-on one to one interviews. Our thanks are also extended to the young people at the CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> Chill Out Zone service in Bathgate for their willingness to share their experiences of spectator behaviour in sport. The testimonies of the young people interviewed have brought the findings and data in this report to life.

Thanks are extended to the many parents and carers who completed the parents' survey and to those parents who expressed a willingness to take part in the follow-on focus group discussions. It was not possible to accommodate all of the offers of assistance from parents and we were grateful for the written submissions received and to those parents who attended the focus group discussion in Glasgow.

Particular thanks are expressed to the volunteer call-takers at ParentLine Scotland who sought support for the parents' survey from callers to their helpline. ParentLine Scotland has been an important partner in this study, providing advice and guidance on the design and format of the parents' survey.

The children and young people survey reached a wide audience due to the help and support of Scottish governing bodies of sport and a range of youth organisations including Young Scot, YouthLink Scotland, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Office of the Scottish Commissioner for Children's and Young People.

Our thanks are also extended to the individuals who were willing subjects in the development of the case studies, contained in this report. Their helpful cooperation and reflection allowed us to build a series of case studies which convey good practice and grounds for further learning and development.

The Safeguarding in Sport team has kept its key partner, **sportscotland**, informed throughout this study and we have been grateful for the support and encouragement received.

Throughout CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> a number of teams have contributed to the success of the study including Policy, Communications, IT and MIS. The support and diligence of the Safeguarding in Sport team in reviewing draft questionnaires and developing early ideas about the study has been invaluable.

Our final thanks go to our committed volunteers, Eddie McConnell and Mark Baillie, who embraced the challenge of this assignment from its very early concept and shaped it into this hugely important contribution to safeguarding children and young people in sport.

**Sally Hall**  
**Safeguarding in Sport service**  
**CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>**

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1 CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> believe that sport can play a hugely positive part in young people's lives in terms of their health, wellbeing and development. Lots of people have a responsibility to make sure young people's experience of sport is enjoyable, safe and fulfilling.
- 2 Spectators are one group that can play an important role in encouraging and helping young people get the most out of their sport. However, sometimes spectators can behave badly and, when this happens, young people can feel abused and intimidated and, in some cases, give up sport altogether.
- 3 Through the work of its Safeguarding in Sport service CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> identified a problem about the behaviour of some parents at sports matches. It was decided to initiate a survey of children and young people to establish their experiences of spectator behaviour in their sports and to find out what impact poor behaviour by spectators had on them. At the same time, a survey of parents was also carried out, in partnership with ParentLine Scotland, to hear from adults on their experiences, in terms of poor sideline behaviour.
- 4 This report presents the findings and analysis from these surveys and it documents the views of children and young people who came forward as volunteers to take part in more in-depth interviews, following their participation in the survey.
- 5 The report also presents the findings of the parents' survey and provides comments and observations by parents from their survey responses, from the focus group discussion involving some of the parents who had taken part in the survey and from written submissions received from some parents.
- 6 The aims of this study was as follows:
  - To investigate the experiences of children and young people in relation to spectator behaviour at sports matches.
  - To identify the impact on children and young people who are exposed to poor spectator behaviour.
  - To hear from parents on their experience of poor spectator behaviour.
  - To understand what support and guidance is sought (and what is currently available) in relation to tackling poor spectator behaviour.
  - To develop a series of case studies from the testimonies of young people and adults involved in sport who have had direct experience of the issue.
- 7 It is important to clarify that this study is not a study of coaches' behaviour in sport. We recognise that much has been written and a great deal of resources and support are available to provide assistance to sports bodies and coaches in developing the skills and competence of coaches, including coaches' codes of conduct and frameworks for promoting positive role models through coaching.

- 8 The area of spectator behaviour is less well examined and this study set out to close that gap while identifying what can be done to tackle poor sideline behaviour in youth sport.

## **METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH**

- 9 To ensure that the study accessed both the experiences and the views of young people and parents a mixed method approach was adopted combining quantitative and qualitative methods.
- 10 The study had two individual but connected elements:
  - an online survey completed by children and young people and a separate online survey for parents, supported by ParentLine Scotland.
  - one to one interviews with a selection of young people who volunteered for further contact and a focus group discussion involving some parents who had completed the survey and volunteered their further involvement.
- 11 The surveys were designed and tested with input from young people and the final online version reflected their suggested amendments. Similarly, parents were invited to review the draft survey questions and ParentLine Scotland provided particular expertise in testing and reviewing the parents' survey.
- 12 The children and young people survey was live online for a period of seven weeks and it was accessible through an electronic link to the CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> Safeguarding in Sport website. The survey was promoted to Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport, Local Authorities and established sports networks throughout Scotland. It was also promoted by a range of other young people groups including Youth Link Scotland, Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People.
- 13 The parents' survey was promoted online, again through established sports networks, and started three weeks after the children and young people survey running for a similar duration of seven weeks. The ParentLine Scotland service operated by CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> provided particular support in that call-takers on their national helpline service invited parent callers (at the close of their calls) to take part in the survey.
- 14 Both surveys were promoted as anonymous but participants were invited to provide further contact details if they wished to take part in any follow-up interviews and focus group discussions. The surveys were promoted through social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and relevant blogs.
- 15 The children and young people survey was completed for three age groups (under 12, 12-16 and 16+) with participants self selecting their age group. Initial discussions to develop separate age group surveys were abandoned following helpful feedback from the range of young people consulted in the design stage of the survey.

- 16 The young persons' survey concluded with contact information for ChildLine and provided details of the confidential helpline service available in Scotland. This offer was made in recognition that, for some young people, reflecting on incidents of bad adult behaviour can lead to worries and anxieties that might need expert, professional support.
- 17 The interviews of children and young people (post the surveys) were conducted by two CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> personnel who were experienced in engaging and working with children and young people.
- 18 The one to one interviews with young people were conducted on an informed consent basis and young people who took part were given two opportunities to opt out of the interview process.
- 19 A focus group of young people (all of whom had different experiences of sport at different levels) was conducted at the COZ (Chill Out Zone) service operated by CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> in Bathgate, West Lothian.
- 20 Participation in the interviews and the focus group discussion was entirely voluntary.
- 21 The focus group discussion for parents took place after the young people interviews were completed and after the initial analysis of the surveys had been undertaken. The interviews and the focus group discussions presented an opportunity to examine, in more depth, some of the issues identified from the surveys. It also provided an opportunity to identify examples of good practice and to hear personal testimonies, while also receiving suggestions of what more needs to be done to tackle the issue of poor spectator behaviour in sport.
- 22 Initial analysis of the survey responses was conducted in Survey Gizmo to establish the frequency of responses. A second stage analysis was undertaken to compare responses between certain groups (e.g. age-groups, gender and player level: recreational player compared with elite players). The data was checked for errors and duplicates removed before analysis of the data was undertaken.
- 23 The findings and results of the surveys are presented in the next sections of this report.

## FINDINGS FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SURVEY

### Demographics and profile

- 24 Over 300 young people followed the link to the online survey and 154 young people went on to complete the survey in full.
- 25 The gender breakdown of respondents was as follows:
- Female (38%)
  - Male (62%)
- 26 Responses came from all over Scotland with 22 out of 32 local authority areas identified by children and young people as their area of residence – see Appendix 1 for full list.
- 27 Participants in the survey were involved in a wide range of sports (over 35 identified). Appendix 2 details the list of sports identified by children and young people with football being the sport cited most often. However, it is clear that this is largely attributable to the male respondents in the survey. For the female respondents the sports of gymnastics, hockey and dance are the more prominent sports identified.
- 28 Survey participants were invited to indicate their age in one of three age categories. The 12-16 age group was the largest group of respondents to the survey with under 12s the second largest group and 16+ the smallest group of respondents:

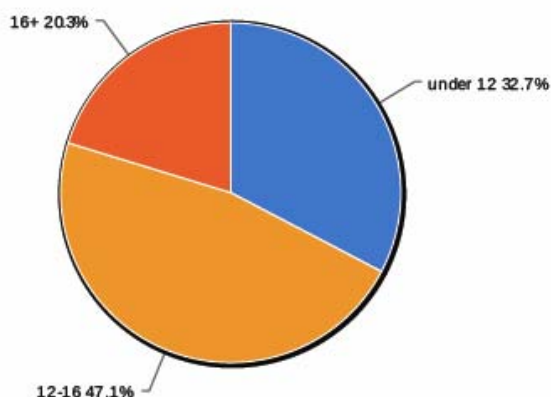


Chart (a)

### Where sport is played and at what level

- 29 The survey invited participants to identify where they play their sport. The majority of respondents (67%) played their sport locally at a local sports club and/or local facility with a further 22% saying they played their sport at school. 11% said they played at a regional/national standard facility. This distribution was fairly consistent for male and female respondents with slightly more males playing at regional/national standard facilities than females.



- 30 The pattern of distribution remained the same across the three age groups (in terms of where they played their sport), however a slightly higher proportion of those in the 16+ age group played their sport at a regional/national standard facility.
- 31 Participants in the survey were asked to indicate at what level they played their sport; four options were provided:
- Recreationally (just with friends)
  - Member of a local sports club
  - As part of a regional development/regional squad
  - As part of a national development/national squad
- 32 The majority (72%) played either recreationally and/or as a member of a sports club. A not insignificant number (28%) identified themselves as playing as either at regional development/squad level or national development squad level. This distribution was similar for male and female respondents with slightly less females (24%) playing at regional/national level and slightly more males (29%) identifying regional/national as the level at which they played their sport.

