

real gym

Safety advice

The advice here is designed to be a supporting document for you, your staff and your school to make suitable and appropriate decisions for you, your class and your school. It provides best practice guidance to assist you in making your lessons as fun, engaging and safe as possible.

School and county policies for PE, gymnastics and child protection should always be adhered to over any advice given here. This is general advice, and not specific to any area or school. You may also find AfPE's 'Safe Practice in Sport' publication, a good source of advice and recommendations.

Good general PE safe teaching principles should be employed when teaching any **real PE** and **real gym** activity. This will include using a 'stop' command which children know and understand when the procedure is used. For example, a hand could be raised in the air, or a verbal command such as 'Freeze... and climb down safely' could be given. It is not ideal to use a whistle as this may startle some children, especially when working at a height.

PE clothing, specifically for gymnastics:

- Shorts and T-shirt should be worn and not loose clothing, as this may catch on the apparatus.
- Barefoot for gymnastics is best (but not essential), to allow observation of full extension. However, it is essential to ensure a clean, splinter free floor. Special care should be taken where the area is multi-functional.
- Otherwise, soft soled PE shoes (not trainers) are acceptable to enable 'feeling' the apparatus.
- Hair should be tied up for safety. British gymnastics guidelines state that ALL jewellery should be removed prior to a gymnastics session. However, should the removal of stud earrings be a problem they should be taped over for the session.

Planning

The **real gym** programme is only distributed with the appropriate training, which is age and activity specific. The training is designed to alleviate teachers' fears and build confidence. The **real gym** programme has been designed to be flexible, allowing teachers to personalise delivery to the age, ability and maturity of the class. All lesson plans can be segmented and delivered in part or whole.

Following good practice guidelines and gymnastics methodology, a progressive series of lessons have been planned to allow the children to gradually build up their confidence. The blocks of lessons, therefore, should be followed in sequential order to enable exploration, development and consolidation to occur in a safe and enabling environment. Ultimately, however, the teacher must decide when it is appropriate to move children forwards in their development, as all classes and children will learn skills at different speeds. The most important aspect is to develop the skills, starting from the emerging **real gym** skills cards, moving towards using large apparatus or working at height.

Gymnastics activities

real gym provides a series of activities and challenges whereby the teacher can personalise the approach and level of challenge before the pupil begins. The teacher's knowledge of the children's abilities is key to providing a safe and enabling environment.

real gym activities have been designed so that children can all be engaged and physically active within the same activity but differentiated according to ability, enabling all children to be included at their correct level of challenge.

Safe participation and physical contact

Within **real gym**, the lessons and activities direct you to a range of skills, and it is advised that you scaffold the delivery so that children can take ownership of their learning and decide the rate at which they progress with suitable checks and challenges from the teacher. Using this method, it is possible to reduce the amount of physical support given by a member of staff. Of course, the safety of the children is paramount and there will be occasions when physical contact is imperative to provide support or reassure a child.

Gymnastics apparatus

Gymnastics, using different heights and types of apparatus, can be motivating, fun, rewarding and challenging. It is important that in **real gym** staff teach the children how to use the apparatus safely in order to create an enabling environment. Apparatus work occurs frequently in the **real gym** lesson plans and follows prior learning. If the teacher regards the skill learning is underdeveloped for apparatus, it is best that the child/ren stays on mats/floor or with hand apparatus/partner work, until such a time that the teacher feels the skills have developed to a sufficient standard.

It is possible to purchase different sizes and weights of apparatus, e.g. movement tables, benches and mats that are suitable for KS1 children to lift and position. It is recommended that you have suitable and appropriate apparatus for each age group within your gymnastics setting.

Getting to know the apparatus

It is important that the children are given the opportunity at the outset to familiarise themselves with the equipment that is going to be used and be involved as far as possible with setting it up. **real gym** includes familiarisation activities, especially in the first few lessons where the children use apparatus. It may be worth re-visiting these as and when it is felt appropriate to consolidate and develop good habits.

Apparatus used should be appropriate to the age and size of the children. The lifting and carrying guidelines given within your school and/or county PE policy should be adhered to and the children should be closely monitored. Safe lifting includes tight grip, keeping the body in line (not twisted) to lift, bending the knees to lift and lower (using the legs to lift) with a straight back. It is vital that the teacher observes and decides how many children should carry different pieces and sizes of apparatus.

Setting up the apparatus

The apparatus must be assembled and placed safely within the hall away from walls ensuring sufficient space between items to avoid collisions between children working on different apparatus. It is important that the children observe and learn as apparatus is assembled if they are not able to do it themselves. Both staff and children need to remain alert during the session to any circumstance that might require apparatus to be changed or checked.

At the end of the session the children should be involved as far as possible with dismantling, carrying and storing the apparatus safely and according to guidelines.

The **real gym** Introduction Book contains ideas to help develop hall set-ups that are varied, allow inclusive activities and enable children to be active as much as possible.

Mats

The message that mats are exit and landing points needs to be emphasised to the children and it is important that these remain correctly placed throughout the session.

For both safety and hygiene reasons mats should be cleaned from time to time ensuring that the non-slip under surface is clean and grips the floor. They are best stored flat as this will ensure they remain flat when laid out.

Mats are typically used to land on and to provide a more comfortable surface to roll on. They may also be used to provide a soft surface when exploring actions on other body parts, e.g. shapes on elbows and knees or on the back/shoulders.

Safe play and interaction on and with the mats at an early stage provides a good confidence building exercise. However, both staff and children must remain aware of their limitations and not become complacent.

Although **real gym** advocates creative use of apparatus and mats through challenging activities, it should be remembered that the teacher is ultimately responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the learners. However, by offering creative set-ups, which allow the learner to choose the level of challenge that is suitable for their needs, learners can stretch themselves at the right time for their development.

When planning use of apparatus and mats in **real gym** lessons, consideration to the following should guide you:

- Creating Clear, Shared Learning Journeys
- Providing Quality Personalised Opportunities
- Shifting Responsibility Towards the Learner

This document does not cover all situations for PE and Gymnastics activities. You should always refer to the following documents which will take precedence:

County PE policy

School PE Guidelines

School Health and Safety Policy

School Safeguarding Policy

You might also like to look at AfPE's 'Safe Practice in Sport' publication.