

Safe and healthy sports for all athletes in Cyprus

All athletes must be respected and protected by the state, and the Cyprus Sports Organization (CSO), as the Supreme Authority in Sports, must ensure the well-being of athletes and the existence of a safe and healthy environment in sports. Therefore, in or around the years 2021 and 2023, the legislation of the CSO (The Cyprus Sports Organization Law of 1969) was amended to ensure the above and therefore the following 3 pillars were set:

- Pillar 1: Education aimed at raising awareness to ensure the well-being, safety, protection, fair, and equal treatment of athletes to prevent, recognize, and address bullying, sexual abuse, and violence in sports, as well as all offenses provided for in the provisions of all relevant laws mentioned above, to create a safe sports environment for all;
- Pillar 2: Establishment of Open Reporting Mechanisms aimed at encouraging reports/complaints for the prevention and addressing of any incidents contrary to healthy sports;
- Pillar 3: Obligations of Affected Entities for the Implementation of the Action Plan Aimed at Combating and Eliminating Violations to Safeguard Healthy Sports

All athletes should benefit from Safe Sport, meaning all children and adults involved in sport activities can train and compete in healthy and supportive settings and surroundings; Safe Sport is also defined as an environment which is respectful, equitable and free from all forms of abuse and harassment.

Child Safeguarding in Sport is defined as the responsibility of the sport federation / association / club to ensure that the sport activity is a safe, positive and enjoyable experience for all children and that all children are kept safe from harm (including abuse) when involved in indoor and outdoor activities, in all capacities and at all levels

The role of the Safeguarding Officer / Focal Point in all sports is crucial and it includes both preventive actions to minimise the chances of harm occurring and responsive actions aimed at ensuring that, if concerns arise, they are handled appropriately in line with national legislation and organisational policy on child safeguarding.

Being Trauma-Informed in sport it means understanding and considering the pervasive nature of trauma (that happened in, through and around sport) and it promotes environments of healing and recovery rather than sport practices that may inadvertently re-traumatize.

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as harmful or life threatening. While unique to the individual, generally the experience of trauma can cause lasting adverse effects, limiting the ability to function and achieve mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.

Becoming Trauma-Informed in sport requires commitment and engagement in meaningful ways both at individual level and organisational level. A sport club that is trauma informed **REALISES** the widespread impact of trauma, stress and adversity and understands the

potential paths for healing and recovery. **RECOGNISIS** the signs and symptoms of trauma in staff, athletes and all others involved in sport activities. Actively **RESISTS** re-traumatisation and is being committed to trauma reducing instead of trauma-inducing. **RESPONDS** by fully and meaningfully integrating, embedding and infusing knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, language, culture, practice and sport settings. These are also known as the 4Rs of being Trauma-Informed.

Safeguarding in sport – Key definitions and concepts

Child safeguarding

Child safeguarding is an umbrella term encompassing both **preventative actions** to minimise the chances of harm occurring and **responsive actions** to ensure that, when concerns do arise, they are handled appropriately. It responds to the need to take into account the best interests of the child in every action relating to children involved in football (e.g. decisions, conduct, training, services and programmes) and to act in accordance with international standards and national legislation, in particular where suspected cases of abuse may amount to criminal offences.

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, a child is anyone under the age of 18 years. Although cases of child sexual abuse in sport have come to light, sexual abuse is not the only form of abuse that violates children's right to protection.

Safeguarding is practical

Safeguarding is more than procedures and policies; it is a mindset of ensuring that children are safe and can take part in sport activities in an inclusive environment free from all forms of abuse and harm. Proactive efforts by sport settings will not only enhance children's enjoyment of sport and their performance, but also set the foundations to safeguard everyone involved in the game. Whilst some sport settings have already introduced good policies, procedures and training, it is important to recognise the need for ongoing capacity development, review and regular updates in line with the new and evolved understanding of child safeguarding and national legislation on the topic. All actions on child safeguarding in sport should ensure that children and their best interests are adequately protected.