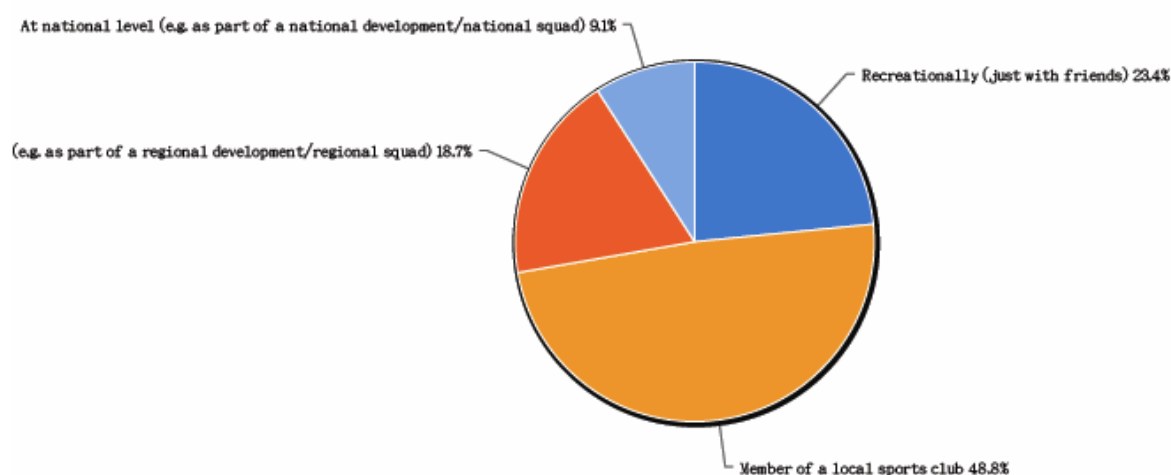


Chart (b)

- 33 Across the three age groups, the level at which participants in the survey identify themselves as playing at is consistent with the overall picture in terms of recreational/club players to regional/national players (i.e. approximately 75% to 25%).

	<b>Under 12</b>	<b>12-16</b>	<b>16+</b>
<b>Recreationally (just with friends)</b>	27%	17%	33%
<b>Member of a local sports club</b>	47%	57%	37%
<b>Regional development group/squad</b>	20%	16%	21%
<b>National development group/squad</b>	6%	10%	9%

Table 1

34 The only discernible difference is noted between the 12-16 age group and the 16+ age group. 57% of young people in the 12-16 age group identify themselves as playing at club level while in the 16+ age group this same category is 37% with an increase in the number of 16+ age group stating that they play their sport at a recreational level with friends. Age 16 is one of the key transition stages for young people and the seeming shift from club sport to recreational sport might be worthy of closer examination.

### **Experiences of poor spectator behaviour**

35 Children and young people were asked if they had direct experience of poor spectator behaviour happening to them and they were also asked, separately, whether they had witnessed poor behaviour by spectators directed at other players. Overall, 43% of young people responding to the survey said they had direct experience of poor behaviour and slightly less (40%) said they had witnessed poor spectator behaviour involving other players.

36 More males than females had direct experience of poor behaviour by spectators (49% compared to 33%) and this pattern was not dissimilar for male and female respondents confirming that they had witnessed poor spectator behaviour occurring with other players (males: 51% and females: 44%). The number of females reporting they had witnessed poor behaviour was significantly higher than the number saying they had direct experience.

37 Across the three age-groups (under 12, 12-16 and 16+), the responses for experiencing and witnessing poor spectator behaviour were consistent in the under 12 age category and the 12-16 age category with 36% reporting direct experience of poor behaviour in each category. In terms of witnessing poor spectator behaviour involving other players, 35% of the under 12 age group confirmed they had witnessed poor behaviour whereas the similar figure for the 12-16 age group was 46%.

	<b>Under 12</b>	<b>12-16</b>	<b>16+</b>
<b>Experienced poor behaviour</b>	36%	36%	68%
<b>Witnessed poor behaviour</b>	35%	46%	71%

Table 2

38 The most significant difference, in terms of experiencing and witnessing poor spectator behaviour occurs in the 16+ age group where a significant majority (68%) confirmed they had direct experience of poor spectator behaviour and an even larger number (71%) said they had witnessed poor spectator behaviour involving other players.

39 The next section of this report concerns the nature of the poor behaviour, its frequency and the impact it has on children and young people.

### Examples of poor behaviour by spectators

- 40 Those respondents who indicated they had either direct experience and/or had witnessed poor spectator behaviour were invited to indicate the nature of the poor behaviour. 67% of these respondents indicated they had been sworn at, 56% of respondents had been called a name and 45% of all respondents said they had been “made fun of”. Further examples included “being threatened” (22%) and “being pushed” (19%):

Spectator behaviour:	
<i>swearing</i>	67%
<i>called a name</i>	56%
<i>made fun of</i>	45%
<i>threatened</i>	22%
<i>pushed</i>	19%
<i>kicked</i>	8%
<i>spat at</i>	3%
<i>hit/punched</i>	3%
<i>racial comment</i>	2%

Table 3

- 41 Of particular concern was the small but significant number of young people who had experienced physical abuse, from adult spectators, in the form of being hit/punched, being kicked and/or being spat at. Seven incidents of this type of physical abuse were reported in the survey.
- 42 Male and female respondents indicated the same most frequent examples of poor behaviour (swearing, name-calling, and being made fun of). Males were much more likely to be “threatened” than females and this was the case also for “being pushed”.

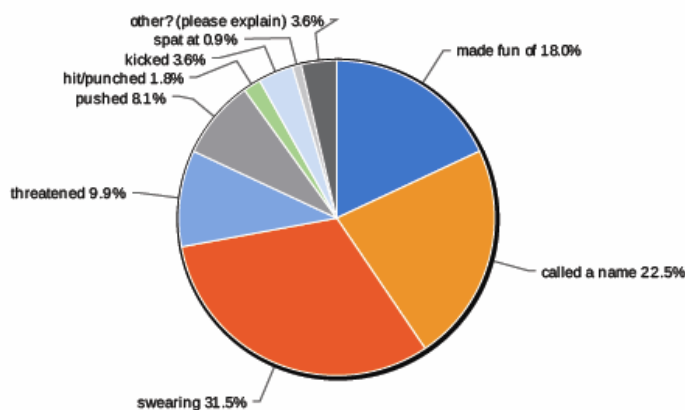


Chart (c)

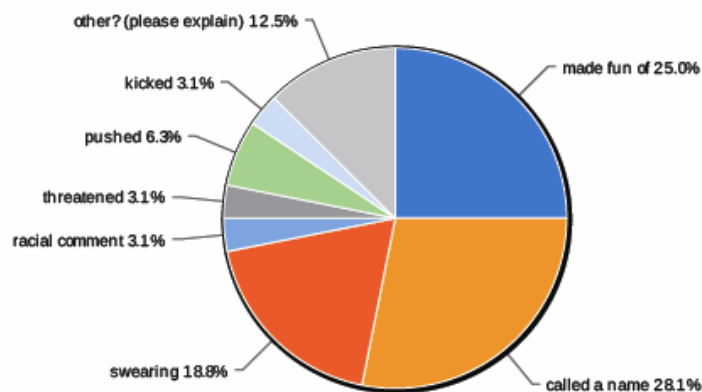


Chart (d)

43 The pattern of reported poor behaviour by spectators was not dissimilar across all three age-groups. However, young people in the 16+ age group reported incidents of verbal abuse and threatening behaviour occurring more commonly than in the younger age-groups.

	under 12	12-16	16+
<b>Spectator behaviour:</b>			
<i>swearing</i>	71%	56%	76%
<i>called a name</i>	41%	52%	71%
<i>made fun of</i>	35%	44%	52%
<i>threatened</i>	12%	20%	29%
<i>pushed</i>	24%	20%	10%
<i>kicked</i>	12%	12%	-
<i>spat at</i>	-	-	5%
<i>hit/punched</i>	6%	-	5%
<i>racial comment</i>	-	-	5%

Table 4

### Frequency of poor behaviour

44 Participants in the survey who had experienced or witnessed poor behaviour by spectators were asked to indicate the frequency of such incidents as follows:

- Just happened once
- Happens now and again
- Fairly frequently
- Happens all the time

- 45 The vast majority (76%) of respondents indicated that incidents of poor behaviour they had experienced either occurred “now and again” or “fairly frequently”. This figure climbs to 82% when reviewing male-only responses and drops to 59% amongst female responders.
- 46 Responses by female participants in the survey indicate that they are more likely to experience incidents as “just happening once” (41%) compared with their male counterparts who reported incidents of poor behaviour occurring only once at 14%.

