Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

It has long been recognised that participation in sport has a myriad of benefits to health and well-being.
It has also been noted that children’s safety can be addressed in, through and around sport (Brackenridge & Rhind 2014).

A 2020 study of elite athletes in Germany found that incidents of sexual violence happened more often outside of sport than in sport, however 48% of the victims were affected in both areas of life, indicating a high overlap of victimization experiences.

(Ohlert, J. et al, 2020)

Although evidence states that harassment and abuse can and does occur within the sports context, for some, sports represents their safe space.
It is important to make certain that everyone involved in sport recognises the individual role that they play in fostering safe sporting environments: athletic environments which are fair, equitable and free from all forms of harassment and abuse.

This factsheet has been specifically developed for athletes’ friends and family members with the hopes of raising awareness of this topic, providing tips and useful information, and helping you to understand the unique and crucial role that you play in supporting safe sport for all. We have divided this factsheet into four key areas:

1. Improving your own knowledge on this topic and challenging misconceptions
2. Recognising the signs and symptoms of harassment and abuse
3. Reflecting on your own conduct
4. Knowing how and where to report any concerns

1. In Sport
   By ensuring a safe sporting environment

2. Through Sport
   By empowering participants beyond the context of sport

3. Around sport
   By affecting the lives of those not directly involved in sport

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends

#SafeSport4All | Athlete365

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)

Safe Sport Entourage Factsheet: Family & Friends
For Family & Friends (Parents, Partners, Siblings)
An enormous first step which can be taken to support athletes is to challenge any misconceptions you yourself may have around harassment and abuse in sport.

This is incredibly important as misconceptions can not only lead to distorted stereotypes, but also to incorrectly targeted policies, new or increased existing vulnerabilities, or the indirect approval of abusive behavior causing it to continue to be unchecked.

There are a number of misconceptions related to harassment and abuse in sport, such as:

- **Athletes can be perpetrators of harassment and abuse in sport**
  - **TRUE**
  
  Anyone can be the perpetrator of harassment and abuse, in sport, including athletes and indeed friends and family members. Similarly, anyone can be a victim (though evidence shows that elite, disabled, child and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transsexual (LGBT) athletes may be more at risk).

- **Harassment and abuse is not a problem for elite athletes**
  - **FALSE**
  
  Studies have demonstrated an increased risk of harassment and abuse for athletes at the highest performance levels. That is not to say however that elite athletes are the only ones at risk.

- **Men and boys are rarely victims of harassment and abuse**
  - **FALSE**
  
  The Dome of Silence: Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport reports that anywhere from 8% to 76% of boys experience sexual harassment and abuse in sport depending on the definition of sexual abuse and harassment.

- **Harassment and abuse in sport only occurs in certain sports and countries**
  - **FALSE**
  
  Studies show that harassment and abuse in sport occurs worldwide, in every sport discipline, and at every level of participation.
Another common misconception is that when we speak of harassment and abuse, we refer only to sexual harassment and abuse. This is also not true. Indeed, the IOC Consensus Statement (2016) defines five main forms of harassment and abuse, all of which are against human rights and can have severely detrimental impacts.

The five forms of harassment and abuse, which may occur in combination or in isolation are defined here as:

**Psychological Abuse** means any unwelcome act including confinement, isolation, verbal, assault, humiliation, intimidation, infantilisation, or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth.

**Sexual Harassment** means any unwanted and unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, non-verbal or physical. Sexual harassment can take the form of sexual abuse.

**Sexual Abuse** means any conduct of a sexual nature, whether non-contact, contact or penetrative, where consent is coerced/manipulated or is not or cannot be given.

**Neglect** means the failure of a coach or another person with a duty of care towards the athlete to provide a minimum level of care to the athlete, which is causing harm, allowing harm to be caused, or creating an imminent danger of harm.

**Physical Abuse** means any deliberate and unwelcome act that causes physical trauma or injury, including things such as inappropriate training loads, forced doping, training whilst in pain, punching, etc.

Full definitions can be found in the IOC Consensus Statement 2016.

Whilst not all cases constitute a criminal offence, all are a breach of human rights and can have a multitude of severe detrimental impacts on athletes.
Signs of harassment and abuse

Being that friends and family are often the people closest to athletes and know them the best, having the ability to recognise the signs and indicators of harassment and abuse can play a significant role in keeping your athlete safe. These are largely the same whether the abuse is happening in sport, at school, at home, or in any other setting.

