



» **YOUR VOICE**  
» **YOUR LIFE**  
» **YOUR TRUTH**\*

*\*Karen Leach, former swimmer from Ireland*

## **GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE**

Supporting individuals affected by sexual violence in sport –  
a guide for sport organizations

## **GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE**

### **Supporting individuals affected by sexual violence in sport – a guide for sport organizations**

based on the results and experiences of the project VOICE

## **VOICES FOR TRUTH AND DIGNITY**

Combatting sexual violence in European Sport through  
the voices of those affected

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# » 1. INTRODUCTION



VOICE is a research project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and developed through a collaboration of seven European universities, four European sport federations and one victim-support organisation. Further details are available on the [VOICE website](#).

This guide is intended to help practitioners and volunteers in sport organisations, clubs and federations to support any child or adult who may disclose an experience or incident of sexual abuse. It is especially aimed at those with responsibility for managing, organizing and delivering sporting activities (in its broadest sense) to children, young people or adults, including those who oversee and manage sporting facilities.

A key feature of VOICE is an active and genuine engagement with those who have experienced sexual violence in the field of sport. At the heart of this approach is the appropriate acknowledgement of lived experiences and the fostering of learning within sport organisations based on their testimony and expertise. Therefore, the content of this guide evolves from 72 research interviews conducted across seven European countries during 2016-2017 and was developed in collaboration with participants from the VOICE-project.

The guide is also based on the knowledge gained during seven Acknowledgement Forums in the participating VOICE countries. The VOICE Forums created the opportunity for stakeholders in sport to hear directly from individuals with a lived experience of sexual violence in sport. It is our view that the life-histories of 'survivors' offer crucial insights into the problem of sexual abuse in sport that are invaluable for prevention. A more detailed analysis of the research is provided in the accompanying VOICE Report.

In this guide, the perspectives of those who have been subjected to coerced or unwanted sexual activity in a sports context are predominant. This approach may differ

somewhat from the policies, procedures and initiatives of sport organisations and other bodies with responsibility for handling allegations of abuse. However, as Celia Brackenridge (2001) pointed out some years ago, the reputation of the organisation often takes precedent over the rights and needs of victims and survivors. Intentionally or otherwise, this protects perpetrators, silences victims and conceals abuse. There have now been many high-profile cases of sexual abuse in sport that illustrate that the concealment or 'cover-up' of sexual violence is a major problem for the global sport sector.

Therefore, VOICE stands in firm opposition to such unethical and shortsighted approaches. Through this guide and other resources, we seek to encourage sport organisations of all sizes, in Europe and beyond, to see the benefits of openness and transparency when managing athlete welfare and child protection issues. Above all we emphasize the importance of listening to, engaging with, and supporting those who have been subjected to and affected by sexual abuse. We offer some concrete



guidance on how this can be achieved in an authentic and ethical fashion.

This guide, then, specifically aims to support and strengthen the voice of 'victims' and 'survivors' of sexual violence in sport. It is also our hope that it might, in some small way, contribute to redressing such injustices in the past and combatting such violations in the present and future of sport.

**” A key feature of the project VOICE is an active engagement with those who have experienced sexual violence in the field of sport.**

### **» Concerning Terminology**

The focus of VOICE has been sexual violence in sport (SV). While SV clearly includes physically aggressive sexual assault and rape, we apply SV as an umbrella concept for a range of behaviours or actions that contain a sexual element and in some way undermine or impair a person’s dignity and autonomy. Therefore, we are aligned with the World Health Organisation (2011) which defines sexual violence as:

Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.

Therefore, SV is not confined to physical or contact behaviour and such acts may or may not be recognized as criminal in law.

While different countries apply different nomenclature, definitions and laws, such behaviour is often identified, or described, by the following terms: sexual harassment; sexual abuse; sexual exploitation (see Glossary in attachment). In English, these are distinct but related terms which generally, but not always, have an equivalent in other languages. We use these terms interchangeably as appropriate.

Furthermore, the specific focus of our research has been the experiences of those who were subject to sexual violence in childhood, however, this guide relates to SV in sport per se and we recognize that many adults are also subjected to sexual violence within sports contexts.

Child sexual abuse was recognized as a serious social problem from the 1980s onwards. Over recent decades we have increasingly come to recognise the scale of sexual violence in our communities and institutions. During this period the language and terms used to refer to victims of sexual violence has also developed. In some countries, following developments in the fields of cancer treatment and mental health, the term ‘survivor’ has become popular in preference to ‘victim’ in order to provide more positive language for the experience of living with a personal history of sexual violence.

However, it should be noted that there is no universally accepted term. In keeping with the principles of VOICE, we also refer to the “lived experience”, “voices of experience” and “experts by experience”. We use all these terms, as appropriate, throughout the guide, but emphasize that self definition is always preferable. Indeed, this was very much the point of the project – to provide the time and space for individuals to define their own experiences, in their own terms and in their own language. Therefore, we encourage organisations and individuals to refrain from the uncritical application of labels to refer, collectively, to those who have been subjected to or otherwise harmed by sexual violence.

The guide also refers to ‘safeguarding’. This is not necessarily a widely used term and may not be well understood, especially within sports settings. In the UK, this term has become popular in order to denote a system that seeks not only to respond to the abuse of children (and vulnerable adults), but one which seeks to prevent abuse through promoting the wellbeing of all children and vulnerable adults. In this context, ‘child protection’ refers to the specific action taken to protect those children who are known to be suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm (see Glossary). Therefore, ‘child protection’ is largely reactive and targeted (when abuse is reported) whereas ‘safeguarding’ is proactive and holistic.