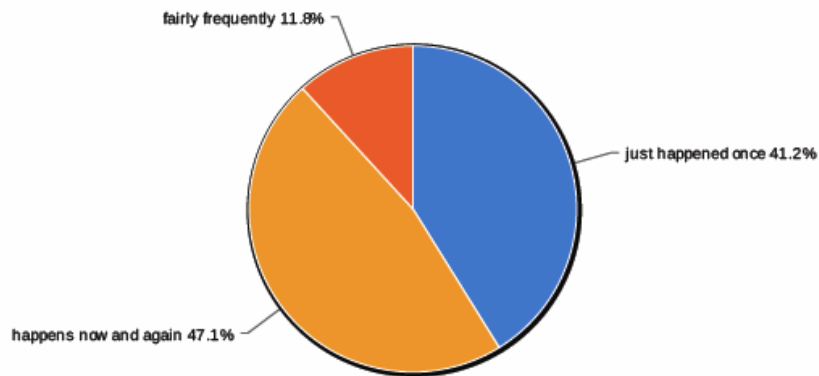


Chart (e)

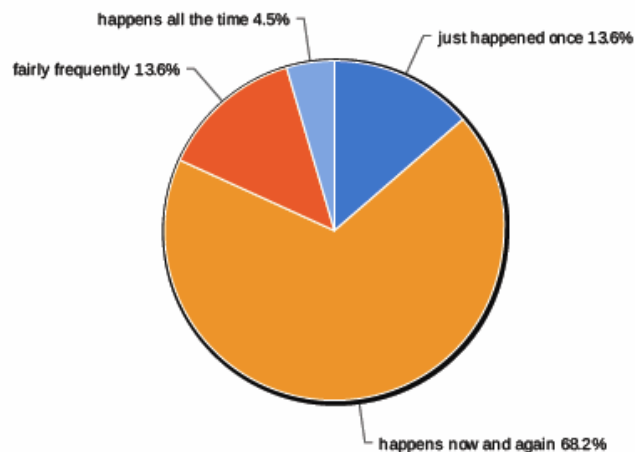


Chart (f)

- 47 The frequency of incidents of poor behaviour experienced is shown in the table below, broken down for each age group in the study.

	Under 12	12-16	16+
<b>Just happened once</b>	12%	32%	15%
<b>Now and again</b>	71%	36%	65%
<b>Fairly frequently</b>	17%	8%	15%
<b>Happens all the time</b>	-	4%	5%

Table 5

- 48 The 12-16 age group reveals a large proportion of respondents (32%) noting incidents as “happening only once” as compared with under 12s (12%) and 16+

(15%) for the same frequency category i.e. “just happened once.” However, like the 16+ age group, the “happens all the time” category of experiencing poor spectator behaviour amongst the 12-16 year olds starts to report, albeit at a low level, at 4%:

- 49 When asked about the frequency of witnessing poor behaviour involving other players, all three age groups report it as happening “now and again” or “fairly frequently” at high levels:

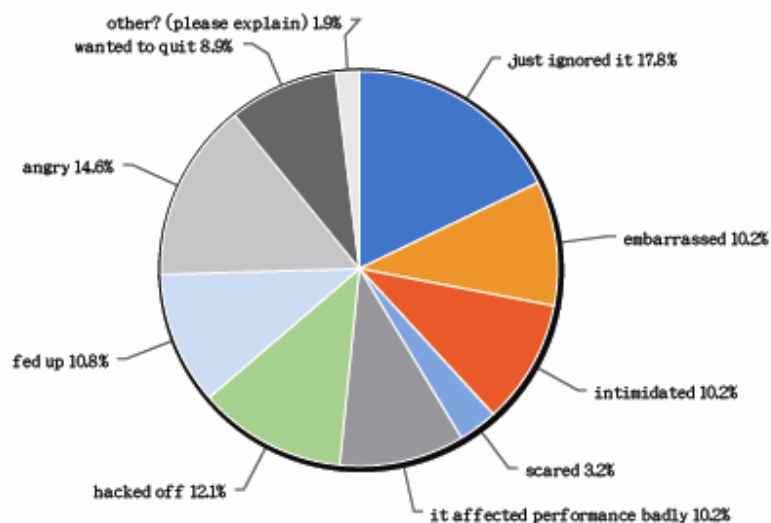
	Under 12	12-16	16+
<b>Just happened once</b>	19%	7%	5%
<b>Now and again</b>	56%	63%	47%
<b>Fairly frequently</b>	25%	30%	43%
<b>Happens all the time</b>	-	-	5%

Table 6

### Impact on children and young people

- 50 The survey invited children and young people to indicate how these incidents of poor spectator behaviour made them feel. While there appears to be some acceptance of poor spectator behaviour as “part of the game”, it is equally clear that such incidents are having a significant impact on young people’s emotional wellbeing and welfare, their enjoyment of the game and their continuing participation in sport.
- 51 While a significant number of children and young people (18%) said they “just ignored it” when they experienced poor behaviour by spectators directed at them, 13% said they felt “intimidated and scared” and 19% said “it affected their performance badly” or they “wanted to quit.” A significant number said they felt “angry” (15%) while nearly a quarter (23%) said they either felt “fed up” or “hacked off” when they were the target of poor spectator behaviour.

Chart (g)



- 52 Male respondents to the survey tended to be more “angry” and “hacked off” than female respondents; whereas female respondents tended to be more “embarrassed” than their male counterparts though female participants were more “intimidated and scared” when poor spectator behaviour was directed at them.

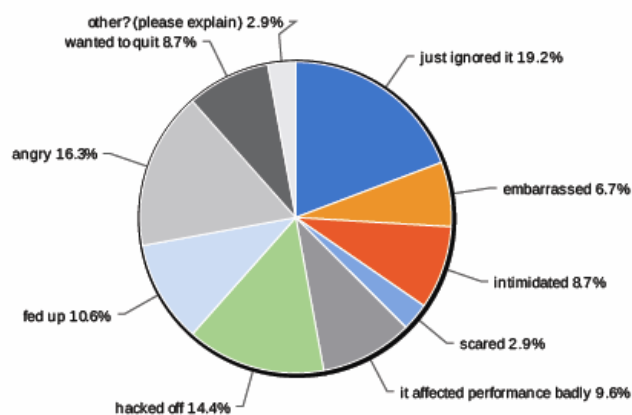


Chart (h)

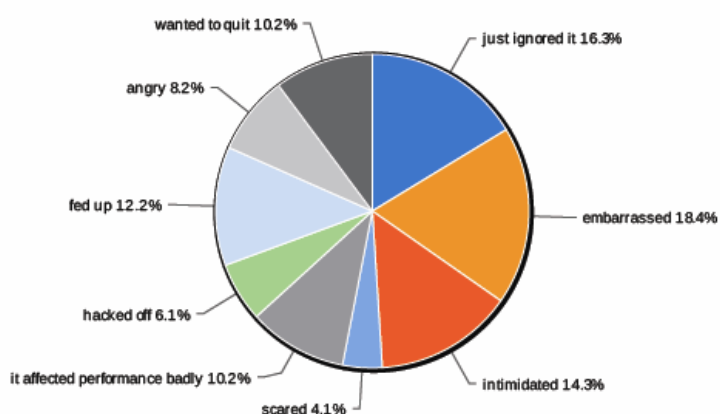


Chart (i)

- 53 Across the three age groups (u12, 12-16 and 16+) similar proportions (25-30%) of children and young people either “just ignored it” or were “embarrassed” when spectators behaved badly towards them. The vast majority (70-75%) however had a negative response when they experienced poor spectator behaviour:

	Under 12	12-16	16+
<b>How did you feel?</b>			
<i>just ignored it</i>	18%	24%	16%
<i>embarrassed</i>	12%	10%	9%
<i>intimidated</i>	12%	8%	11%
<i>scared</i>	-	3%	4%
<i>it affected my performance badly</i>	8%	8%	13%
<i>hacked off</i>	10%	10%	14%
<i>fed up</i>	15%	10%	9%
<i>angry</i>	18%	15%	14%
<i>wanted to quit</i>	7%	12%	7%
<i>motivated me</i>	-	-	3%

Table 7

### Witnessing poor spectator behaviour

- 54 The survey also asked children and young people what they had witnessed in terms of poor spectator behaviour involving other players and how that made them feel.
- 55 Nearly half of all children and young people (47%) confirmed that they had witnessed poor spectator behaviour involving other players. This response drops slightly when female-only responses are examined (44%) and increases to over half (51%) when male-only responses are reviewed.
- 56 Children and young people responding to the survey, who confirmed they had witnessed poor spectator behaviour involving other players, indicated that the frequency of these incidents was greater than their own direct experience of poor spectator behaviour. In other words, poor spectator behaviour directed at other players was much more likely to occur “now and again” and “fairly frequently” than be recorded as “just happened once”.
- 57 The nature of the poor behaviour witnessed was similar to the distribution and range of poor behaviours experienced directly by players (i.e. “swearing”, “a player being called a name” and “a player being made fun of” were the most common bad behaviours.)
- 58 For female respondents this accounted for just over 80% of the poor behaviours witnessed whereas the similar figure for male respondents was closer to 65%. For male respondents who witnessed poor spectator behaviour, there was a significantly higher proportion reporting that they had witnessed “threatening” behaviour and other players being “pushed” and “hit/kicked” than was evident in the female-only responses.