Safeguarding is contextual

All procedures and policies on child safeguarding in sport need to be adapted to the situation at hand. These include templates and guidance that are intended to help sport setting develop their own policies, procedures and good practices. The Cyprus Sports Organization ("CSO"), within the framework of the Cyprus Sports Organization Law of 1969 (41/1969) as amended by the Cyprus Sports Organization (Amendment) (No. 2) Law of 2021, (Number 113(I) of 2021), has proceeded with the formulation of an Action Plan (the "Action Plan"), which will include the CSO's strategy for taking measures within the framework of the principle of good governance with the aim of: (a) ensuring the well-being, safety, protection, and fair and equal treatment of athletes, (b) preventing and addressing bullying in sports, as well as (c) offenses provided for in the provisions of the Criminal Code, the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law, the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law, and the provisions of other relevant laws.

Safeguarding is team effort

Developing measures to safeguard children requires cooperation with different sectors such as education, health, social services, justice and law enforcement. There also needs to be engagement with various parties, including schools and clubs, families, physicians, coaches, teachers, sports officials and peers, which must be done in accordance with national legislation. One important measure is the appointment of a Child Safeguarding Officer who will act as a point of reference and as a coordinator, but is not responsible for doing everything! Every adult involved in sport has a responsibility to ensure that the game is safe and fun for children irrespective of their ability to play and involved in the game. A vital role of the Child Safeguarding Officer is working closely with key internal and external partners to develop and implement safeguarding procedures, especially procedures for responding to suspected cases of abuse.

Definitions of abuse and harm. Recognising signs and symptoms

Most children benefit greatly from their involvement in games. Nevertheless, in sport, through sport and around sport activities children may be abused or harmed, irrespective of their age, gender, race, culture, religion, ability or sexual orientation. Although sport child abuse scandals reported in the press have focused on sexual abuse, it is important to understand that this is not the only form of abuse that children may experience. This information sheet sets out the different types of abuse and gives examples of how they might be recognised in a sport setting. It also outlines some signs that may indicate a child is experiencing abuse.

Physical abuse:

Physical abuse is often the most easily recognised form. Physical abuse can be, but is not limited to, any kind of hitting, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, beating or other action that causes physical injury, leaves marks or causes pain.

Examples in sport:

- Shouting at a child because they are provocative, not listening or disturbing the training
- Forcing a child with an injury to play
- Encouraging children to deliberately play aggressively, without regard to the risk of injury to themselves or others

Sexual abuse:

Sexual abuse is any type of sexual contact between an adult and anyone younger than 18 years old; between a significantly older child and a younger child; or if one person overpowers another, regardless of age. It is also abusive to take indecent photos of children, involve children in watching sexual images or activities, or encourage children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Making unwanted comments, particularly those that are sexual in nature, is also a form of sexual abuse, often called sexual harassment. Even if someone under 18 years old consents to a sexual relationship, this is still considered sexual abuse.

Examples in sport:

- Taking photos of children naked while they are showering
- Starting a sexual relationship with a player
- Commenting on how 'well developed' a girl athlete is physically

- Requiring abnormal physical contact claiming it is for the well-being of the player

Emotional, psychological or verbal abuse

Emotional abuse happens when a significant adult in a child's life constantly criticises, threatens or dismisses them until their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth are damaged. Always joking about someone can also be abusive.

It is not that children should not be criticised, or that jokes should not be made.

Constructive criticism is important for children to learn and improve. Similarly, jokes and laughter help form bonds between people and can create a sense of team spirit. However, the difference is that emotional abuse goes too far. Criticism stops being motivational, and jokes are not funny. Emotional abuse can hurt and cause damage, just as physical abuse does.

Examples in sport:

- Shouting at a child and constantly calling them a 'loser' for not performing well during a competition or for missing a penalty in a football match
- Constantly laughing at a child, and encouraging other players to laugh, if a child is unfit
- Showing favouritism in the team so that some children feel excluded

Neglect

Neglect occurs when an adult does not provide enough emotional support or deliberately and consistently pays very little or no attention to a child and their needs. Neglect also occurs when a child is not given adequate food, housing, clothes, medical care or supervision.

There are other forms of abuse, such as discrimination, exploitation and violence, but these fall under the four main categories of abuse.

Examples in sport:

- Not being aware of where children are during sport activities or away trips
- Not providing water, or allowing children to break for water, in hot weather during training
- Using transport that is not safe and roadworthy to take children to matches

Bullying

Although abuse is typically thought of as being something that an adult does to a child, peers can also perpetrate abuse. Child-to-child abuse is often called 'bullying'.

