

Policies, Procedures, and Advocacy for Ending Abuse in Sports



This document is for ALL adults who are responsible for protecting athlete safety, health and well-being and preventing all covert emotional, and overt emotional, physical and sexual abuse in their spheres of influence. Responsible adults include parents, guardians, coaches, club directors, national governing body leaders, SafeSport leaders, international governing body leaders, International Olympic committee members, state, national, and international legislators, health care and law enforcement professionals.

We know that teaching children to cross the street is necessary but not sufficient to ensure their safety. Similarly, teaching athletes to spot sneaky and obvious spiders is necessary but not sufficient to ensure their safety during sports participation.

As with traffic safety, sport safety also depends on carefully considered, universally recognized, and diligently enforced rules of the road. Unfortunately, our current “rules of the road” for protecting athletes from abuse are wholly inadequate, and the rules we do have are rarely enforced.

A comprehensive system for protecting athletes from all types of abuse includes the following:

- a clear, unequivocal, international [code of ethics](#) (equivalent to traffic laws);
- mandatory coach and staff education (equivalent to driver’s ed); and
- promptly enforced consequences such as firing, suspending, and banning abusive coaches (equivalent to suspending and revoking the licenses of dangerous drivers).

Together we can prevent abuse and create healthy environments for our children to achieve peak performance and find flow.

To protect people of all ages from abuse we also should **insist that similar mandates be incorporated into every sector of society:** education, entertainment, politics, business, religion, armed services, recreational clubs and groups, and families.

The first six mandates are taken directly from the recommended [Code of Ethics](#). The last four mandates (in red on page 4) speak to the procedural, legal, therapeutic, and societal measures we must enact to end the epidemic of abuse in sports and begin cycles of healing.

We commit to

- Prioritize athlete physical, mental, and emotional safety, health and well-being.
- Ensure a positive, holistic, athlete-centered sport experience for every athlete.

- Prevent all types of abuse (sneaky/covert emotional abuse, as well as obvious/overt emotional, physical, and sexual abuse).

To fulfill our commitments, we do the following:

1. Screen and Train Coaches and Staff

- Complete background checks for all coaches and staff as part of the hiring process, and once a year thereafter.
- Check national and international SafeSport and sex offender databases (to prevent abusers from moving from one age group, gender, club, or country to another).
- Require that all staff be licensed/ credentialed by the relevant governing body.
- Require that all staff be SafeSport I, II, and III certified.
- Obtain references from at least two previous employers for any potential hire.
- Ask three verified former athletes to complete the anonymous athlete experience survey for any potential hire.
- Be thorough during the hiring process, and insist on specifics if we are told anything along the lines of “We had a parting of the ways.” “We didn’t share the same coaching philosophy.” “The coach left for personal reasons.” When in doubt, investigate further.
- Ask screening questions designed to detect abusers.
- Require all new hires to read and sign a conduct agreement form.
- Train all staff regarding all types of prohibited conduct as part of the hiring process, and once a year thereafter.
- Offer training to enhance positive, holistic, athlete-centered coaching as part of the hiring process and once a year thereafter.
- Promote coaches and staff who prioritize athletes’ physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being.

2. Educate Athletes, Parents, Coaches, and Staff to See and Stop All Forms of Abuse

- Recognize the inherent power imbalance in the coach-athlete relationship, the vulnerability of athletes, and the high risk for abuse.
- Recognize that (non-coaching) staff, and teammates may be abusive.
- Recognize that covert emotional abuse is as harmful as overt emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.
- Use simple, age-appropriate examples to teach athletes of all ages (and their parents) how to spot sneaky (covert) emotional abuse, which is often a gateway to physical and sexual abuse.
- Promote “How to Spot Spider” viewings (or equivalent training) for all new athletes and parents and offer training to all athletes and parents at least once a year.

3. Establish Systems of Accountability for All Coaches and Staff

- Implement and conduct an ongoing review process, including third party observation of all coaches and staff.