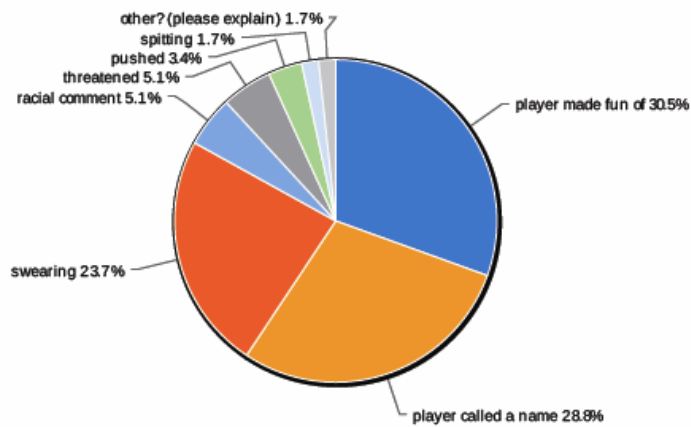


Chart (j)

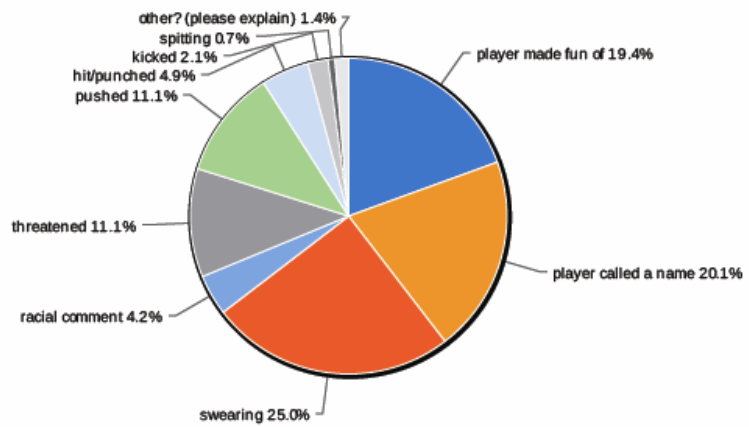


Chart (k)

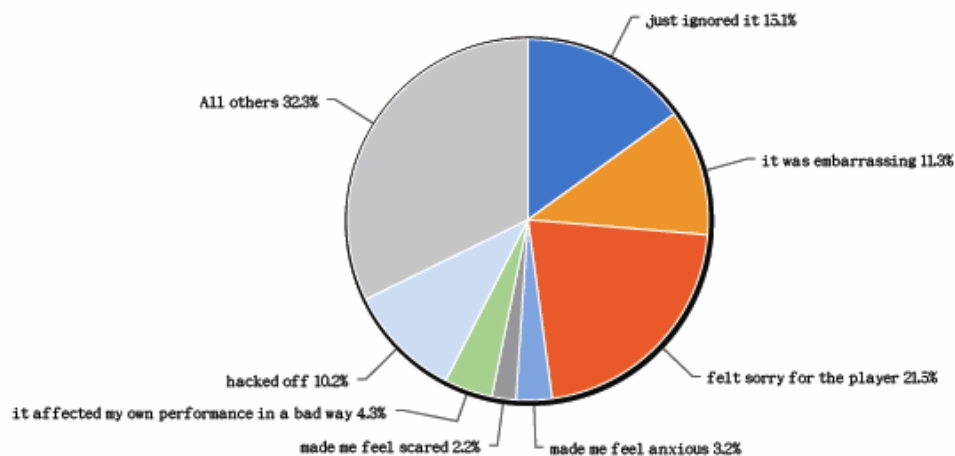
- 59 Although it might be anticipated that the higher rates of “threatening” and “pushing” behaviour witnessed by young people might be confined to the 16+ age group, the survey reveals a significant number of children in the under 12 age group reported witnessing “threatening” and “pushing” behaviour directed at other players by spectators (see table 8 over).

	under 12	12-16	16+
<b>Spectator behaviour:</b>			
<i>swearing</i>	62%	77%	81%
<i>player called a name</i>	56%	73%	76%
<i>player made fun of</i>	62%	70%	71%
<i>player threatened</i>	44%	20%	29%
<i>pushed</i>	38%	23%	29%
<i>kicked</i>	6%	3%	5%
<i>spat at</i>	6%	-	5%
<i>hit/punched</i>	12%	10%	10%
<i>racial comment</i>	-	10%	24%

Table 8

- 60 It is clear from the responses to the survey that children and young people witnessing poor spectator behaviour involving other players experience largely negative feelings when such incidents occur:

Chart (I)



- 61 This largely negative response by children and young people when they witness poor spectator behaviour involving other players is consistently reported as the majority response when examining female-only and male-only responses. It is also the case across the three age groups involved in the survey.
- 62 The other category (in the chart above) includes players feeling “angry”, fed up” and “wanting to quit”.

## Poor behaviour continuing after the match or game

- 63 Children and young people were asked if the poor behaviour that they experienced or witnessed by spectators continued after the match or game concerned.
- 64 40% of respondents who had poor spectator behaviour directed at them confirmed that it continued after the game. This figure increased to 48% for those respondents reporting witnessing poor spectator behaviour involving other players.
- 65 When pressed to explain where and how poor spectator behaviour continued after a match, young people told us that it happened:
- “on the way to the changing rooms”
  - “in the corridors of the centre”
  - “outside the changing rooms/centre”
  - “in the car park”
  - “in the car”
  - “at training the next week”
- 66 Male respondents (51%) were more likely to witness poor spectator behaviour continuing after a game than their female counterparts (42%). Generally, reports of poor behaviour continuing after a game were higher in the category of respondents who witnessed poor spectator behaviour than in the category of those respondents who had experience of poor spectator behaviour directed at them.
- 67 Respondents in the 16+ age group were more likely to report poor spectator behaviour continuing after a match/game in both categories of experiencing and witnessing poor behaviour:

	<b>Under 12</b>	<b>12-16</b>	<b>16+</b>
<b>Did it continue afterwards?</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>
For those having direct experience of poor spectator behaviour	39%	35%	48%
For those who witnessed poor spectator behaviour involving others	44%	39%	62%

Table 9

- 68 The level of poor spectator behaviour continuing after a game or match is much higher than might have been assumed.

## INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

- 69 Swearing and name-calling were reported by children and young people as the poor behaviour they most commonly either experienced or witnessed. In follow up interviews the threatening nature of the bad language and distress caused by adult's behaviour is apparent:

*"One [supporter] told my teammate: "You fuck off". It puts [players] down."*

*"You need to get a grip, you were rubbish."*

*"Without fail if comment is being made it will be being told to: 'Fuck off'."*

*"I've been threatened with: 'I'm going to punch your fucking face in' and I've heard frequently: 'Kick his fucking head in.'"*

*"[As I've got older] it's definitely more physical but the verbal stuff gets worse too, more serious, threatening comments, like: 'I'll get you later, you're marked, you'd better watch your back.' And this is from the adults!"*

*"Sometimes if a player drops the ball people say things like they should've caught it or passed it. Nothing extremely bad but just general swearing. Heard adults call kids 'little buggers' a lot."*

*"Some of them say the 'f-word' to their own children."*

*"Niggling comments and pushing but also some threatening stuff like: 'I've got you marked'."*

*"When I played [in the under 11 age group] I remember an opposition coach saying to his players to kick a particular player, then the adults joined in too."*

*"I've been threatened with: 'I'm going to stab you afterwards'. Most of this comes from players but none of the adults do anything about it."*

*"[I've heard] the embarrassing and the mean stuff – like 'that was rubbish'; you can forget getting to the Scottish Championships now."*

- 70 Some young people reported racism and sectarianism. Although, in some cases, this was not clearly defined, there was a desire to voice concern over the fact that racism and sectarianism exist in youth sport.

*"Racism is a serious one. Bystanders as just as bad as the ones doing it."*

*"I think racism hangs over the game like a dark cloud."*

*"I'm Scottish but my dad is from Pakistan and I get quite a lot of racist comments going on. But nobody ever seems to do anything about it – I think they're scared to tackle it. I can't stand it when adults laugh when another adult makes a racist remark."*

*"[I've heard] Sectarian comments – especially when you're playing teams from areas which you know are particularly one way or the other, either Catholic or Protestant."*

*"As I've got older I experienced racism on the pitch when my friend was called a 'Paki'. I could see he was really angry and it makes you feel angry at the time. It should be dealt with."*

*"[I've heard] Sectarian comments like: 'fenian scum, proddy dogs'."*

*"Heard someone called: 'black bastard'."*

*"The racist stuff is horrible but that's maybe just me."*

- 71 Interestingly, children and young people tended to answer the question: 'What would you like to hear?' in the negative starting by saying what they *didn't* want to hear. Some found it very difficult to think of what they would respond to.

*"I don't want to be bad-mouthed by the opposition when you do something good. Don't want people shouting at ref because it does have an impact – when you get older you see people shouting at the ref all the time. Would like people keeping a cool head and an apology is always good."*

*"You can do it. Put your all into it. If you are in a competition and you're a bit scared about it once you've done something having someone say 'you're already doing well, keep going' is good."*

*"If parents can't say positive stuff then they shouldn't come to the games."*

*"More encouraging choice of words and tone rather than shouty and angry. If too enthusiastic it's a bit creepy, like: 'that was a great pass' can sound ironic. When done something well it's good when it's praised. 'Get your heads up,' is quite a good way of asking you to keep going when you're not playing well."*

*"When the other team scores the other supporters should clap because we're all young. Everyone should clap/cheer everyone else's children."*

*"Well done. Brilliant goal. 'I like it' – my coach says that when we do something good."*

*"My dad's the best role model I could ask for. He was always on the touchline giving me great support and always encouraging me on – really good, really positive. He's just an inspiration for me."*

*"[Supporters should say] nothing – they should stay silent!"*

*"I'd like to hear: 'Well done, good stuff,' things like that but coming from both teams."*

*"Spectators shouldn't be allowed to say anything abusive."*

*"General encouragement (more of that) but not any patronising stuff."*

*“Because it’s an individual sport the shouting tends to come from the parent of the [athlete] and I think sometimes it puts them off – but the coaches can get very excited too at times.”*

72 When asked to talk about incidents where adults had been considered “out-of-order” or where behaviour had appeared threatening nearly all the young people interviewed were able to recall an incident. Half of those interviewed went on to describe a scenario where an adult either reportedly assaulted a child or another adult. This included:

- A dad pushing a 16-year-old as they made their way from the pitch to the changing room.
- A parent running onto the field of play to confront the official – pushing them and getting ready to fight.
- Two mothers fighting as children looked on. This resulted in one child bursting into tears.
- A 40-year-old man [playing against teenagers in a midnight league] spitting in the face of a teenager, punching him in the face then kicking him in the stomach when he fell on the ground.

