

International Safeguards for Children in Sport

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Introduction

Millions of children and young people take part in sporting activities every day across the world. For some children this is purely for recreation and fun. Others may participate in sport for development programmes. For some young people sport may be their chosen future career, either as talented athletes, as coaches or as officials. Sport may also be used as a vehicle for diverting young people from anti-social or criminal behaviour.

Children have the right to participate in sport in a safe and enjoyable environment. Their rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Over the past 15 years or so victims of all forms of violence in sport have started to be able to have their voices heard and responded to. Previously there has been little questioning of the perception that sport is only a force for good for young people. Until the late 1990s/early 2000s very few sports organisations had put in place systems and structures to respond to complaints about the behaviour of adults or other young people.

We now know enough from research and evidence to be clear that sport does not always take place with a focus on children's rights at its centre, or sometimes fails to fully consider the risks to children, leading to organisational cultures that don't allow for the discussion of harm and abuse (Brackenridge, Kay & Rhind, 2012). There are also some risks to children and young people which are unique to sport such as the increased risks of all forms of abuse to elite young athletes. Many sport for development programmes are provided to extremely vulnerable children who may be affected by violence and abuse in their daily lives and for whom sport should be a safe haven. We should all seek to ensure that sports provision to these young people takes place in safe environments.

A draft set of Standards (now called Safeguards) were developed by a partnership of organisations working together for the Beyond Sport Summit in London, 2012. These were further developed through an extensive piloting phase over the next 2 years. The finalised version of the Safeguards was launched at Beyond Sport in October 2014. They lay the foundations for a holistic approach to ensuring children's safety and protection in all sports contexts internationally.

Definitions

- Safeguarding refers to the actions we take to ensure **all** children are safe from harm when involved in our clubs and activities
- Child protection is a set of activities that are required for **specific** children who are at risk of/or are suffering harm
- Abuse refers to the acts of commission or omission that lead to a child experiencing harm
- Harm refers to the negative impact or consequences upon the child of those actions
- Violence refers to the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation [WHO 2002 World Report on Violence and Health]

International Safeguards

These Safeguards aim to outline the things that should be put in place by any organisation providing sports activities to children and young people. The Safeguards should be viewed as guides, which facilitate an organisation's journey towards safeguarding children rather than an end in themselves.

They reflect international declarations, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, relevant legislation, government guidance, existing child protection/safeguarding standards and good practice. They have been informed by research conducted by Brunel University with a diverse range of perspectives from different countries and stakeholder groups during an extensive piloting phase.

These Safeguards represent collective good practice at a point in time and will be subject to periodic review to ensure they reflect developments within safeguarding practice.

The 8 Safeguards are:

1. Developing Your Policy
2. Procedures for Responding to Safeguarding Concerns
3. Advice and Support
4. Minimising Risks to Children
5. Guidelines for Behaviour
6. Recruiting, Training and Communicating
7. Working With Partners
8. Monitoring and Evaluating

The Safeguards aim to:

- Help create a safe sporting environment for children wherever they participate and at whatever level
- Provide a benchmark to assist sports providers and funders to make informed decisions
- Promote good practice and challenge practice that is harmful to children
- Provide clarity on safeguarding children to all involved in sport

The Safeguards are based on the following principles

- All children have the right to participate, enjoy and develop through sport, in a safe and inclusive environment, free from all forms of abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation
- Children have the right to have their voices heard and listened to. They need to know who they can turn to when they have a concern about their participation in sport
- Everyone, organizations and individuals, service providers and funders, has a responsibility to support the care and protection of young people
- Organisations providing sports activities to children and young people have a duty of care to them
- There are certain factors that leave some children more vulnerable to abuse, and steps need to be taken to address this
- Children have a right to be involved in shaping safeguarding policy and practice
- Organisations should always act in the best interests of the child
- Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect and not be discriminated against based on gender, race, age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, beliefs, religious or political affiliation
- The processes and activities for the creation, development and implementation of safeguarding measures should be inclusive

Please note that whilst these Safeguards have been developed in relation to children (aged under 18 years old) they can also provide a valuable framework for good practice in relation to other groups such as vulnerable adults.

Piloting the Safeguards

A number of the organisations represented at the joint initiative at the Beyond Sport Summit 2012 agreed to pilot these Safeguards along with a number of additional organisations committed to strengthening their approach to making sport safer for children. Throughout the piloting, the safeguarding lead from these organisations participated in Virtual Learning Sets (VLS). The VLS were lead by a member of the Founders Group with expertise in

safeguarding children. Organisations were allocated into small groups of 6-8 based on mission, location and size. These VLS met online every 2 months to discuss their experiences of working towards the Safeguards.