## » 2. BACKGROUND

Sexual abuse and exploitation is not a new problem, however, our recognition that it is a problem in sport has a very short history. Policies to tackle abuse in sport first emerged as recently as the late 1990s, in just a few countries such as the UK, Canada and the Netherlands.

Despite the groundbreaking research of academics such as Celia Brackenridge (UK), Kari Fasting (Norway), Sandra Kirby (Canada), and Peter Donnelly (Canada) from as early as 1986, it was the high-profile media coverage of cases of sexual abuse in sport that principally forced the issue onto the agenda of national sport agencies. In other words, it was most often the testimony of individuals who had suffered abuse, and their determination to speak out, that marked the advent of a growing public awareness of child sexual abuse in sport.

It was clear, at least for some, that the cases coming to light in the mid- and late-1990s (such as those within British and Irish swimming and Canadian ice hockey) were simply illustrations of a much larger and widespread problem. Unfortunately, for many in the sport sector this was an issue that they did not understand and were reluctant to address.

A BBC television documentary in 1993 (*Secrets of the Coach*) interviewed the Executive Director of the American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA) who forcefully stated that ASCA would not permit any suspicions of sexual abuse against a coach to be officially reported by parents or athletes unless the accusation had been assessed by another coach who agreed that there were grounds for making an official report. The rationale for this was that if they did allow parents or athletes to make reports, ASCA would be overwhelmed with false allegations against innocent coaches: 'I would absolutely guarantee you that if we were to allow [parents or swimmers to report] we would have many more spurious accusations than we'd have factual cases' (BBC TV, 1993).

Such statements deter victims from coming forward, especially children and young people, whilst prioritising organisational reputation above the welfare and safety of children. Such responses led Celia Brackenridge to state, in a Times newspaper article in 1996: 'it has taken me a long time to cajole the authorities into responding. Denial is the most common response'. Regrettably, even when an individual does report, as this guide will illustrate, denial and minimization may continue.

*"Everybody did what he said. He got what he wanted, what he said went. I was only a little girl so I was going to do what he told me to do. I didn't know any different. Sitting here as a woman, I can say: yes it was wrong, but as a little girl, I didn't know."*

Karen Leach, retired Irish swimmer and VOICE Ambassador

*"Looking back now it is hard to believe how he managed to silence all of us. It is true though that he tamed us well. The repeated mantra was 'whatever happens in the locker room, stays in the locker room.'"*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

***“Sexual abuse and exploitation is not a new problem, however, our recognition that it is a problem in sport has a very short history.”***

There is, then, a substantial history of denial and minimization of sexual abuse within sport, both in relation to individual disclosures and in the general acceptance that abuse is a problem that occurs in sport. This includes the highest levels of sport governance. Whilst countries are at different stages of development in relation to their official recognition of sexual violence in sport and the extent to which they address it, the problem of denial and minimization persists and is common to all.

Furthermore, there has been no official inquiry specifically into the problem of sexual violence in sport in any country. What evidence exists comes from either published research by a relatively small group of researchers or testimony from 'survivors' (occasionally covered by national media). Recently, a sport-specific 'independent review' was conducted by both the English and Scottish Football Associations and the [Australian national inquiry](#) into child sexual abuse did include sport in some way. In May 2019, the German [Independent Commission for Acknowledging Child Sexual Abuse](#) (Unabhaengige Kommission zur Aufarbeitung sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs) (2018-date) initiated a sport-specific campaign and asked survivors of SV in the field of sport to come forward with their reports.

These represent extremely positive developments that must be replicated across international sport. It is our contention that it is only through independent inquiries into abuse in sport that the international sport community will be able to genuinely address and move beyond the injustices of the past and forge a new history for sport that is not undermined by sexual violence and the abuse of children. If the sport sector is to make a genuine attempt to address the abuses that have been perpetrated against many generations of children, young people and athletes within sport, sports leaders at the highest level must be prepared to invest substantive resources into such inquiries.

Nevertheless, it now seems clear that, during the short lifetime of the VOICE-project, through the courage of those that have experienced childhood sexual abuse, we have perhaps moved into a new era for sport and its acknowledgement of the abuse and exploitation of children and athletes. We hope that this guide will assist sport organisations at all levels to move forward, with greater confidence, to provide safe sports environments for all.

*"There is finally someone who listens. And finally someone who understands!"*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

*"... things that I have not said for a long time... burdened me or kept me busy for so long that I could not voice them. I think it has to do with the fact that this repeats, emotionally, the silence, which was an essential element of my abuse. I have learned that talking - breaking the silence - is an important, if not the most important, part of the process of my recovery."*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

*"The VOICE-project has given me my Voice back, it has given me a reason to be alive, I have got my freedom, my voice has been heard and I have been listened to, I have been respected and valued for my life and for what happened to me. The people that I have been involved with in this project never turned their back on me, once they heard my story, they have stayed and supported me as I have grown stronger and become well again."*

*The VOICE-project has given so many of us an opportunity to speak out, it has created a place for people with lived experience to be safe, to be free and to be able to talk about what happened to them. It has created fantastic friendships and lifelong connections for all of us.*

*We now know that we are not on our own, that we have a place in life. That we mean something, that we have an important message that must be heard. We know what will keep children safe because we know what would have kept us safe."*

Karen Leach (VOICE Ambassador)

# » 3. KEY ISSUES AND PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE (GP) IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SPORT

» S. 10 / 12

**GP 1**

***Position Your Organisation to Prevent Sexual Violence and to Support 'Survivors'***

### » *Good Practice*

Sport organisations have a public facing statement on sexual harassment and abuse, or abusive behaviour in general, which clearly indicates that the organisation values reports of sexual violence and that such reports will be treated seriously (whether the experience is recent or non recent).