*“The opposition coach shouted at the referee and one of our parents started shouting at the opposition coach. The official couldn’t control it and the next thing parents were squaring up – all a bit mental and scary.”*

*“One parent in the opposition team had a dog with him (kind of bulldog type) – and he was definitely winding the dog up at the opposition. It was a fairly scary, powerful dog and we thought it was going to break loose. Nobody did anything about it.”*

73 There was a clear message from children and young people that where an alleged assault or confrontational situation took place it wasn’t properly dealt with. There appeared to be a reluctance to acknowledge and deal with incidents effectively. This eight-year-old’s experience sums it up:

*“At one of our matches an adult from the other team said the ref had made a stupid decision. They [were] ... nearly fighting. It felt scary, weird. We were just standing there. The game got postponed – they told us to go home. They said they were sorting it but they didn’t really sort it, they only stopped them arguing but they didn’t make up. At training next time all they said was ‘don’t worry you won’t play that team til [you’re older].”*

Others said:

*[Following an incident] “Nobody did anything about it.”*

*“There was an incident at least twice a month [involving my team]. The only thing I can remember was being told not to come for a few games.”*

*“When an adult sounds off to their kid I think the coach should stop that happening but I think they find it a bit awkward.”*

*“Our match was abandoned [after a confrontation]. After that we were just left to get home. There was nothing at the end, never any discussion. I didn’t play with my team after that – it had an impact in that I didn’t want to be involved.”*

## FINDINGS FROM PARENTS' SURVEY

- 74 The parents' survey received 340 responses. The majority of the responses were completed by adults accessing the online survey via the CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> website. ParentLine Scotland also secured a significant number of responses by inviting callers to their national helpline (if appropriate) to take part in the survey at the close of each call.
- 75 The parents' survey was shorter in length and more straightforward than the children and young people survey. The purpose of the parents' survey was to gauge awareness of the issue of poor spectator behaviour at young people's sports events; to hear from parents on their experiences; and to find out what support and help might be needed to tackle the issue.
- 76 Half of all parents (50%) responding to the survey confirmed that their child had spoken to them about the issue of poor spectator behaviour at sports in which they played. More significantly, 65% of all parents responding said they had seen examples of poor spectator behaviour directed at young players.
- 77 As with the children and young people survey, the most commonly witnessed poor behaviours by spectators were "swearing"; child being "made fun of/ridiculed" and "inappropriate name-calling". 70% of all parent respondents confirmed "swearing" as the most common poor behaviour, followed by "being made fun of" (51%) and "name-calling" (37%).

<b>Poor spectator behaviour witnessed by parents:</b>	
<i>swearing</i>	70%
<i>player made fun of/ridiculed</i>	51%
<i>inappropriate name-calling</i>	37%
<i>threatening comment</i>	26%
<i>threatening behaviour</i>	22%
<i>player pushed/jostled</i>	11%
<i>racial comment</i>	7%
<i>kicked</i>	4%
<i>spat at</i>	3%
<i>hit/punched</i>	3%
<i>other</i>	16%

Table 10



78 Included in the 'other' category in Table 10 (on the previous page) were a range of additional responses from parents including:

- fathers screaming at other children
- general ignorance (“you’re rubbish wee man”)
- parents telling a child to “kick him”
- player who was red-carded being cheered off by opposition touchline
- apportioning blame to other players
- parents constantly shouting at their children
- spectators saying loudly “something needs to be done about that wee hacker” despite the referee having dealt with the earlier incident firmly and fairly and both players having moved on in the game.
- one parent shouting “you’re a disgrace to the family.”

79 When asked if anyone had challenged the poor behaviour by adult spectators, 68% of parents said “yes” which leaves a sizeable figure (32%) reporting that poor behaviour appears to go unchallenged.

80 In addressing poor spectator behaviour at a match or game, parents indicated that it was most commonly the coach who spoke to the parents, followed closely by other parents and then the match official (referee) speaking to the adults concerned. In some cases, it was the young people themselves who responded to the adult concerned. Adults responsible for poor spectator behaviour were reported as being asked to leave on 36 occasions.

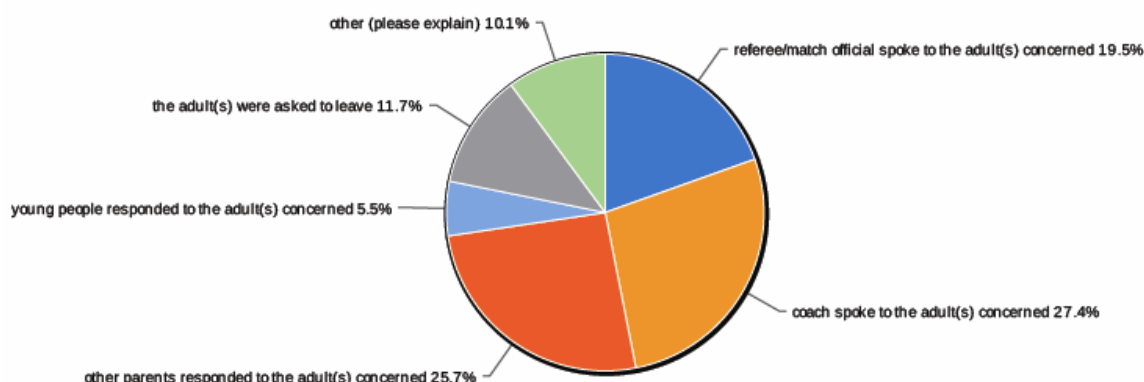


Chart (m)

81 Included in the 'other' category of responses above, were a range of comments:

- formal complaint filed
- parent asked not to attend future games
- parent was asked to apologise to the kids in his son’s team
- coach spoke to other coach and then they both had a word with the parent
- “mostly, many of the incidents are ignored . . . too many officials, coaches and adults look the other way”

82 When asked if they knew what to do if they witnessed poor behaviour by adults at a sports event involving children and young people, 74% of parents said they knew what to do. However, when asked if enough was being done to stop poor behaviour by adult spectators at sports events, 20% said it’s largely ignored and a further 38% said more needs to be done.

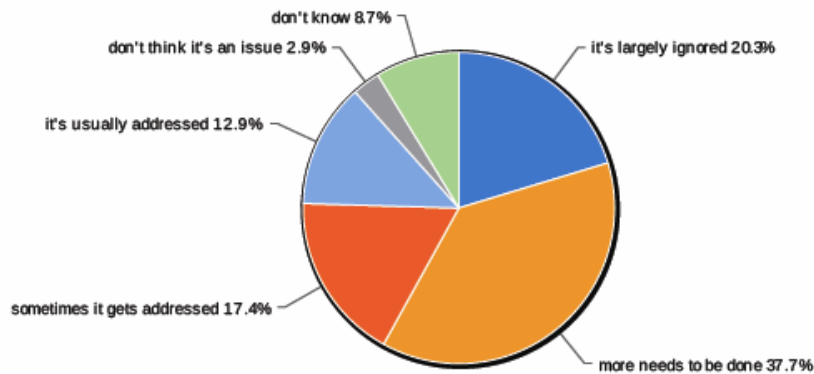


Chart (n)

- 83 The parents' survey concluded by asking parents what would help them in addressing poor behaviour by adult spectators at sports events involving children and young people. "Knowing that the sport has a code for positive behaviour" was the most common response followed closely by "knowing who to talk to at the event" and then "knowing that the sport has a plan to tackle poor behaviour". Providing "information and advice" was the fourth most common response.

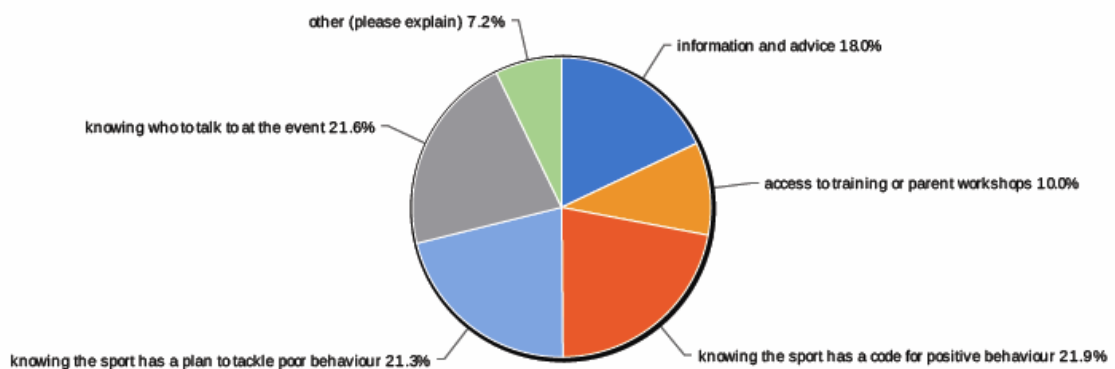


Chart (p)

- 84 Parents responding to the survey offered many suggestions and observations about tackling poor behaviour by adult spectators. Comments offered under the 'other' category above included:

- Issuing clear guidelines about expected behaviour from parents when child joins a club or sport.
- Increased distance between spectators and the pitch/court.
- Make sure that children are aware of who they can turn to if they are subjected to poor behaviour by adult spectators.
- More publicity and advertising about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not.
- Having a designated person at the event other than the coach or referee.
- Having parents sign a pre-agreed contract about behaviour
- Support for the referee from extra officials.
- Make sure the organising body are told and have sanctions to address the behaviour of spectators.
- Our league is very supportive in this area and proactive in getting the right message across: "football is fun".