- Distribute decision-making and prevent situations in which athletes feel they must please one specific coach. (This includes having at least three independent decision-makers recommend/select athletes for regional, national, or Olympic teams.)
- Require that all staff (e.g., management, front office personnel, coaches, trainers, equipment managers) act as legally mandated reporters.
- Empower athletes, parents, coaches, and staff to report all types of abuse.
- Create simple, clear, well-publicized, anonymous, safe reporting systems for victims and whistleblowers.
- Establish an Athlete Safety Committee (ASC) that includes a trauma-sensitive health care professional and at least two athletes (or parents if athletes are under 18).
- Schedule ASC meetings at least twice a year, and within one week when any concern is raised.
- Proactively and anonymously survey athletes about what they see and how they feel in their sporting environment, at least once a year.
- Use clear, specific language when asking athletes about their experiences with coaches and staff.
- Ensure that an athlete never has to directly interact with a person of concern.
- Ensure an athlete has an advocate of their choosing to support them and/or speak on their behalf in all conversations regarding potential abuse.
- Provide an independent, trauma-sensitive health care professional to support and/or speak on the athlete's behalf in all conversations regarding potential abuse.

4. Promptly investigate all complaints of abuse

- Initiate an investigation within one week of receiving a complaint of any type of abuse.
- Engage a truly independent, trauma-sensitive third party to respond compassionately and comprehensively to every report of abuse.
- Unless initial findings unambiguously determine no wrongdoing, suspend the accused person until the full investigation is completed.
- Complete each investigation within one month of receiving the complaint.
- Complete each investigation even if the accused “steps down,” “retires,” “moves,” or “is released”

5. Act to Protect Our Athletes and All Athletes

- When an investigation determines that abuse has occurred, hold ourselves to a standard of timely personal and institutional transparency, responsibility, public apologies, and all-inclusive amends (emotional, procedural, and financial).
- Maintain a zero-tolerance policy and fire coaches and staff who emotionally, physically, or sexually abuse athletes.
- Promptly report abuse to the appropriate sport and legal authorities.
- Enforce professional consequences for any adult (coaches, staff, owners) who fails to be proactive, responsible, and responsive in addressing athlete safety, health, and well-being (including covering up or failing to report abuse of any type).

- Forbid retaliation (demoting, cutting, firing, blacklisting) against athletes, parents, and staff who report abuse.

6. Consistently adhere to ALL SafeSport policies

7. Respond Promptly and Compassionately to All Reports of Abuse

- Recognize that covert emotional abuse is as harmful as overt emotional, physical and sexual abuse.
- Fully fund and staff club, national, and international programs to respond compassionately and comprehensively to every report of abuse within one month.
- Ensure truly independent, trauma-sensitive investigations are performed by people with expertise in all types of abuse.

8. Enact Laws That Protect Athletes and Deter Abusers and Conspirators

- Create a trauma-sensitive legal system to minimize the re-traumatization and maximize the empowerment of victims.
- Abolish the statute of limitations for all forms of abuse.
- Make covert and overt emotional abuse, and overt physical abuse, criminal offenses—punishable to the same extent as sexual abuse.
- Incorporate restorative justice practices into all legal proceedings.
- Specify the right to punitive damages for all types of abuse.
- Expand sex offender databases to track all types of abuse.
- Allow the public disclosure (at the victim's discretion) of the terms of any settlement.
- Enforce professional and legal consequences for any adult (from club owners to local police, to the FBI) who fails to be proactive, responsible, and responsive in addressing athlete safety, health, and well-being, including failing to investigate and report, or covering up abuse of any type.

9. Heal Athletes

- Provide and fund sport-informed, trauma-sensitive therapy for all victims of abuse.
- Skillfully and compassionately support victims throughout their healing process.
- Optimize treatment of each individual according to their unique neurodevelopmental, abuse, and sport history.

10. Maximize Media and Sponsor Influence

- Support trauma sensitive, investigative journalism that reports the truth, uncovers coverups, and holds abusers and accomplices accountable.
- Promote solutions-based reporting.
- Encourage athletes to harness the power of social media to tell their stories.
- Amplify athletes' messages so they know people believe and support them.
- Publicly pressure sponsors to insist that clubs and leagues enact protective policies.