» S. 13 / 15

**GP 2**

***Designated Officer for Child Welfare/ Safeguarding***

### » *Good Practice*

Sport organisations have at least one Designated Officer who has received appropriate training and has overall responsibility for safeguarding issues. This individual's name and contact details must be promoted and easily accessible to all members.

» S. 16 / 17

**GP 3**

***Independent Sources of Support***

### » *Good Practice*

Sport organisations publish contact details of independent sources of support, such as victim-support and child protection agencies and charities, in order to offer impartial support for victims and to develop a better understanding of the issues at stake within the organisation.

» S. 18 / 20

**GP 4**

***Code of Conduct***

### » *Good Practice*

Establish a general code of conduct for those in positions of responsibility in the organisation, e.g. staff members, coaches, board members. Include specific statements relevant to the prevention of sexual violence into this general code.

» S. 21 / 25

**GP 5**

***Receiving and Managing Disclosures of Sexual Violence or Abuse***

### » *Good Practice*

Sport organisations publish a protocol or procedure for handling reports of abuse, including clear advice for staff on how to respond to a disclosure and how to escalate concerns if required.

» S. 26 / 28

**GP 6**

***Supporting victims after disclosure***

**» Good Practice**

Following disclosure, where possible and appropriate, maintain contact with the individual (or parents/guardians) and assist them to access the support they need.

» S. 29 / 32

**GP 7**

***Peer abuse and children's rights***

**» Good Practice**

Communicate age-appropriate messages about safety and welfare to children in sport, seek young people's views about issues that affect them, ensure all children understand who they should speak to about abuse, and include children in the development and implementation of safeguarding in your organisation.

» S. 33 / 34

**GP 8**

***Self-Care and Support for Designated Officers***

**» Good Practice**

Those working with victims/survivors (e.g. Designated Officers) in sport organisations must receive appropriate training and be appropriately supported, especially when challenging cases arise. The opportunity to talk to (and 'off-load') to supervisors or peers in the organization should be identified in the role description and monitored by those in leadership positions.

» S. 34 / 37

**GP 9**

***Apologizing and Acknowledging***

**» Good Practice**

Offer an official apology to the victim on behalf of your organisation in order to acknowledge the harm suffered as well as the organisation's gratitude and respect to the individual for making the disclosure.

» S. 38 / 40

**GP 10**

***Staging a Forum for Acknowledgement***

**» Good Practice**

Facilitate an event that offers 'survivors' of sexual violence in sport the possibility to recount their experiences, in a safe environment, to key stakeholders who are willing to listen and to learn from "experts by experience".

» S. 40 / 41

**GP 11**

***Beyond Acknowledgement: Working with Survivors of Sexual Violence***

**» Good Practice**

Establish means by which those with a lived experience may be safely and authentically included in the development of organisational responses to sexual violence in sport.



**“Any sport organisation should make it clear that it considers the welfare and safety of children and vulnerable adults to be their primary concern and a fundamental element of its work.**

One of the first, most important and simple steps that a sport organisation can take in offering support for victims of sexual violence in sport, is to state officially and explicitly that sexual violence (and all forms of abusive behaviour) can and does occur in sport. Such statements should make clear, in appropriate language, precisely what behaviour is included under terms such as sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, etc. (see Glossary in attachment), or whatever terms are relevant and appropriate within national borders.

Any sport organisation should make it clear that it considers the welfare and safety of children and vulnerable adults to be their primary concern and a fundamental element of its work. However, beyond this, sport organi-

sations must also actively welcome those that have experienced sexual violence within their sport who wish to make a formal disclosure. This element is often missing or the message is not disseminated effectively. This area will be addressed more fully in later sections.

Such acknowledgement, from the highest level of governance, will help to establish a clear organisational position and give some assurance to those affected that what they have experienced is recognized by their organisation as unacceptable and that they will be treated appropriately if they choose to report. Regrettably, many victims have suffered very negative responses to their disclosures:

## ” *First of all state officially that sexual violence (and all forms of abusive behaviour) can and does occur in sport.*

Organisational statements regarding intolerance for abusive, exploitative and/or harassing behaviour should be easily accessible. Ideally, the organisation (especially umbrella organisations) should have its own overarching policy for the prevention of maltreatment and the promotion of athlete welfare and all affiliated organisations, and their members, should be required to adopt and implement the policy.

Policies should:

1. set down the principles and/or values of the organisation including a clear commitment to the enhancement of children’s rights;
2. make a clear and strong commitment to providing safe sporting environments and experiences for all children, free from abuse, exploitation, discrimination, harassment and bullying;
3. clearly define the problem of sexual violence, child sexual abuse, and other forms of abuse and neglect, including national/international definitions;
4. identify national and international conventions, statements, research and initiatives that underpin the need for policies and related arrangements within sport;
5. identify the specific preventative strategies that the organisation will employ including: internal support and lines of responsibility; clear processes for how allegations/reports will be handled; support/training for staff/volunteers; and codes of conduct;

6. identify external organisations that have specific expertise in child protection/sexual violence that are able to offer objective advice and support;
7. identify a process for supporting individuals who disclose abuse;
8. identify a safeguarding/ welfare officer in your organisation/club.