Bullying can take many forms. It can include physical acts such as hitting; online activity, such as abusive messages, comments or images posted on social media; damage or theft of property; and name calling. Bullying may be based on someone's gender, ethnicity, sexuality or disability; or their sporting ability.

Adults sometimes try to minimise bullying, thinking it is less serious because it occurs between children. However, bullying can and does cause harm. It also tends to get progressively worse. For this reason, it is important to create an atmosphere where everyone knows that bullying is not tolerated, and to stop it as soon as it starts.

Recognising signs and symptoms of abuse

Recognising abuse is not always easy. Occasionally, the abuse is witnessed or disclosed, i.e. the child or another child/adult reports it. More often, there are 'clues' – signs that something may be wrong. This does not necessarily mean that something is wrong, but they are indications and should be followed up.

Typical signs include the following:

When children:

- have unexplained physical injuries, including bruises and wounds, such as cigarette burns, or signs of self-harm, such as scars from cutting, or pain when walking;
- have unexplained/constant illnesses, e.g. stomach upsets, difficulty eating;
- suddenly change behaviour or mood, such as becoming aggressive, withdrawn or shy;
- avoid certain situations or people;
- become very secretive, e.g. stop sharing what is happening in their lives or suddenly stop talking when adults walk in;
- constantly put themselves down, e.g. say that they are worthless, or useless;
- seem to be isolated/do not mix with others in the team;
- attempt suicide;
- say they or their team mates are being abused or harmed

When adults such as sport staff / parents:

- seem to single out one or more children for 'special treatment', either as favourites or for punishment;
- seem to care more about the result, than if the child is happy and having fun;
- are negative and critical about a child;
- use language that is not appropriate, e.g. discuss girls' physical appearance in a sexual way;
- do not respect children's privacy, e.g. in changing rooms;
- are not concerned about the children, what they are doing or where they are;
- do not abide by guidelines and codes of conduct;
- say they have seen a child being abused or harmed or are concerned about a situation

Abuse in sport

Children benefit from sport and physical activity, and football is no exception. Sport, in general, provides mental and physical benefits. Such benefits include strength, endurance and flexibility, as well as improved self-esteem, problem-solving and leadership. Important values and life skills are learnt through sport, such as fair play, teamwork and commitment. Through sport, children can make friends, develop a social group, have fun and keep fit. A

love of sport developed in childhood can lead to lifelong enjoyment of the recreational activities and a healthy life style.

To achieve any of this, sport must be a positive and enjoyable experience for the children and teenagers who play. Abuse and harm can occur anywhere, both within and outside the family and club/organisation. Children may be harmed or abused by professionals, volunteers, carers, family members and other children.

Children can be harmed in many ways, and often experience more than one type of abuse. There are some specific situations and types of harm that are more likely to occur in sport. Recognising these situations can help make sure all sports are a positive experience for all children, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, legal status (such as being a refugee or immigrant) or ability. These situations are:

Injuries:

Nearly every sport involves some risk of physical injury. However, the pressure to perform can mean that children are pushed beyond what is reasonable or appropriate for their age and ability, or that they are encouraged to play when injured, causing further damage.

Performance pressure:

Winning is an important part of sport. However, pushing children to perform can be harmful both psychologically and physically. Sometimes this performance pressure can come from adults, but it can also come from the child or their peers. For children, performance should never be at the expense of enjoyment.

Physical care:

Physical abuse is often the most easily recognised form of abuse. Physical abuse can be any kind of hitting, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, beating or other action that causes physical injury, leaves marks or causes pain.

Certain settings, such as changing rooms, showers and close contact during physiotherapy, make children especially vulnerable. These settings can provide opportunities for individuals who wish to sexually abuse a child. As a rule, children's privacy should be respected. If medical or intimate care or treatment is provided, children should be entitled to have another child or adult of their choice present.

Overnight stays / away trips:

Overnight stays, for example in the context of away matches or training camps, can provide opportunities for those who wish to sexually harm children. Enough adults must always be present to ensure proper supervision. At least two adults should always be present when working with children to avoid children going missing or being left in dangerous situations. Another factor to consider is whether transport arrangements are safe, for example, that vehicles are roadworthy.