- Unexplained or unwarranted injuries (e.g., bruises, sprains, fractures, overuse injury)
- Decline in performance
- Nightmares or trouble sleeping
- Poor self-image
- Inability to trust others
- Aggressive or disruptive behavior
- Intense anger or rage

Some signs and indicators are listed below. Please note that these are not purely indicative of harassment and abuse - there may be something else going on - but they are all signals that further support is likely needed:

- Act out sexually
- Self-destructive, self-abusive, or suicidal behavior
- Sad, passive, withdrawn, or depressed
- Difficulty forming new relationships
- Drug or alcohol use
- Avoid going to certain places (e.g., home, training facility)
- Change in behavioral patterns
- Fear of certain adults (e.g., coaches, parents, peers)

Reflecting on your own conduct

The social support and influence that family and friends provide is hugely important for athletes. However, it is important to ensure that your own behavior and conduct reflects the fact that the safety and welfare of athletes is of paramount importance.

A 2010 report by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Center noted that:

“Whilst parents and caregivers have consistently emerged in the research literature as one of the most significant positive influences on children’s play and sport, there are cases where parents and caregivers put excessive pressure on their children to excel, through abusive and violent behaviour …”

There is also widespread evidence of parental pressure, abuse and different forms of violence to their children and other athletes, most frequently from the side-lines.

It is important to recognise the positive and negative impacts your own behaviour - even when it is well intentioned - may have on athletes.

Some sports organisations offer specific education and support to parents and family members in this regard.

A PARENT’S GUIDE TO FINDING A SAFE SPORTS CLUB

Children 1st has published a useful resource entitled “What to Ask - A parent’s guide to finding a safe sports club for your child”. The questions include:

- Is the club affiliated to any sports governing body and/or club accreditation scheme?
- Who can you contact at the club if you or your child have a concern?
- Does the club have an up-to-date safeguarding policy in place?
- Does the club have a code of conduct in place for coaches / volunteers / children / parents?
- Does the club follow safe recruitment procedures for all their coaches and volunteers?
- Does the club encourage parental involvement?
- Do the coaches all have an up-to-date coaching qualification and/or licence?
- Does the club operate within a safe environment?
- Does the club ask for parental consent and emergency contact details?
- What are the boundaries with regard to club relationships and communication with children and young people?

Further information can be found, [here](#).
Knowing how and where to report

It is important to know how and where to report concerns of athlete maltreatment. This should be in line with any and all legal obligations.

Reporting concerns, whether they be potentially criminal or not necessarily criminal but against the values of sport, such as forcing an athlete to train when injured or sick - which is recognised as a form of abuse in sport - is extremely important.

Evidence demonstrates that witnessing abuse and not reporting it can give the impression that the behaviour is ok, and therefore indirectly encourages it to continue. This is called the bystander effect.

Many sports organisations have set policies and reporting procedures in place. These can usually be found on their website, and we encourage you to make yourself familiar with your relevant organisation's reporting procedures.

A directory of International Federation safeguarding policies can also be found [here](#).

Why don’t athletes report?

**Fear of:**

- Punishment
- Not being believed
- Being gossiped about
- Being excluded from sport
- Jeopardising their social position
- Jeopardising their sport privileges
- Uncertainty associated with the reporting process

(Solstad, 2019)

**Remember:** For any potentially criminal cases, or where you suspect imminent risk of harm, or when it involves a child it is essential that you report to the appropriate legal authorities in a timely manner.

Checklist

- Educate yourself on what constitutes harassment and abuse in sport and common signs and indicators
- Talk openly to athletes about their rights and reinforce that their safety and welfare should come first
- Encourage athletes to be positive role models by being a positive role model yourself
- Familiarise yourself with the safeguarding policies and procedures of relevant sports organisations
- Educate yourself on how your own behaviors may positively or negatively impact athletes, especially children
- Know how and where to report any concerns of maltreatment
- Know where you can find further information and resources
- Support the rights of athletes, including child athletes, to have a voice in decisions which concern them
- For parents whose children participate in sport, ask questions related to the club or teams safe sport policies and practices

References

Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gómez-Benito, 2009; Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011.


Stirling, Ashley E MSc*; Bridges, Eileen J MD†; Cruz, E Laura MD‡; Mountjoy, Margi L, MD§ Canadian Academy of Sport and Exercise Medicine Position Paper: Abuse, Harassment, and Bullying in Sport, Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine, September 2011 - Volume 21 - Issue 5 - p. 385-391; doi:10.1097/JSM.0b013e318203f5d8