Such policy documents will help to assure victims and survivors within the sports community that their disclosures will be treated seriously and dealt with thoroughly.

For organisations looking for examples of the policies and procedures required to underpin a safe sport environment, the [Child Protection in Sport Unit](#) in the UK (funded by Sport England) provides a wide range of templates and advice. In addition, Safe Sport International identify [10 principles for safe sport](#).

*“A few coaches defended me, as did my friends and family. The great majority, however, ridiculed me and labelled me as a ‘slut’, ‘bitch’, ‘liar’ ... It made me sick hearing these words from parents of younger girls ...”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

” ***Sport organisations must also actively welcome those that have experienced sexual violence within their sport and who wish to make a formal disclosure.***

» ***Good Practice Example:***

**Swim England’s Safeguarding Policy Statement for affiliated organisations**

[The organisation] (club/squad/school) is committed to providing an environment in which all children and young people participating in its activities have a safe and positive experience.

In order to achieve this, the organisation agrees to:

1. Adopt and implement the policies and procedures in Wavepower\* in full.
2. Recognise that all children participating in [the organisation] (regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, ability or disability) have a right to enjoy their involvement in aquatics in a safe environment and be protected from harm.
3. Ensure that all individuals who work with children in [the organisation], whether paid or voluntary, provide a positive, safe and enjoyable experience for children.
4. Appoint a welfare officer with the necessary skills and training as outlined by the ASA who will take the lead in dealing with all child safeguarding matters raised within [the organisation].
5. Ensure that the welfare officer’s name and contact details are known to all staff, members and parents of members.
6. Ensure the welfare officer is available to discuss issues of concern on matters of safeguarding and deal with such concerns appropriately and in line with Wavepower.
7. Ensure that all individuals who work with children in [the organisation] have undertaken the appropriate training, have had the relevant DBS checks, and adhere to the required practices for safeguarding children as outlined in Wavepower.
8. Ensure that all individuals who will be working or will work with children in [the organisation] have been recruited in accordance with the ASA Safe Recruitment Policy.
9. Ensure that all individuals who work with children in [the organisation] have the appropriate training, code of conduct and good practice to follow in line with the guidance in Wavepower.
10. Provide all members of [the organisation] and parents of members with the opportunity to raise concerns in a safe and confidential manner if they have a concern about a child’s welfare.
11. Ensure that all child safeguarding matters, whether they be concerns about child welfare or protection, are dealt with appropriately in accordance with the guidance for reporting and action in Wavepower.
12. Ensure that confidentiality is maintained appropriately and in line with the best interests of the child.
13. Ensure all papers relating to child safeguarding matters are held in a safe and secure manner.

\* Wavepower is the name of Swim England’s [Safeguarding Policy](#)

» ***Good Practice 1***

Sport organisations have a public facing statement on sexual harassment and abuse, or abusive behaviour in general, which clearly indicates that the organisation values reports of sexual violence and that such reports will be treated seriously (whether the experience is recent or non recent).

## GP 2 Designated Officer for Child Welfare/Safeguarding

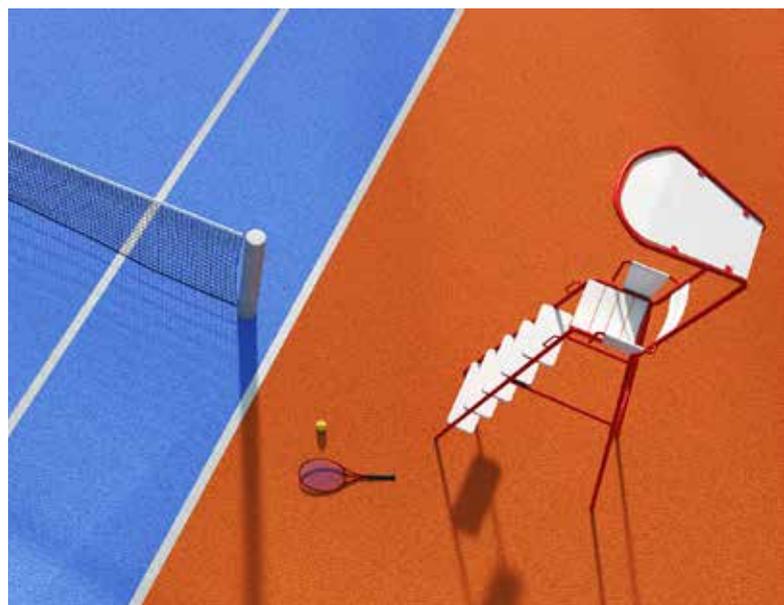
Beyond written statements, an organisation that takes child welfare seriously will have at least one designated person of trust with responsibility for child welfare/safeguarding. While this role will be alien to many countries, governing bodies in some countries now insist that their affiliated sport clubs designate an appropriate individual to take responsibility for this area. If organisations in sport have not yet nominated officers for Child Welfare (or similar), we strongly recommend this is undertaken without delay.

Establishing this role within a sport organisation or club will:

- a) send a clear message to the membership that child welfare and prevention of abuse and exploitation is a permanent and high priority;
- b) provide a clear point of contact for the members, especially children and young people, to raise concerns;
- c) provide support, oversight and appropriate sharing of information within and beyond the organisation.

The Designated Officer (DO) should be the first point of contact for any concerns around child welfare or abusive behavior. Therefore, their role should be publicised and the individual regularly identified through the organisation's communication channels and official material, including a photograph and contact details.