Research was conducted by Brunel University with 32 of these organisations. Data were collected from a range of sources:

- Interviews with the safeguarding leads of each organisation
- Periodic feedback from the leaders of the VLS
- Feedback collected from pilot organisations at Beyond Sport 2013 in Philadelphia
- An online survey of participants regarding a revised set of Safeguards

Based on this data, the researchers made recommendations to the Founders Group. The final version of the Safeguards was then developed and launched at Beyond Sport 2014. More details about each of the Safeguards is provided below.

Key Steps on the Safeguarding Journey

The following steps will guide your journey through each of the Safeguards. They should facilitate an organisation to reflect on their current system and inform their efforts towards ensuring the safety of children.

Step1: Foundation level

- The Safeguards are used to raise awareness of the need to minimise the risks faced by children in your organisation and inform discussion around the next steps towards implementation

Step 2: Preparing to Implement

- The Safeguards are used to conduct a review to identify current strengths and weaknesses in relation to minimising the risks faced by children in your organisation

Step3: Action Planning

- There is a written plan which details the steps which will be taken to implement the Safeguards, who is responsible for these actions and a time-scale as to when these actions will be completed

Step 4: Implementation

- You have implemented the strategies and systems outlined within each of the Safeguards

Step 5: Maintaining and Embedding

- The system is reviewed on a regular basis (at least every 3 years) and is further developed based on the experiences of children, parents/carers and staff

Safeguard 1: Developing Your Policy

What - Any organisation providing or with responsibility for sports activities for children and young people under the age of 18 should have a safeguarding policy. This is a statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to safeguard children involved in sport from harm, and provides the framework within which procedures are developed.

Why - A safeguarding policy makes clear to all what is required in relation to the protection of children and young people. It helps to create a safe and positive environment for children and to show that the organisation is taking its duty of care seriously. It also takes account of specific factors that may leave some children more vulnerable.

- You have a safeguarding policy which is clearly written and understandable
- The policy clearly describes your understanding and definitions of violence
- The policy covers your organisation's commitment to safeguard children in all aspects of your work
- The policy makes it clear that all children have equal rights to protection
- This policy is officially endorsed by the senior management within the organisation
- The highest level of the organisation has the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the policy
- You have consulted with children, parents/carers and staff as part of the initial development and/or on-going review of your policy
- All your staff, volunteers or other representatives have signed up to the policy

Safeguard 2: Developing a System to respond to safeguarding concerns

What - Procedures describe the operational processes required to implement organisational policy and provide clear step-by-step guidance on what to do in different circumstances. They clarify roles and responsibilities, and lines of communication. Effective systems are required which help to process any complaints or concerns and support any victims of violence. You should build on existing systems and understand your role with regards to relevant national systems and legislation.

Why - For safeguarding to be effective, procedures have to be credible for children. Procedures help to ensure a prompt response to concerns about a child's safety or well-being. They also help you to comply with and implement legislation and guidance. Violence against children is distressing and can be difficult to deal with. Organisations have a duty to ensure that advice and support is in place to help people to play their part in safeguarding children.

- There are clear procedures in place that provide step-by-step guidance on what action to take if there are concerns about a child's safety or well-being, both within and external to the organisation
- There is an identified member of staff within the organisation who will be tasked with the responsibility for leading on the organisation's work towards safeguarding children, and the highest level of the organisation understands and commits to this work
- You provide children and young people with information about their rights and about who they can turn to if they are worried, in a process which empowers them.
- You have made information available to children and their parents/carers, about what is likely to happen following a disclosure, in a format and language that can be easily understood by everyone
- All incidents, allegations of violence, and complaints are recorded, monitored and stored securely
- You consulted with children, parents/carers and staff as part of the initial development and/or ongoing review of your response system
- You deal with complaints in a fair and transparent way, that includes a clear appeals process

Safeguard 3: Advice and Support

What – Arrangements made to provide essential information and support to those responsible for safeguarding children. Children and young people are advised on where to access help and support.

Why – You have a duty to ensure advice and support is in place to help people to play their part in safeguarding children such that they know to whom they can turn to for help.

- You have arrangements in place to provide support to children, volunteers and staff members, during and following an incident or allegation of violence or a complaint
- Your system acknowledges that children with additional vulnerabilities (for example, a disability) may face extra barriers to getting help
- You ensure that staff members with special responsibilities for keeping children safe have engagement with specialist advice, support and information regarding child protection
- Contacts are established at a national and/or local level with relevant child protection agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations and community groups providing support on child protection that can provide information, support and assistance to children and staff

Safeguard 4: Minimising Risks to Children

What – Measures to assess and minimise the risks to children.