Close relationships:

The relationship between a child and their coach or other support staff, such as physiotherapists and doctors, is important and can be beneficial. Many children develop close and trusting relationships, especially with their coach, who can be a significant person in their life, especially if they don't have good relationships with other adults.

However, these close relationships can also provide an opportunity for children to be harmed. The child may want to please the adult, or the adult may be a person of trust and power whose integrity no one would question.

Keeping children safe in sport means that no one is 'above suspicion'. That does not mean everyone is a suspect; it is about ensuring that everyone involved – children, parents and adults – are held to the same standards of behaviour and conduct.

Team culture:

Being part of a team, and the sense of belonging that comes with it, can be very beneficial for children's self-esteem and self-worth.

The team culture is key to the child's learning experience. This culture is created by the players but is highly influenced by the coach. For example, if the coach makes it known that everyone is respected and bullying is not tolerated, the team culture is much more likely to be welcoming and positive. Conversely, if the coach shows that they value winning over taking part, players may start to blame and isolate children who they believe are letting the side down.

Additionally, children may think that some players do not 'fit' the team, perhaps due to their background or characteristics.

A hierarchy may develop with older or more powerful children holding influence over other children. This can be positive but can equally be negative and lead to bullying, including 'hazing', which children are expected to tolerate to gain acceptance by the team.

Child Safeguarding Officer: Roles & Responsibilities; Skills & Characteristics

The role of the Child Safeguarding Officer (CSO) is critical to an environment where children of all ages and abilities can safely participate in sport and have fun. However, this does not mean that the CSO has sole responsibility for the safeguarding of children within an organisation. The role of the CSO, as the name suggests, is to provide a point of contact, and to advise, support and assist the organisation in the implementation of the child safeguarding policy and associated procedures, including responding to cases. To be able to do this, the focal point needs the support of management and the cooperation of all those working with and for the organisation.

Although the role of the CSO is important, it need not be too onerous. There will be times, such as when an incident occurs, when there will be additional work, but most of the time the role involves being available to support and assist as required. Ideally, organisations should nominate at least two people to act as CSOs, so that the workload can be shared and if one is absent there is another to fulfil the role.

Organisations should ensure that the name and contact details of the CSO are made known to all those working with and for the organisation, as well as parents and children.

Roles & Responsibilities

- Acting as the focal point (first point of contact) and taking the lead on child safeguarding within the organisation;
- Ensuring safeguarding training is given to staff, volunteers and others;

- Ensuring staff and others are aware of the child safeguarding policy and their responsibilities under it, for example by providing training and briefings;
- Advising and supporting staff, volunteers and partners in the implementation of the child safeguarding policy;
- Carrying out risk assessments, or supporting others in completing them, when required;
- Ensuring that football programmes, practices and activities take constant and regular account of safeguarding measures;
- Mapping out and establishing partnerships with local authorities and civil society organisations with expertise in child welfare, health and law enforcement, so that information is available if an incident occurs or external advice is needed;
- Ensuring staff, volunteers and all stakeholders, as well as children and parents, are familiar with the child safeguarding policy, and that the policy is accessible;
- Acting as the first point of contact if incidents of abuse arise, and escalating concerns to management and local authorities, including law enforcement, as appropriate;
- Participating in child safeguarding training, as required;
- Keeping an accurate record of any incidents;
- Maintaining the safeguarding implementation plan and producing an annual progress report, as requested;
- Advising and representing the organisation in matters relating to safeguarding.

Skills & Characteristics

- Prepared to take on the role of child safeguarding officer;
- Ideally, some knowledge and experience in child safeguarding and child protection;
- Willing to undertake child safeguarding training;
- Respect and authority within the organisation, so that their opinions are valued;
- Approachable, with good communication skills with adults and children;
- Ability to keep calm when a concern is raised, especially if a child needs assistance;
- Ability to empathise with children and to ensure that their needs and interests remain the focus of all actions and decisions (child-centred approach);
- Ability to work with others to ensure that the child safeguarding policy, and associated procedures, are implemented in general and when a child protection incidence occurs;
- Commitment to the values of sport, safeguarding children and upholding their rights, together with the ability to advocate for and defend safeguarding;
- Training and presentation skills;
- Ability to keep records, e.g. of training, incidents;
- Ability to work professionally, confidentially and consistently in an area where emotionally distressing and sensitive issues and cases may arise.