

PARENT & CARER GUIDE

Sports Coaches & Activity Instructors

How to choose a safe coach, camp or instructor for your child's sport and activities.

Sport and activities help children grow in fitness, skill and confidence. Since 21 January 2026, eligible self-employed coaches and instructors can apply for their own Enhanced DBS check, so you can ask to see one. This guide covers what to look for, whoever is coaching your child.

They can get a DBS check. You can ask to see it.

Since 21 January 2026, eligible self-employed workers can apply for their own Enhanced DBS check through a DBS Umbrella Body.

Clubs, camps and independent coaches

Coaches work in different ways, and the checks in place can vary. Knowing which type you are dealing with helps you ask the right questions.

- Clubs usually have a welfare or safeguarding officer. Ask who they are and how to contact them.
- Holiday camps should have clear policies on staff checks, ratios, first aid and collection.
- Some holiday camps for younger children are registered with Ofsted. You can ask if yours is.
- Independent coaches often work alone, so it is more important to check them yourself.
- Many sports have a national governing body. Ask if the coach holds its qualifications.

Swimming, martial arts and personal trainers

- Swimming: ask about lifesaving and first aid training, and where parents can watch from.
- Martial arts: ask how physical contact is explained and managed, and whether you can watch classes.
- Personal trainers for teens: sessions should be in a gym or public place, with you kept informed.
- Ask about insurance and what happens if your child is injured.
- Changing rooms: check the rules on adults and children sharing spaces.

How to check their DBS certificate

For coaching under-18s, look for an Enhanced DBS certificate for the child workforce. Where the role is eligible, it may also include a Children's Barred List check. You cannot apply on the coach's behalf. They apply themselves through a DBS Umbrella Body, such as self-employed-dbs.co.uk. Not everyone qualifies, and the eligibility tool at gov.uk/find-out-dbs-check can help.

- ☐ I have seen the original paper certificate, not a copy or photo.
- ☐ The name and details match their government photo ID.
- ☐ I have checked the issue date.
- ☐ It covers the child workforce.
- ☐ I have asked whether they subscribe to the DBS Update Service.
- ☐ With their permission, I have done a free status check at gov.uk/dbs-update-service.

Using the DBS Update Service

If the coach subscribes, you can check their certificate online for free, with their permission. You will need the certificate number, their surname as shown on the certificate, and their date of birth. GOV.UK suggests entering "private employer" as the organisation name. The result shows whether the certificate is still current or whether new information exists. If there is new information, ask them to apply for a new check.

If a certificate shows a coach is on the Children's Barred List, they are legally barred from this work. Do not use them, and tell the police if you know they are coaching children.

Remember the certificate belongs to the coach. Do not photocopy it, share it or keep details longer than you need to.

Good habits for safer sessions

- Stay and watch the first few sessions, or wait nearby.
- Agree who drops off and collects, and never leave a child waiting alone.
- Group messages should include parents. Avoid private chats with your child.
- Lifts home should be agreed with you first, every time.
- Talk to your child about how sessions feel, not just how they did.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, call 999.
- Worried a child is being harmed? Call the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000.
- Concerns about a club coach? Tell the club welfare officer too.
- Guidance for families: gov.uk/guidance/private-individuals-employing-self-employed-workers-or-personal-employees
- Find an umbrella body: gov.uk/find-dbs-umbrella-body

Questions to ask

1. Do you have an Enhanced DBS certificate for the child workforce, and can I see the original?
2. Are you signed up to the DBS Update Service?
3. What coaching qualifications do you hold, and are you insured?
4. Do you have up-to-date first aid training?
5. Can I watch sessions, and where will they take place?
6. How many children will be in each group, and who else helps?
7. Can you give me references from other parents or clubs?

Warning signs

- They will not show a DBS certificate, or only offer a photo or copy.
- They discourage parents from watching or staying nearby.
- They message your child privately or on social media.
- They offer lifts, gifts or extra one-to-one time without asking you.
- They cannot name their qualifications, insurance or references.
- Your child seems anxious or unwilling to go to sessions.

KEY POINT

A DBS certificate is only one part of the picture, so combine it with qualifications, references, watching sessions and talking with your child.

Working with children or vulnerable adults?

Point them to **self-employed-dbs.co.uk**. Eligible self-employed workers can apply online in around ten minutes and get their Enhanced DBS check processed by a registered Umbrella Body.

self-employed-dbs.co.uk

This guide is general information based on DBS and GOV.UK guidance published September 2026. It is not legal advice. Always check the latest guidance at gov.uk. DBS for Self-Employed is a brand of MJD Ventures Limited.