**” To be effective as a welfare officer, make sure that everyone in your club/league knows you and how you can be contacted.**



### » *Good Practice Example:*

**The English Football Association's guide to being an effective welfare officer**

#### **Make sure everyone knows you**

To be effective as a welfare officer it is vital that everyone in your club/league knows who you are and how you can be contacted — especially the players, parents and coaches. You should sit on the club/league committee and you should know your coaches and manager. If you are part of a large or expanding club/league you may wish to encourage the committee to appoint an additional welfare officer(s) to support the work you are doing. We would recommend clubs with more than 10 teams consider having additional welfare officers.

# ” *It is crucial that sport governing bodies appoint their own Designated Officer for child welfare/safety.*

## Training

When a child or an adult discloses sexual violence or abuse, there needs to be a clear understanding within the organisation of how to deal with the report appropriately and how to support the person making the disclosure or reporting abuse. Therefore, staff require training so they are able to respond to the needs of individuals who report abuse, especially where that individual is the victim of sexual violence. Such training may be undertaken through his/her work or volunteering outside sport (e.g. teaching, social work, emergency services) or through specific courses from victim-support or sport organisations. This is particularly essential for Designated Officers.

Such training should include, as a minimum, the signs and symptoms of abuse, how to deal effectively with a disclosure, how to report abuse to the relevant authorities, and how to escalate concerns if appropriate action is not taken. Ideally, such training should be informed by experts in the field and underpinned by research in this area.

One current international initiative in this area is i-Pro-protect which has developed online training courses for a range of key stakeholder groups in sport, including young people, coaches and parents. In the UK national governing bodies of sport have established their own, sport-specific, training programmes (online and in-person) which form an integral part of their broader coach education provision.

### » *Good Practice Example:*

#### **The Rugby Football League**

The Rugby Football League (RFL) national governing body requires every rugby league club to have at least one Club Welfare Officer (CWO). To become a CWO the individual must have completed two separate, specified training courses as well as having undergone a criminal record background check. The RFL also requires all CWOs to complete a registration form.



### » *Good Practice Example:*

#### **Integrity Contact Person in Sport Federations - Center for Ethics in Sport**

Since 2018, it is mandatory for every Flemish sport federation to install and train at least one Integrity Contact Person (or 'Designated Officer'). This person is trained and equipped to deal with incidents and reports of child sexual abuse in sport clubs, as well as responsible for coordinating the prevention policy at federation level.

The Center for Ethics in Sport, responsible for policy development and support regarding child sexual abuse in sport in Flanders, organizes regular training and supervision for all Integrity Contact Persons. The training includes the VOICE materials and personal narratives, brought by the 'Voices in Sport Foundation' in Belgium.



In some countries, agencies exist to provide specialist support in relation to sexual violence and these may have resources that can enhance a sport organisation's understanding of how to respond to disclosures and improve prevention. Since it might be difficult to find a suitably qualified person within a small sport club, leaders may cooperate with their respective governing bodies or with a regional victim-support organisation.

It is, therefore, crucial that sport governing bodies or umbrella federations in sport appoint their own DO for child welfare/safety. This position is of utmost importance, not only as a point of contact in case of reports, but also as a key figure and driving force for the continual development of abuse prevention and the promotion of children's rights. However, research in the UK has shown that even where designated officers are appointed, there can still be resistance from within sport.



## » Learning Example:

### Experiences of Safeguarding Lead Officers in the UK

The following views are taken from a research paper by Hartill & Lang (2014)<sup>1</sup> that investigated the experiences of safeguarding lead officers (SLOs) within national governing bodies of sport in the UK.

SL02: "... when I first joined there was a huge sort of push away from it ... 'this is ridiculous! We have managed all our lives without this, we don't need this! ... this is all just political correctness gone mad!'"

SL03: "I don't think they understood it. I don't think it was seen as being particularly important. ... there was this feeling of 'this doesn't happen in our sport.'"

SL07: "I am advised that safeguarding is on the board meetings [but] I am yet to see it on any of the minutes. ... my head of department is the representative of safeguarding on the board. Unfortunately, I have never had him approach me and ask me for any data or details or anything about cases to feed back into the board, never, so it is quite disappointing."

Therefore, it is vital that the role of DO is explicitly supported by the leadership of the organisation and by the highest level of governance within the sport so that the importance of the role is conveyed to the wider membership. If the welfare of children and vulnerable adults is genuinely a priority for a sport, the role of designated welfare officer within that sport, or individual club, should be valued at least as much as the role of coach.

Furthermore, despite the importance of a DO, research has shown that the introduction of such a role can lead other members to feel that child welfare is an issue to be handled by others and is not their responsibility. Therefore, the principle that child welfare and safeguarding is everyone's responsibility must be emphasized, embedded and disseminated throughout the organisation's structure.

There are also several reasons why having two designated officers is preferable:

- a) shared responsibility: the role can be challenging, especially for a new DO, therefore, sharing this responsibility is both a supportive and more sustainable approach;
- b) ensures continuity of role:
  - i. in case of absence each can represent the other
  - ii. membership/staff turnover in voluntary sport can be high and there is often a significant time-lag between an officer leaving and another being recruited;
- c) provides diversity and choice for the community: multiple DOs provides greater potential for offering diversity (e.g. gender, ethnicity, disability) in the role and having a wider choice of individuals for members to speak to/report to can be very important.