Why - Some people, who work or seek to work in sport in a paid or voluntary capacity, pose a risk to children. Children are also at risk when placed in unsuitable places or asked to participate in unsuitable activities, including age-inappropriate activities, over-training and through unrealistic expectations being placed on them. It is possible to minimise these risks by putting safeguards in place.

- Your training helps staff & volunteers to recognise the additional risks some children are exposed to, because of their race, gender, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, social background or culture
- A risk assessment is conducted for activities, transport, accommodation and spaces
- Steps are taken to minimise any risks to children identified through a risk assessment
- If the risks are assessed to be too significant then the activity does not go ahead

Safeguard 5: Guidelines on Behaviour

What - Codes of conduct to describe what an acceptable standard of behaviour is and promote current best practice.

Why - Children's sport should be carried out in a safe, positive and encouraging atmosphere. Standards of behaviour set a benchmark of what is acceptable for all.

- You have specific job descriptions and written guidelines for behaviour (codes of conduct) which contain statements about treating people with dignity, respect, sensitivity and fairness
- You have guidance around activities that include time spent away from home, including overnight stays
- You have guidance around working with children who have a disability
- You have guidance around the appropriate use of information technology and social media (such as email, digital cameras, internet) to make sure that children are not put in danger and made vulnerable to exploitation
- You have guidance on positive ways of managing the behaviour of children that do not involve physical punishment or any other form of degrading or humiliating treatment, and are age and gender appropriate
- You have guidance on expected and acceptable behaviour of children towards others, particularly children (for example, a learning agreement developed with the children taking part)
- Where organisations are involved in placing children in the care of others (for example, football clubs placing youth team members with host families), carers demonstrate their commitment to clear expectations regarding appropriate behaviour
- Where organisations are involved in placing children in the care of others, frequent meetings are held with the child to discuss their experiences
- There are clear consequences for not following the guidelines on behaviour that are linked to organizational disciplinary procedures
- The highest level of the organisation has the responsibility to ensure that the guidelines are followed
- You consulted children, parents/carers and staff as part of the initial development and/or on-going review of your guidance

Safeguard 6: Recruiting, Training and Communicating

What – Recruiting appropriate members of staff, creating opportunities to develop and maintain the necessary skills and communicating regarding safeguarding.

Why - Everyone in contact with children has a role to play in their protection. They can only do so confidently and effectively if they are aware, have the necessary understanding of, and the opportunity to develop, practice and implement key skills. Organisations providing sporting activities for children have a responsibility to provide training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers.

- The recruitment process includes an interview, character/employment references and a background check in line with local legislation
- You have trained all members of staff, volunteers and other relevant people on safeguarding and child protection, including how to report concerns
- Children are provided with advice and support on keeping themselves and one another safe
- Parents and the wider community are provided with information, advice and support on safeguarding children
- You consulted with children, parents/carers and staff as part of the initial development and/or on-going review of your training
- The highest level of the organisation has the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the training
- You provide access to regular additional training and specialist support for all staff members and volunteers with special responsibilities for safeguarding

Safeguard 7: Working with Partners

What - Action taken by the organisation to influence and promote the adoption and implementation of measures to safeguard children by partner organisations.

Why - A number of sports organisations have both a strategic and a delivery role in relation to children and young people. Where organisational partnership, membership, funding or commissioning relationships exist or develop with other organisations, the organisation should use its influence to promote the implementation of safeguarding measures. The organisation should provide or signpost support and resources in relation to implementing adequate safeguarding measures. The organisation should actively promote the adoption of the *International Safeguards to make Sport Safer for Children*.

- There is a process of engagement with partners on child safeguarding issues to ensure a shared understanding of safeguarding expectations, mutual learning and development of current best practice
- Your safeguarding policy represents an essential part of any partnership agreements
- A written agreement provides guidance on current best practice for an organisation's work with children
- You publicise information about your policy to your community and partners
- You work to sensitise your communities to the importance of safeguarding children (for example, parents, teachers, community leaders and administrators)

Safeguard 8: Monitoring and Evaluation

What - The on-going monitoring of compliance and effectiveness, involving all relevant groups.

Why - Organisations need to know whether safeguarding is effective and where improvements and adaptations are needed, or recognise patterns of risk.

- You consulted with children, parents/carers and staff as part of the initial development and/or on-going review of your monitoring and evaluation system
- There are systems in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of, and where necessary, further develop:
 - your policy
 - your system for responding to safeguarding concerns
 - the available advice and support
 - your systems to minimise the risks to children
 - your written guidelines for behaviour
 - your recruitment, training and communication
 - the way in which you work with partners to safeguard children
- The highest level of the organisation has the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the monitoring and evaluation system