## Parents' focus group discussion

- 85 A large number of parents indicated (in their survey responses) that they would be willing to participate in a follow-on discussion about spectator behaviour in sport. It was not possible to accommodate all of the expressions of interest in a focus group discussion as the spread interest was throughout Scotland. This is an invaluable source for the Safeguarding in Sport service and for CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>, more generally, and efforts should be made to maintain contact and, when appropriate, to engage this new audience for views and opinions on future developments.
- 86 Parents were particularly forthcoming about their experiences of poor spectator behaviour at sports games. Almost every parent had a story to tell about an incident that had taken place and which, in their view, had not been handled well at the time.
- 87 Of particular concern was the observation by some parents that the impact of poor spectator behaviour on children and young people was rarely addressed. It was the view of many parents who either wrote to us or spoke with us in the focus group, that incidents were not properly reviewed with the players and young people who often witnessed “ugly behaviour” between adults. In other words, the behaviour of the adults may get tackled but it was very rare for anyone to speak with the young people about what they had witnessed and to explain that the behaviour was completely unacceptable, while also allowing young people to speak about how they felt.
- 88 The focus group discussion involved a number of parents who, coincidentally, were all active in sport as coaches, volunteers and sports development. They provided invaluable and credible testimony and they were unanimous in their belief that much more needs to be done to tackle the problem of bad behaviour by adult spectators at sports games played by children and young people. A number of the focus group participants advised that they had been “threatened” verbally and physically by other adults, when performing in their role as club coach or team manager.
- 89 Although there was considerable agreement about the extent and nature of the problem amongst the parents who either wrote to us or participated in discussions, one area of difference highlighted was between the extent of the problem as reported in team sports as opposed to individual sports. It was felt that individual sports placed greater responsibility and discipline on the individual to behave and be disciplined and this “rubbed off” on the spectators. It was also suggested that the group dynamics of team sports led more quickly to unacceptable behaviours in spectating groups. However, it was acknowledged that across team sports there are very differing levels of bad behaviour evident among spectators with some team sports having no evident history of the problem; some team sports adopting a zero-tolerance approach; some sports justifying that aggression (and to some extent violence) is part of the physical aspect of the game; and other sports reporting the problem of poor spectator behaviour as endemic to the game.

## THE CASE STUDIES

- 90 Case studies were conducted with a cross-section of people who have different levels of involvement in children's sports. This included a parent, CPO, coach, umpire, sport psychologist, and coaching specialist. Sports covered in the case studies are: football, netball, rugby, and hockey.
- 91 All those interviewed had some experience of disruptive spectator behaviour; however a higher number of aggressive and intimidating incidents were reported in football. Interviewees were keen to point out that disruptive spectator behaviour affected not just players, but also made it more difficult for coaches and match officials to do their job – which includes ensuring the welfare of children within their care.
- 92 It was apparent that some clubs are more proactive than others at communicating and engaging with parents. In particular, there was some feeling among the interviewees that clubs who communicated the responsibilities of spectators (including parents) relating to the welfare and enjoyment of children in sport might have fewer incidents of disruptive crowd behaviour.
- 93 Eight case studies are presented here:
- Cleaning up their act: the response of hockey
  - No goals, no problem: one mum's experience
  - Defence Tactics: junior football coach
  - The referee's viewpoint: one referee's perspective
  - Guardians of good behaviour: rugby football league approach
  - Pro team sets the standard: a young player contrasts his amateur and pro experiences
  - Net benefits: a view from one netball official
  - Not a lot to shout about: a perspective from a sports psychologist
  - A positive force for good: a Positive Coaching Scotland example

## Cleaning up their act

**Colleen Reid, Coach Education Development Manager at Scottish Hockey, explains how the game has benefited from robust procedures to tackle disruptive crowd behaviour.**

“Following a series of incidents a few years ago, we decided to set up a situation where the umpires were provided with more powers. At the time it was introduced, the ‘Clean Air Act’ was unique to Scotland,” says Colleen.

She continues: “One of the laws is that if the coach or a supporter of one of the teams is becoming unruly, the captain or a nominated player of that team can be sent off as a penalty. This ensures that there are processes and procedures in place for officials to follow regarding comments from players, coaches or spectators.”

As part of the Clean Air Act, Scottish Hockey’s East District launched an initiative called ‘Zip It’, where the players came up with and launched a local campaign, which included designing t-shirts with a logo on the back.

Despite this commitment to improving the atmosphere at matches, Colleen admits that there’s still work to be done in making sure that everyone involved in the game knows about the Act and what it’s there for: “Even though we provided updates and seminars throughout the year, ultimately, when you’re covering the whole of Scotland it can be a challenge to make sure all individuals know about it.”

Even with the new measures, some matches can still be disrupted by inappropriate comments from the crowd, and coaches can be an important factor, as Colleen explains: “Unfortunately, in high pressure situations, I think there will always be a degree of shouting from parents or coaches. The type of coach involved with each team can have a big effect on the atmosphere at matches. Clearly, there are quiet coaches and louder ‘hairdryer’ coaches.”

Colleen doesn’t believe hockey has been affected by the problem of poor spectator behaviour to the same extent as football and points out that it’s usually match officials who are subjected to abuse rather than the players. However, this doesn’t mean that young people aren’t on the receiving end of abuse: “We encourage young umpires to come through the ranks at youth events and you sometimes hear of spectator comments being made at those events. Obviously, that sort of thing isn’t going to be helpful to the young umpires, because they are new and aspiring.”

Colleen believes the key thing is for clubs to have a rigorous child protection policy and for all members to know about it. She explains: “There should be guides outlining the child protection policy for coaches, parents, and players so that everyone involved has an understanding of what’s expected of them in upholding the policy, and what the processes and procedures are if there is an incident. That’s a fundamental starting point.”

She added that clubs should continue to disseminate guides and child protection information to all parents, players and spectators and not assume they already know it.

## **No goals, no problem!**

**When Ruth realised her attitude towards her son's performance at football matches was affecting his enjoyment of the game she decided to change her ways.**

There's nothing wrong with encouraging your child to do their best when they're playing sports, or giving them advice to help them get more out of a game. But when does a pep talk go too far?

This is a question Ruth asked herself when her five-year-old son joined the local football club. She explains: "I went to his first game and he was really bad! I said to him, 'you need to be able to kick a ball, son, it's not that hard.' But he was wandering around the pitch, not paying attention, and I found it extremely frustrating."

Ruth has always been good at sports and admits she is competitive. "I'd secretly take running trainers to school sports day so I was ready for the mums' race! As I grew up I realised that if I tried hard in sport I could do well. I played netball, hockey and football. When you push yourself and you're good at it, it's a nice feeling."

But she soon realised that putting her own high standards onto her son wasn't helping him to enjoy football. In fact, it was having the opposite effect.

"I would say things to him like, 'come on son, you need to get stuck in' and I was actually quite uptight about it because I didn't want him to be the kid who wasn't any good. I'd give him advice about where to go on the pitch and things."

Eventually, Ruth decided it was best to stop going to watch her son play. "Kids do need direction in sport but they don't need pressure," she says. "I felt frustrated with him, but he was only five."

Then the club started a 'positive coaching' approach, where children are rewarded for doing their best in taking part, not scoring goals. Adds Ruth: "Positive coaching meant he began to really enjoy himself again."

And it was an influence on Ruth, too. "I changed my approach – after matches, no matter how he'd played, I'd always tell him how well he'd done."

"He might not be the best player in the world, but I need to accept that. I've just tried to focus on his being happy and not whether he scores any goals."

## Defence tactics

**When adult spectators get out of hand at junior football matches, coaches can be forced to step in to protect their players. John Henderson, Coach, Bonnyrigg Rose shares his experience.**

Football coaches have to do more than just coach: they organise travel and kit, help with fundraising for the club, and fill-in paperwork. Most are happy to take on these extra chores because they love the game and enjoy working with the next generation of players. A less welcome part of the job is dealing with disruptive and abusive behaviour from the sidelines.

It's a problem that John Henderson, coach for Bonnyrigg Rose, is all too familiar with: "I've seen parents running onto the pitch and starting fights with other parents," says John, who has coached the team for the last eight years. "I've been to matches where supporters for the other team have been verbally abusing my players and I've had to speak to that team's coach about getting those parents under control."

Sadly, it seems that the age of the players makes no difference to the adults who shout at them. John has had to deal with aggression at matches for children as young as eight. "I've been lucky in that most of my parents have been very good, but there are certain teams we've encountered over the years who are known to have disruptive parents and supporters."

Not surprisingly, young players who get verbal abuse from the sidelines struggle to concentrate on the game. "I've seen the players reacting to the parents on the other side and getting into a slanging match. In these situations, I've had to intervene and tell the players to ignore the shouting."

John admits that it's a difficult problem to stop without banning 'problem parents', but even this can have a downside for the players. "Serious incidents can be reported to the league association, and clubs can tell parents that they're not welcome. But if the parent is banned, they might go in the huff and take the child out of the club."

The South East Region Youth Football Association now recommend that cordons should be put up to move spectators further away from the pitch, but this isn't always easy for coaches who have lots of other things to organise before a match.

