

SAFE & SOUND

How we keep your child safe in Squirrels



Information for parents and carers

The NI Squirrel Association offers fun, learning and adventure to over 1,500 young people in Northern Ireland. We know that young people thrive in safe surroundings and we are therefore committed to ensuring that Squirrels is both enjoyable and safe for everyone who takes part.

As a parent or carer, you may have questions about how we achieve this, and we hope to provide the answers in this leaflet.

How are leaders who volunteer with young people appointed?

All those who help run our activities are volunteers who give their time freely to help young people enjoy Squirrels. Leaders are interviewed and asked to provide references. Everyone volunteering regularly in Squirrels is asked to undertake a vetting process (AccessNI). If you are asked to help you may be asked to complete this process too.

Is there a written code of behaviour for adults in Squirrels?

The NI Squirrel Association has a clear code of behaviour for all adults involved in Squirrels. This gives advice about how young people should be treated and everyone is expected to follow it. If you volunteer to help out with an activity you will be made aware of our guidelines.

How is the Leadership team made up & do leaders receive training?

The Drey leadership team is made up of a group of volunteers – usually, Squirrel Leader, Assistant Squirrel Leaders, Drey Regular Helpers and Occasional Helpers. Often there are young people of 14 – 18 years of age working for their Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme helping in the Drey. Drey leaders receive training which covers a wide range of topics including basic first aid, child protection, safety aspects and how to plan, organise and run activities.

Most Squirrel Dreys are affiliated to a Scout Group and are supported by the Group Scout Leader.

How can I raise any concerns or comment on activities?

If you are unhappy with anything relating to your child's time in Squirrels, you should raise it with your child's leaders. If you would rather speak to someone else, contact the NI Squirrel Association directly on their email address: squirrelinfo@scoutsni.org

How do I know that my child is safe?

No Squirrel activities ever take place while there is only one adult and one child present. The NSPCC says that parents should be wary of the points listed below. We would never expect any of these to occur in Squirrels.

- *activities where parents/carers are discouraged from staying to watch or become involved*
- *behaviour or activities that encourage rough play, sexual innuendo or humiliating punishments*
- *individuals who take charge and operate independently of organisational guidelines*
- *individuals who show favouritism or personally reward specific children*
- *encouragement of inappropriate physical contact*
- *poor communication and lack of parental involvement, leaving you feeling uneasy*
- *children who drop out or stop going for no apparent reason*
- *invitations for children to spend time alone with volunteers (or even visit their home)*

If a Squirrel Leader has concerns about the welfare of my child what reporting procedure would they follow?

The NI Squirrel Association has a clear procedure for reporting child protection/safeguarding concerns. Any concerns are recorded and forwarded to the NI Squirrel Association Management Committee

If a young person tells a Leader they are being abused, the Leader will do the following:

1. Allow them to speak without interruption and accept what they say. Where possible, ensure another Leader is present.
2. Be understanding and reassuring but not give their opinion.
3. Tell them that they will try to offer support but that they must pass the information on.
4. Write careful notes of what was said, using the actual words, wherever possible and sign and date them. Any witnesses will also sign and date the record to confirm it.
5. **Inform** the NI Squirrel Association immediately.

If a young person is at immediate risk of significant harm, the PSNI, NSPCC 24-hour counselling service or the Gateway Team in the local Health & Social Care Trust will be contacted. The NI Squirrel Association will be advised immediately of any action taken.