

WORKSTREAM 2 – System and structure

Action 1: appoint the club Safeguarding Officer and communicate his/her existence in the club

Safeguarding Officer (SO) profile description

What?

A Safeguarding Officer (SO) within a sport club is an easy-to-reach point of contact where athletes, their parents/families, coaches, board members, staff, or other stakeholders can seek, suspect or complain about interpersonal violence.

Why?

It is important that there is a culture of openness in sport clubs where everyone feels they can report incidents. Installing a SO makes it clear to everyone who they can turn to with a report and ensures a clear and timely follow-up of incidents.

Tasks of a Safeguarding Officer

The SO listens to the question or the story of a reporter and directs him/her as needed or advises on the possible next steps, without going into the substance of the matter or finding out truthfulness. Furthermore, the SO formulates advice on prevention activities within the sport club and helps the board members to acknowledge these initiatives.

- **Point of contact and first reception**

The SO listens to the story of the reporter, without assuming the role of responder. He/she shows enough empathy, makes the reporter feel that they are listening and does not question the story. Everyone in the club needs to know who the SO is, how to reach the SO and with what questions or messages they can contact him/her.

- **Coordination of the follow-up protocol and referral**

The SO takes any question or report seriously. The SO initiates the follow-up protocol and ensures the procedure is followed. He/she forms a picture of the situation, assesses the seriousness, and then provides the reporter with information, advice or referrals. In the event of suspicions or indication of serious interpersonal violence, it is not the task of the SO to provide assistance or to conduct investigation him/herself, but to refer to experts. In case of emergency, the SO refers to medical services, police and justice, etc. immediately.

- **Prevention and support of club governance**

In cooperation with the club board, the SO will make sure the existence and role of the SO is well known and raise awareness of the existent codes of conduct. The SO also remains informed about and provides information and advice to the club board members about interpersonal violence.

Role definition: What a Safeguarding Officer is not

- a responder: does not initiate an aid process and has no professional secrecy
- an investigating judge: should not go after the facts
- a journalist: should not inform anyone who is curious
- a board member: has no decision-making responsibility but only an advisory role

Key requirements

The Safeguarding Officer:

- is preferably not be a chairman or (as far as possible) not a board member or at least not a dominant person where peer review is not possible. If a board member is appointed, he/she must be able to operate independently and be transparent about possible conflicts of interest;
- is appointed by the club board through a clear mandate;
- is able to rely on an internal consultation (club board) and experts in the event of a major incident;
- may, on request, submit an extract from the criminal record (depending on the legislation in your country);
- does not conduct research and does not find truth itself;
- work on the basis of the established follow-up protocol, procedures, regulations and statutes of the sport club;
- is able to act discreetly and operate independently; and
- can count on support and training through an expert organisation.

What should a Safeguarding Officer know and be able to do?

The Safeguarding Officer:

- has basic insights about physical, psychological and sexual interpersonal violence (particularly in sport);
- is able to assess the seriousness of an incident;
- has clear knowledge about the role of a SO;
- is able to profile as a SO within everyone in a club;
- is able to handle an incident based on the follow-up protocol created by the sport club;
- is able to engage in dialogue with all parties involved;
- knows where to go for a complaint or help;
- is able to proceed with registration and file creation; and
- is able to consult the club board and make suggestions.

Communicate the existence of the Safeguarding Officer in the club

Safeguarding Officer sample text

My name is (name of the Safeguarding Officer). I am the Safeguarding Officer (SO) of (name of the sport club). As an athlete, parent/family member, coach, volunteer, staff or any other member of our club, you can contact me with a question, concern, suspicion or complaint about any matter related to violence and abuse.

- Are you dealing with a difficult situation such as psychological, physical, sexual violence, bullying, neglect or other unwanted behaviour?
- Do you notice during your sport activities that such unacceptable actions/behaviours are taking place?

If your answer is yes, you can reach me by email at (email address) or call me at (phone number). On (day/s), I will be present at the club, and you can speak to me personally.

I am here to support you, listen to your questions or concerns, handle with the situation with complete discretion and advise you on possible next steps or referral.

Name and signature:

Tips for your communication as a Safeguarding Officer

As a Safeguarding Officer (SO), it is important to make yourself known to the people in your sports club **in different ways and at different times**. Do not assume that reporters will find you through an email list or because your name is on the website. Below, you will find a number of tips to ensure that you are easily accessible and approachable.

- Introduce yourself personally to the members of your club. Visit the training sessions. At the start of the season, organise an online/live meeting with the trainers/team leadership, and perhaps repeat this action during the sport year. For example, you can briefly explain your role at the end of a coaches meeting, at a board meeting, at a briefing meeting for members, parents, etc. A familiar face already makes it a lot easier to report something.
- Make sure that coaches and administrators know who you are and what your role as SO entails. Check with them if they can also include your contact details in their presentations, brochures, or any other materials for athletes, parents, etc.
- In case you have a reporting/dedicated page on your club's website, make it as personal as possible (see example text above). Add a photo to your contact details and make sure you can be reached in different ways (telephone, email, contact form, WhatsApp, etc.). Everyone likes to get in touch in their own way (writing, calling, etc.).
- Make sure you can be reached by phone anyway. People often don't feel like typing out a whole case in an email or contact form. And don't forget, this is often a matter that brings discomfort.
- Think about a good voicemail that inspires confidence and clearly explains when you will call back (e.g. if you are only available during certain hours).
- Make your email address as personal as possible, e.g. SO_Martin@sportsclub.com. Do you prefer to work with a general email address such as report@sportsclub.com? If so, then make sure you clearly communicate you are the only person who reads the email of the reporter.
- Repeat: one social media post or one email will not make you known by everyone in your club. Communicate regularly throughout the year about your role as a SO and use different channels.