Many clubs are also taking proactive steps to ensure a positive environment for the players, such as asking parents to sign a code of conduct.

But when all else fails, coaches like John can be the last line of defence in protecting children from abuse: "My policy is that there's nothing wrong with shouting encouragement from the sidelines, but if there are any negative comments, that spectator is asked to leave."

### **The referee's viewpoint.**

**We can't play competitive sport without them – but often the man (or woman) in the middle bears the brunt of abuse from spectators and players alike. Here one football referee\* gives his perspective on an incident and shows how clubs might handle disputes.**

My son plays in the under 10 team and parents are often asked to 'take the whistle' for a match. We don't get any training for this, but I suppose we don't expect things to get really out of hand like they did at a recent match.

The game was going well but then one of the coaches started questioning my decisions. This all came to a head when I awarded a clear penalty to my son's side in the dying minutes.

At this the coach repeatedly called me a "f\*\*\*\*\* cheat". When I blew the final whistle he became even more incensed and aggressive. He refused to shake my hand and this influenced his players with some walking away rather than do the sporting thing of thanking the opposition for the game. Our players responded by not shaking hands either.

I was quite angry at his behaviour and I walked off without speaking to anyone else from the opposite team. At the time I didn't feel like I'd done anything wrong but later I began to reflect upon what I could have done differently. I should've spoken firmly to the coach when he first started mouthing off, but I just wanted to get on with the game. It was quite sad that a game which had gone so well on the pitch had ended so badly. I wondered if that was my fault and did question whether, long term, I still wanted to be part of the club.

Fortunately I was lucky that the two clubs wanted to sort the problem out and move on. Parents who were at the match were asked by our club president what they had witnessed. They felt the coach had overstepped the mark and that I had been provoked. A few days later the coach apologised to our club committee and officials from both sides met to discuss what happened and agreed how to avoid any further problems. Parents were also notified about the incident and told what action the clubs had taken to avoid any repetition. Most importantly the boys were spoken to about the incident and told what had been done to try and resolve things.

Campbell Bell, Service Manager at Safeguarding in Sport, said: "Although this was a regrettable incident, the two clubs recognised the importance of quickly resolving the situation and did this in a very open and transparent way.

"This sent a positive message to the young players and their parents that although disputes can happen during matches, they should not be allowed to escalate or continue after the game. In competitive sport, situations can become heated but the adults involved must remember that they are role models for the children and they have a duty not to expose them to any kind of aggression or abuse."

**\* Some details have been changed to protect identity.**



## **Guardians of good behaviour**

**It isn't just players who get tackled at Rugby Football League (RFL) matches, it's also abusive language from the sidelines. Safeguarding in Sport talks to RFL's Safeguarding Manager Colette Eden.**

Young players in England's RFL are used to getting tackled from all angles on the pitch, but in recent years they've also had to put up with verbal assault from the sidelines.

To deal with the problem, the RFL introduced its Touchline Manager (TM) scheme, where an official from each team monitors the crowd during matches. The initiative was introduced five years ago, when spectator disruption was a growing concern. "The project came about because we needed it... crowd behaviour has got progressively worse over the years," says Colette Eden, RFL's Safeguarding Manager. "There was a recent incident where a group of supporters for one team were laughing at the opposition players when they dropped the ball. These were adults laughing at children – this was absolutely awful."

The problem isn't confined to players; young match officials have also been targeted, explains Colette: "You can be an official from the age of 12 – we have a lot of young match officials and we were having a problem with adult spectators shouting and swearing at them. We've also had brawls between parents and coaches."

What happens on the sidelines can also rub-off on the players: "We know that we've had poor behaviour from players which has been a reaction to the crowd – there's definitely a link," observes Colette.

The TM initiative is part of RFL's RESPECT programme, which sets out a code of conduct for all those involved in the game, from players through to spectators.

Each club has up to 10 TMs (one for every age group), with around 3500 throughout the League. TMs can ask members of the crowd to quieten down or, if necessary, to leave. So it's important for TMs to be confident about keeping the crowd in check. But, as Colette makes clear, their authority rests on support from others: "TMs should be secure in the knowledge that, when they do take action, they have full backing from the club's committee. It's also important for other spectators to be supportive of the TM."

After five years, the scheme is well-embedded and has gained acceptance as a role in the team just like any other.

Looking ahead, Colette says the aim is now to work more closely with certain clubs and provide individual, tailored training across different regions: "For some clubs, knowing how to support and make proper use of the TM involves a major cultural change and we try to work with those clubs to encourage them to submit reports on crowd behaviour and to provide training on dealing with the crowd."

They may not be on the pitch, but TMs are playing a big part in team defence.

### **Pro team sets the standard**

**Kenny\* (15) has played football since he was a youngster and has seen the good, the bad and ugly when it comes to supporter behaviour.**

“I’ve played football for years and when I was in the under 12s I remember an opposition coach saying to his players to kick a particular player, then the adults joined in too.

“When I played for the under 15s team there was an incident at least twice a month,” he says.

“I’ve been threatened with ‘I’m going to punch your f\*\*\*\*\* face in’ and I’ve heard frequently ‘kick his f\*\*\*\*\* head in’ being shouted from adults. Probably the worst I’ve had is being threatened with ‘I’m going to stab you afterwards’. Most of this comes from players but none of the adults do anything about it.”

When Safeguarding in Sport talked to young people about what happened after incidents the response was nearly always that behaviour had been ignored or the incident simply glossed over. Kenny has had that same experience.

“I’ve never seen anyone getting hit but I have seen adults lose the rag. The one thing I can remember being apparent after incidents was being told not to come for a few games.”

Young people’s experiences of poor behaviour continuing after the match also rang true for Kenny.

“I have heard people say that the stuff you hear from the sidelines is all ‘a bit of banter’. But it does go on after the match sometimes, like outside the changing room in front of other kids.”

One of the issues that emerged from the survey conducted with young people was that the nature of abuse becomes more serious as the player grows.

Kenny says: “That’s not something I can relate to because I play for a pro team now and there are definite standards and behaviour expected of every player; it’s more disciplined and you understand the consequences if you step across the line. But none of that was the case when I played local football in the amateur game.

“There’s plenty banter with the team I play with now but it stays disciplined – we all know what will happen if we misbehave.”

Kenny found it hard to think about what he’d like to hear from the side of the pitch but was clear in what he didn’t want to happen while he was playing.

“I just don’t think spectators should be allowed to say anything abusive,” he concluded.

**\*Name has been changed to protect the young person’s identity**

## Net benefits

**Mary McTavish has had a life-long involvement with netball, as a player and official, and believes conduct on and off the court is better than ever**

Mary started playing netball when she was 12 years old; she moved on to coaching the game as an adult, and has been an umpire for the last 20 years. In that time, Mary's seen her fair share of heated games and had to deal with rowdy spectators, but, on the whole, she says standards on and off the court are good: "In netball we don't have a big problem with supporters getting out of line. It's a good sport with a good atmosphere. Everybody is friendly and knows everybody else," says Mary. "Of course, it can get a bit more heated during finals and high-stakes matches, but there are never any major problems."

She goes on, "Parents who are there to support their children can sometimes get carried away. They might be shouting at their children on the court or disagreeing with the umpire's decision. Either way, this is distracting for the officials and for the players."

On the odd occasion when Mary has been forced to ask a spectator to quieten down, her warning always does the trick and in 20 years she's never asked anyone to leave a game.

Moving on to why netball has such a good record, Mary puts it down to regular reviews of the rules, which keep games running smoothly. For officials like her, there are assessments every few years, which keep her up to date with rules and regulations. But perhaps most importantly, Mary says that training for coaches isn't focused on getting players to score, but is focused instead on players getting their technique right while enjoying the game.

Mary believes that conduct within the game is better than ever and, with an estimated 20,000 participants in Scottish schools and the Netball Association expanding its membership; it seems that netball is setting a leading example for positive spectator conduct.

## **Not a lot to shout about**

**We've all seen the parent who gets a bit too wound up watching their child play – and heard the argument that being vocal is 'the way to get the best out of' the youngster. But shouting from the sidelines can have the opposite effect as Laura Carey, Network Sports Psychologist at the sportscotland Institute of Sport, explains ...**

"Shouting from parents, or general members of the crowd can often be unhelpful," Laura explains, "because the player is unlikely to be able to hear the shouting clearly and it may disrupt their attention."

"It can also distract the player or athlete from key messages that the coach and the player have worked out together in their game/match plan. If someone else is shouting with conflicting information then that just creates confusion."

Through her work with the Institute of Sport Laura works with people across a range of sports to offer psychological techniques to improve performance.

The timing of aggressive shouting can play a big part in how it affects young players. Shouting on a day when the player is feeling confident about their performance may not have much effect on them. But, Laura stresses, "on another occasion, say the player's had a bad couple of days at training, suddenly their confidence is weaker and one throw-away comment could have a bigger effect on confidence and motivation."

"Research suggests children prefer their parents to play supportive roles and to comment on effort and attitude rather than technical or tactical aspects," she adds. "They don't want their parents to stand out in a crowd of spectators."

Laura pointed out that, although adults in sport will generally be more settled in the level they've reached, children are usually looking to improve and are focused on impressing the coaches who can allow them to progress.

"Parents who are too vocal on the sidelines cause additional stress for their children. They worry that their parents' shouting may annoy the coach and lessen their chances of progressing to the next level," she says.