## » Good Practice 2

Sport organisations have at least one Designated Officer who has received appropriate training and has overall responsibility for safeguarding issues. This individual's name and contact details must be promoted and easily accessible to all members.

<sup>1</sup> Hartill, M. & Lang, M. (2014). "I know people think I'm a complete pain in the neck": An examination of the introduction of child protection and 'safeguarding' standards in English sport from the perspective of national governing body Safeguarding Lead Officers. *Social Sciences*, 3(4): 606-627.

## GP 3 Independent Sources of Support

Sexual abuse in a sports context very often involves a breach of trust, not only by those that perpetrate sexual violence, but by those bystanders that fail to take action to prevent it.

*“There were lots of adults there. Some of those adults have come to us to say sorry for not saying anything at the time, because they knew what was going on. They knew that when he disappeared with one girl into a room alone – they knew when we all came up from doing the warm-up, except him and one girl.”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

Children and adults who have been sexually victimized are unlikely to feel that they can rely on the support of the organisation where the abuse has occurred, especially when the perpetrator may still be present and in a position of power and influence. Therefore, the possibility to speak with an appropriate individual outside the organisation can provide a means by which an individual affected by sexual violence can access the support they need.

*“I spoke with a psychologist who assured me that I was not to blame and calmed my conscience.”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

*“Now I’m okay, I’m much better. I went for psychological treatment for a long while, it really helps to understand that it was not my fault, that it had nothing – absolutely nothing – to do with me. I just crossed his path. So damn unlucky!”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project



Therefore, sport organisations should develop contacts with established independent children’s organisations, telephone or web-based helplines, and appropriate victim-support organisations. Contact information should be published through media channels and promoted by the organisation.

Such cooperation can greatly enhance organisational knowledge about sexual violence, child abuse and related issues within a sports club or organisation and provide an important source of support for those with responsibility for this area. Therefore, this action is not simply remedial or reactive, but a proactive strategy to ensure victims are supported. Any individual with responsibility for child welfare in sport (including at least the Chairperson of a sports club) should establish connections with appropriate local agencies and organisations, as soon as possible, rather than waiting until an emergency arises.



### » *Good Practice Example:*

#### **England Netball**

Being involved in sport can bring many positives to a person. It is also an environment where young people can find friends and role models. We know that there are many pressures on young people and sometimes they may have difficulties in coping. We have taken this on board and broadened our definition of [safe-guarding](#) to include well-being. We provide guidance to help recognize and respond to the most frequently occurring issues and signposts to the numerous support organisations which can provide the expert help needed with these complex issues. Organisations which are accessible to young people are included so that they have the option to take action to help themselves, or if you are a young netballer needing some help we encourage you to use them.



### » *Good Practice Example:*

#### **Austrian Disabled Sports Association**

The Austrian Disabled Sports Association put a link on their website to a collection of counselling centres in Austria for those affected by sexual violence or know those affected, where they can report anonymously: [Fuer-Respekt- und-Sicherheit-und-gegen-sexualisierte-Gewalt](#)



### » *Good Practice Example:*

#### **Jiu-Jitsu Federation Austria**

The Jiu-Jitsu Federation Austria provides three contact persons for helping in case of abuse and, if necessary, forwards them to appropriate counselling centres. Further, "[Help in case of abuse](#)" is prominently placed on the homepage of the website.

**” Any individual with responsibility for child welfare in sport should establish connections with appropriate victim-support organisations.**

### » *Good Practice 3*

Sport organisations publish contact details of independent sources of support, such as victim-support and child protection agencies and charities, in order to offer impartial support for victims and to develop a better understanding of the issues at stake within the organisation.

## GP 4 Code of Conduct

In addition to a public facing statement or policy in relation to safeguarding or child protection, it is important that sport organisations clearly express what their expectations are in terms of general standards of behaviour. Many VOICE-participants told of practices and behaviours that should have been challenged and reported by other adults in the organisation:

*"It all began with her [coach at elite sport school] talking to me regularly. She sat next to me during lunch hours and told me about her private life. Soon we were on a first-name basis. ... I was flattered. We exchanged mobile numbers and she started to send me text messages, asking me about my whereabouts and what I was doing and when we would meet each other. ... she was always around me. She picked me up at classes, took me for lunch, talked to me in the school yard and then she even started to meet me outside the schoolbuilding."*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

*"He had an office ... a storeroom. And he always measured us in there. .... Every part of our body. Each year."*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

*"The offender was my coach. I do not think that the coach has the right to know everything about you, your problems at home, in school, with your boyfriend, anything really. Or that he has the right to make inappropriate comments regarding a person's physique ... One night [During an elite training camp] I could not sleep ... the coach invited me to sleep in his room. I slept in the coach's room for the next few days."*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

A Code of Conduct (or suchlike) can be a useful tool to set down unambiguous expectations about behaviour. Such a code is best developed through an inclusive process of consultation so that the views of all stakeholders are represented and understood (e.g. club officials, coaches, parents and children). It should be concise, written in straightforward, accessible language and clearly identify unacceptable behaviour as well as best practice.

In order to emphasize its significance, it is good practice to build the code in to the recruitment and/or induction of new members so that membership of the team/club/organisation indicates an agreement to abide by and uphold the Code. Senior members of the organisation should endorse, abide by, refer to and regularly promote the code. Crucially, the organisation and its leadership must be prepared to challenge behavior that contravenes the code and to apply the necessary disciplinary measures.

