

## Guidance – Fitness Sessions and Qualifications

Under **UK law and guidance**, there is no single rule that says informal or fun physical activities must be delivered by a professional or licensed coach. However, there **are certain thresholds** and **contexts** where this becomes a **legal or best-practice requirement**, particularly in relation to.

Things to consider within VPC

### Duty of Care and Health & Safety

Anyone organising a physical activity has a legal duty of care under:

- **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974** (if the activity is work-related, e.g., by a school, employer, or club),
- **Common Law** duty of care (if the activity is informal but foreseeably risky).

You must:

- Take reasonable steps to ensure participant safety
- Provide adequate supervision, especially with children or vulnerable people
- Carry out risk assessments
- Ensure safeguarding procedures are in place (particularly for under-18s)

Key point: If the nature of the activity involves increased risk (e.g. gymnastics, martial arts, climbing), the threshold for “reasonable” competence rises, and using a qualified coach may be considered necessary to meet your legal obligations.

### Insurance Implications

If you are delivering or hosting physical activity:

- Does force insurance cover leaders leading the activity and cadets taking part in it?
- Public liability insurers often require coaches/instructors to be qualified (usually via a recognised body like UK Coaching or a national governing body).
- Delivering activities without appropriate training or qualifications can invalidate insurance.

**Key Considerations - Informal delivery** (e.g. parents or volunteers running games) might be fine if risk is low, but if someone is injured and the activity isn’t run to recognised standards, liability could fall on the organiser.

### Working with Children or Vulnerable Adults

If you're running physical activity sessions involving:

- Children under 18,
- Vulnerable adults,

then:

- You will need a DBS check,
- You must follow safeguarding protocols (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2024),
- Many settings (e.g. schools, youth clubs) require instructors to have NGB qualifications or be registered with relevant governing bodies.

#### **You *Do Not* Legally Need a Qualified Coach**

- Informal games (e.g. playing rounders in the park with friends or youth groups)
- Low-risk activities with adults
- One-off or occasional social activities not affiliated with a club or school

#### **But even then VPC suggest the minimum requirements are:**

- Obtain written informed parental consent for the young person to take part in the activity which includes emergency contact details and relevant medical information
- You must still act reasonably and ensure an appropriate risk assessment is in place
  - Ensure enhanced DBS check is in place as a legal requirement
  - Ensure staff leading the session are safeguarding trained
  - Ensure first aid is available
- Have insurance if acting under an organisation or group umbrella

#### **When a Qualified Coach Is Likely Required or Strongly Recommended**

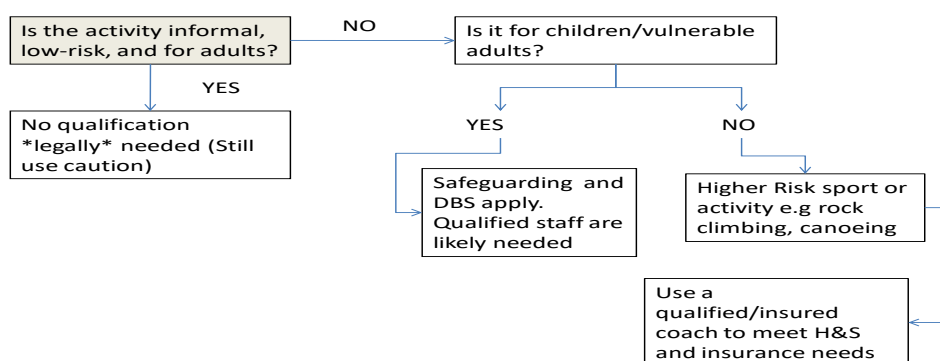
- Activities with **higher physical risk** (e.g. contact sports, martial arts),
- Activities involving children or vulnerable people
- When acting on behalf of an organisation, school, or business
- If insurance requires it
- If the nature of the session implies a professional standard (e.g. advertised coaching or paid instruction)

## Summary

There is **no absolute legal threshold** requiring a qualified coach for all physical activity. However, insurance requirements, health & safety duties, and safeguarding responsibilities often mean that:

- Higher-risk or structured activities, especially with children or vulnerable groups, should be delivered by qualified professionals, or
- You risk legal liability, safeguarding failures, or invalid insurance

Fig 1 – Decision Making Tree



**Decision making Tree:**  
Do we need a qualified coach?

Check the list of activities covered by the Insurance of your Force and only plan activities that are covered by your insurance policy and Force Safe to Operate Standards. The Girlguiding website offers an [index of activities](#) and what needs to be considered when planning your activities.

The Girlguides have a specific [index of water sports](#) which explains some of the specific risks of boating and water-based activities which may be of benefit when planning activities.

**Always use a qualified instructor**— for adventurous (high risk) activities its best to use qualified instructors for specific activities. Make sure instructors have an appropriate national governing body qualification.

Where the activity does not have a recognised instructor qualification, ensure the instructor you use:

- has up-to-date knowledge of the activity
- is proficient at the activity
- has experience of safely and effectively instructing groups in the activity
- has experience of safely and effectively instructing the relevant age group.

**Use a reputable commercial activity provider-** you can verify the quality of a provider by checking it has either an [Adventuremark](#) endorsement or [LotC Quality Badge for Adventure](#).

Make sure helpers and instructors have been checked - If the activity involves one-to-one unsupervised instruction, the instructor needs a disclosure (DBS) check. The activity provider is responsible for carrying out the check and for providing written confirmation.

**During an activity** leaders must continue to assess risk throughout an activity; trip or event and this should be recorded with full mitigation details.

An appropriate weather forecast is acted upon to choose where the activity takes place and each participant is suitably equipped to cope with predicted extremes.

All activities must be undertaken in accordance with the Force's Safe to Operate Standards, additional Insurance cover and must adhere to the relevant activity specific guidance and or outside activity centre guidance.