Sadly, it is the young people who excel the most who are most likely to be subjected to excessive pressure, as she explains: "Sport offers an environment where you are constantly compared to others, you're criticised; everybody has an opinion on you – everything you do is evaluated and on show. Parents and coaches tend to invest a lot more time in young athletes who excel – so there is scope for more criticism in those situations which can lead to burn-out."

Talking about a recent case where adult supporters were photographed shouting and gesturing at a youth team, some of whom were as young as 11, Laura put forward one explanation for such behaviour: "There is research which suggests that people feel like they almost become anonymous when in a crowd, they perceive less personal accountability and adopt the values of the group. It doesn't only apply in sport but it's certainly more visible in sport."

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The most effective way to give players the mental and emotional tools to deal with the stress that might come from shouting is to influence the coaching process. Says Laura: "It's very important for players to develop self-awareness and to understand their 'thoughts, feelings and behaviours'. You can then build up coping strategies that will help the player be best prepared for and cope with their performance requirements such that they meet or excel their intended targets."

## A positive force for good

**Through sportscotland's Positive Coaching Scotland (PCS) programme Stuart Grieve, Football Programme Manager is working to introduce a healthier culture in Scottish football. The PCS programme targets club leaders, coaches, teachers, and parents at clubs across Scotland to get key messages across. Through seminars and workshops, these groups will be introduced to concepts such as the 'Double Goal Coach' and 'Honour our sport'.**

The PCS programme promotes a positive culture in Scottish football by focusing on enjoying the game and giving the best effort rather than being focused on goals scored, as Stuart explains: "The research from the PCS programme shows that there can be a 'win at all costs' culture on the sidelines, coming mainly from parents and from coaches. It can manifest itself in different ways; from parents putting too much pressure on their children to arguing with coaches or with parents from opposing teams.

"There can be situations during matches when it is difficult to tell who the coach is as so many people on the sidelines are shouting and getting involved."

Stuart is in no doubt about where this fixation with the final score comes from: "Some parents and coaches look at professional sport and its high-profile managers, players and teams and think that it's all about winning from week to week – that's all they think sport is about. They then apply that same outlook to the junior level, and it just adds a lot of pressure that simply doesn't need to be there. Obviously, professional sport is about winning – it's a paid business. But at grass roots level it should be about learning and enjoyment."

Not surprisingly, Stuart believes this has been part of the game's culture for a long time. As a young player, he remembers matches that were "very pressurised environments", with shouting and verbal abuse coming from the sidelines. He's also coached for about 12 years, and witnessed the strain placed on coaches by parents who complain about how often their child's team is winning, how much game time their child gets, which position they're playing in, and, of course, 'why's my child not scoring more goals?' It's not unheard of for some parents to pull their children out of teams in protest at a club's performance.

The PCS programme aims to shape the game's culture from the bottom up. "Through the principles of PCS, the focus is on developing the person as well as the player," says Stuart. "Clubs are encouraged to set their own standards which suits their own players and that shouldn't change regardless of whether they are winning or losing games."

The PCS programme is trying to change attitudes and behaviour over time. So how easy can it be to change a long-term culture, especially in Scotland's national sport? "We're measuring that through things like how long are children staying in sport and the environment within clubs," says Stuart. "We're also aware of how much clubs are using PCS messages and tools."

PCS is based on a similar programme from the USA – Positive Coaching Alliance, which was set up in 1998 and has become a widely accepted method of coaching at junior sports in the USA. In Scotland, PCS was founded and piloted by Winning Scotland Foundation, an independent, business-led charity that aims to help young people fulfil their potential in life

as well as in sport. **sport**scotland are now leading the national implementation of the programme.

For more information visit [www.sportscotland.org.uk/PCS](http://www.sportscotland.org.uk/PCS)

## CONCLUSION

- 94 CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> believes that sport can make a positive contribution to children and young people's health, wellbeing and development. We share the Scottish Government's ambition for sport<sup>1</sup> and **sportscotland**'s commitment to develop sporting opportunities for all.<sup>2</sup> CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> believes that it is everyone's responsibility to protect children: that responsibility extends to everyone involved in providing sporting opportunities for children and young people<sup>3</sup>, including spectators.
- 95 Spectators can play an important role in encouraging and helping young people to get the most out of their sporting experience. However, sometimes spectators can behave badly and, when this happens, young people can feel abused and intimidated and, in some cases, give up sport altogether.
- 96 This study set out to examine and understand the impact of poor spectator behaviour on young people and it revealed that bad behaviour by adult spectators is having a detrimental and, in some cases lasting, negative impact on young people's participation in sport.
- 97 Young people told us that poor behaviour by adult spectators at sports events is occurring on a regular basis and it takes many forms from intimidating verbal abuse to, in some instances, serious physical violence. The young people we spoke to told us that it is rarely addressed from a young-person's perspective and that, more often than not, it is "swept under the carpet." This view was consistent with the responses we received from the many parents who took part in the survey, despite most sports having appropriate policies and procedures in place.
- 98 It is simply not acceptable that children and young people are exposed to any form of abuse in sport and there is a pressing need to address the poor behaviour of adult spectators at sports events involving children and young people.
- 99 Of particular concern, the study revealed that the poor behaviour of some adult spectators continued after the game or match in question. Young people told us that this involved abusive comments and the occasional "pushing and shoving" en route to the changing room, in the car park or on the way home. It is critical that sports understand that the view that: "what goes on in the game stays in the game", is not supported by the findings of this study.
- 100 Parents who took part in the survey and who participated in follow-on discussions told us that more needs to be done to tackle the problem of poor adult behaviour at sports events involving children and young people. A number of the parents, who were active in sport as officials and coaches, told us they had been "threatened" by adult spectators and it was clear that these were not isolated incidents. In this regard, tackling the poor behaviour of spectators at sports events involving children and young people should also have a positive impact on the volunteer workforce involved in running sports events week in, week out across Scotland.

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<sup>1</sup> Let's Make Scotland More Active (2003) and Reaching Higher: Building on the success of Sport21 (2007), Scottish Government

<sup>2</sup> Developing and Supporting a World Class Sporting System (2011), **sportscotland**

<sup>3</sup> The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2010), Scottish Government



- 101 It is evident that a great deal of progress has been made in recent years to advance a safeguarding culture in sport. With the support of **sportscotland**, CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> has worked collaboratively with Scottish governing bodies of sport, sports clubs and local authorities in this joint endeavour. Most of this activity has been directed at officials, coaches and volunteers who are working directly with children and young people in sport. It is critical that their positive efforts are not undermined and that tackling the bad behaviour of spectators at sports events involving children and young people is made a new priority.
- 102 The Safeguarding in Sport team at CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> is responding to the findings of this study by launching a new campaign to raise awareness of the problem while highlighting the information and support available to help tackle the issue. We will continue to provide:
- support for children and young people
  - advice for parents and carers worried about their own or others' bad behaviour
  - expertise, resources and child protection training
  - training and guidance on ways to tackle bad behaviour
- 103 In addition, we are setting up a special campaign line, in conjunction with ParentLine Scotland, to handle calls from anyone concerned about bad behaviour on the sidelines of children's sporting activities and events. The free and confidential helpline can provide information, advice and support to anyone worried about their own behaviour or the behaviour of others to help them deal with it and create more positive experiences for children and young people participating in sport. ParentLine Scotland has also produced an information factsheet for parents on this issue.
- 104 CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> is calling on all groups and organisations involved in providing sporting opportunities for children and young people to examine the problem in their own sport and to take firm action where poor spectator behaviour exists. Incidents should be dealt with swiftly, fairly and in a child-centred manner. Training should be undertaken at regular intervals.
- 105 Failure to tackle the unacceptable behaviour of adult spectators at sports events involving children and young people means we are not ensuring children and young people's participation in sport is safe, secure and enjoyable. There is a need to utilise, fully, existing policies and procedures (e.g. Codes of Conduct) and make sure that action is taken when poor spectator behaviour is identified.
- 106 This is the first study of its kind in Scotland seeking the views and experiences of children and young people actively involved in sport while also hearing parents' perspectives on the problem. It therefore establishes an important baseline for future study and the Safeguarding in Sport service at CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> is committed to repeating this study in future years.

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2. Developing and Supporting a World Class Sporting System (2011), sportscotland,
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5. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Protecting Children from Violence in Sport, (2010)
6. 10 Steps to Safeguard Children in Sport (2011), Safeguarding in Sport, CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>
7. Information factsheet for parents no: 9 (2012), ParentLine Scotland, CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>

### Children and Young People Survey

List of localities identified by children and young people as their area of residence:

Aberdeen
Aberdeenshire
Angus
Clackmannanshire
Dumfries and Galloway
Dundee
East Ayrshire
Edinburgh
Falkirk
Fife
Glasgow
Highland
Inverclyde
Midlothian
Moray
North Ayrshire
North Lanarkshire
Perth and Kinross
South Ayrshire
South Lanarkshire
Stirling
West Lothian

### Children and Young People Survey

List of individual sports identified by children and young people as sports in which they took part:

Archery
Athletics
Badminton
Basketball
Canoe Slalom
Climbing
Cricket
Cross Country
Climbing/rock climbing
Curling
Cycling/road racing
Dance
Fencing
Football
Golf
Gymnastics
Hockey
Judo
Karate
Kayaking
Motocross
Netball
Orienteering
Quad biking
Rugby
Running
Sailing
Skiing
Snooker
Squash
Swimming
Table tennis
Tennis
Trial motorcycle
Wrestling

**My dad's the best role model I could ask for. He was always on the touchline giving me great support and always encouraging me on - really good, really positive. He's just an inspiration for me.**

16 year old boy

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