**” It is important that sport organisations clearly express what their expectations are in terms of general standards of behaviour.**

**” A Code of conduct should be concise, written in straightforward, accessible language and clearly identify unacceptable behaviour as well as best practice.**



### » **Good Practice Example:**

#### The Lawn Tennis Association’s Code of Conduct

- Prioritize the well-being of all children and adults at all times.
- Be a positive role model. Act with integrity, even when no one is looking.
- Help to create a safe and inclusive environment both on and off court and promote the Fair Play values: enjoy; respect.
- Value and celebrate diversity and make all reasonable efforts to meet individual needs.
- Keep clear boundaries between your professional and personal life, including on social media.
- Check you have the relevant consent from parents/carers, children and adults before taking or using photos and videos.
- Ensure your own roles and responsibilities, and those of everyone you are responsible for, are clearly outlined and everyone has the information, training and support to carry them out.
- Where possible, do not be alone with a child or an ‘adult at risk’ [vulnerable adult].
- Do not abuse, neglect, harm or discriminate against anyone; or act in a way that may be interpreted as such.\*
- Doing nothing is NOT an option: report all concerns and disclosures as soon as possible, following the Concern Reporting Procedure. If someone is in immediate danger, call the police.

\*In the UK (and other countries) it is illegal to have a sexual relationship with anyone under the age of 16 whether they give consent or not.

The Code of Conduct should be interpreted in a spirit of integrity, transparency and common sense, with the best interests of children and ‘adults at risk’ as the primary consideration.





## » *Good Practice Example:*

### Code of Ethics for University Sports Göttingen

**For all honorary, part-time and full-time staff members working in university sports as well as members of the national student teams.**

I am aware that as a person working in university sport I have a special responsibility in my function. Within the scope of these tasks:

- I respect the rights of the persons entrusted to me and the physical and mental health of those who confide in me and do not use any form of violence - be it physical, psychological or sexual.
- If sport-specific physicality is immanent in my sport, I enforce the rules of fair play and pay attention to respectful interaction with each other.
- I am aware that the individual sensations of closeness and distance are different for all people. I adapt my behaviour and my actions within the scope of my activities to the situation and respect the personal limits, characteristics and peculiarities of the people entrusted to me or of the people who have entrusted themselves to me.
- I actively take a stand against any verbal or non-verbal form of discrimination (racism, sexism, homophobia, trans\*phobia, etc.) or offensive behaviour (border violations, harassment, mobbing, etc.).
- I offer the persons entrusted to me as well as the persons who entrust themselves to me, full opportunities for self-determination, respect their personalities, create individual framework conditions and use appropriate methods.
- I am aware that I have a role-model function in front of the persons entrusted to me, which manifests itself among other things in the fact that I cultivate an open and respectful relationship with one another and that I live and pass on respectful action and consideration towards other people and nature within the active sports world.
- The University of Göttingen is also available to be contacted in the event of uncertainties, questions and/or incidents in the spectrum of border violations, discrimination and sexual violence.

With my signature I commit myself to participate in a sensitization training of the Göttinger Hochschulsport as well as to adhere to this code of ethics. I react appropriately if this code of ethics is violated in the course of my work at university sports.

**” *It is good practice to build the code in to the recruitment and/or induction of new members so that membership of the team/club/organisation indicates an agreement to abide by and uphold the Code.***

## » *Good Practice 4*

Establish a general code of conduct for those in positions of responsibility in the organisation, e.g. staff members, coaches, board members. Include specific statements relevant to the prevention of sexual violence into this general code.

## Receiving and Managing Disclosures of Sexual Violence or Abuse

Although seldom recognized, the sport sector has much to learn from the experiences of individuals who have made official reports or disclosures of sexual violence. The VOICE research uncovered many problems in the way disclosures and reports of child sexual abuse have been handled by sport organisations. It is now vital that the sector develops greater awareness of this important aspect of the problem.

There are many reasons why disclosing sexual violence is a difficult, even traumatic, experience. Those who have experienced the most invasive forms of sexual violence have frequently reported being badly let down by those to whom they reported. Even when an allegation proceeds through the legal system – invariably a long and arduous process for the victim (and his/her family) – securing a prosecution can be difficult, not least because of culturally embedded ‘rape myths’ that undermine the interests of victims within the judicial process. In England and Wales, despite an increase in reports, figures for 2017-18 show prosecutions for rape are at a 10-year low.

For these reasons and more, it is often not until many years after victimisation that individuals feel able to report their experiences (and many never do). Yet in many countries, a ‘statute of limitations’ imposes a time limit on prosecutions of alleged crimes. Clearly this will prevent many survivors of sexual violence from seeking redress through the legal system. Furthermore, many victims, disclosing publicly, have experienced a ‘backlash’, especially via social media, finding themselves accused of being liars and fantasists. Some survivors have also been accused of defamation by their abuser after disclosure. This secondary abuse (or revictimisation) is an issue that the international sports community must take a stance against.

Therefore, it invariably takes a great deal of courage to report an experience of sexual assault, especially for children, young people and vulnerable adults, and particularly when the offender is a trusted and respected individual. Perpetrators will not only commit a sexual assault but will persistently work to undermine the emotional stability and autonomy of the child in order to

both prepare the ground for sexual activity as well as to maintain a relationship of control over them (and often their family or wider support network). This controlling element of sexual violence has the objective of securing the individual’s acquiescence, but also her or his silence about the experience.

This controlling, manipulative and exploitative behaviour can be endorsed, enabled and camouflaged by the immediate and wider sports culture, compounding the experience and leaving the child feeling isolated and unable to seek support, even from those closest to them.

*“There were other coaches that hit the girls really hard, and the boys sometimes got spanked. You know it was fairly common and extra training was a pretty normal way to punish the girls. But he would also tell you that you were a ‘whore’ and ‘good for nothing’. When we were alone he would tell me that I was his favourite and that he loved me and he was going to make me a great champion ... I was convinced that I was a whore, a slut ... so we [friends and family] never talked about it. Ever. If I thought that the subject was going to come up I went off or I changed the subject. Nothing would make me tell about it. When I wasn’t training I remember lying in bed with the light off, just looking at the ceiling. My mother would come in and ask me ‘what’s the matter, why don’t you go out?’, ‘I’m tired, I’m tired’. You got through like that. It’s very easy to conceal.”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

**” The VOICE research uncovered many problems in the way disclosures and reports of child sexual abuse have been handled by sport organisations.**

However, when survivors do manage to talk about what happened to them, perhaps even to the point of making an official report, many of our “voices of experience” said they were not believed.

*“We informed the club, but they didn’t believe us. We went to court and justice took two years of our lives.”*

Father whose daughter was affected by sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

*“I met with [a friend] who used to train with me as I wanted to tell her why I actually left the club. She forwarded the information to the club president who we met later on, so that I personally told him what had happened. The offender was not punished and as far as I know he still works as a coach at the club.”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

Given the vulnerability of a child (or adult) who has been subject to sexual violence, the initial response to a disclosure is extremely important. If the club or organisation fails to take the report seriously or deal with it in the appropriate manner, feelings of self-doubt, isolation, shame and guilt will be amplified. This can leave the victim extremely vulnerable and at even greater risk of experiencing further abuse as well as the long-term consequences of abuse that can lead to a lifetime of instability and mental health problems that many of our participants reported.

*“He was very shocked, didn’t want to believe it at all ... kept saying what a respected man he’d been and how much he’d done for everyone ... he said his son had had lessons with him and hadn’t ever complained about anything ... I went away ... doubting myself and thinking that I was obviously the only one that that this had happened to ...”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

Such responses can serve to invalidate an individual’s experience, undermining their integrity and self-worth and compounding long-term psychological problems. This can effectively silence victims, sometimes for the rest of their life, constituting a further abuse of power. In the example above there were in fact at least 10 other victims, who eventually felt able to make an official report following publicity around the case due to the persistence and fortitude of this individual.

In some cases, victims have been isolated or excluded following a disclosure.

*“We got a letter. It said that we were not welcome in the club anymore – neither my siblings nor me. It made me so sad.”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project



**“If the club or organisation fails to take the report seriously or deal with it in the appropriate manner, feelings of self-doubt, isolation, shame and guilt will be amplified.”**

In other cases, individuals have been asked to leave an organisation following an allegation of abuse against them. Consequently, they have simply moved on and joined another club, sometimes moving into a different region or just a different sport, whilst the original club works to actively conceal (and collectively forget) the allegation.

*“One day my father told me that our coach would no longer be in the club. Two of the other boys had told something about him. ... I never saw him again. He left the club, and nothing more happened with the issue. How many boys he managed to abuse is unknown. Afterwards he was never mentioned in the club, and the boys and I never talked about him and what had happened.”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

In the following case, victims’ identities were revealed by the sports organisation following a confidential disclosure. This resulted in a gross invasion of privacy and further abusive backlash within the public domain causing a great deal of additional harm and distress.

*“We didn’t want to talk to the media because our parents didn’t know about it and when we went to the Sports Council we said ‘just get him out of the gym - put him away from the girls and we will not go to the media with the story’. So we didn’t, but they did! They went to a radio station and put the story out in the news. I got a very hard campaign against me via Twitter and Facebook. A journalist then told us that she had a copy of the police report; she had all the names and was going to put a story out! So I thought I need to control this a little bit because in that report there are other names ... So I talked to her and the [resulting] story was on the front page of this newspaper. After that I was getting insults and all kinds of stuff via social media. And it still goes on today.”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

Given what we now know about abuse and sexual violence in sport, it is no longer acceptable for a sport organisation of any size to be unprepared to receive a disclosure of sexual violence. Those affected need to have confidence that any concern, complaint or allegation will be dealt with in a serious and appropriate manner.

Confidence in an organisation’s capacity to keep children safe will grow when the organisation demonstrates its ability to adequately and meaningfully support those that come forward with allegations. This capacity will be enhanced through the publication and promotion of a complaint or reporting policy with associated procedures or protocols.

Such a policy should make explicit the protocol to follow when a report of sexual violence is received, including how to respond to and support the alleged victim, appropriate recording and sharing of information, and what further actions are to be taken. This must include guidelines for reporting to official investigative authorities and other relevant external agencies, especially those that may offer support to the victim.

The confident management of a disclosure is vital to reassure a victim of an organisation’s ability to support them appropriately. A formal policy with clear operational procedures also increases the security of Designated Officers and can help to remove some of the uncertainty that can be experienced when receiving a disclosure.

**” There are many reasons why disclosing sexual violence is a difficult, even traumatic, experience.**



” *The confident management of a disclosure is vital to reassure a victim of an organisation’s ability to support them appropriately.*

### » *Good Practice Example:*

England Cricket Board (ECB) – [Safeguarding Resources](#): ‘What to do if you have concerns’

#### **The ECB advocate the 3 Rs approach:**

1. Responding to the disclosure/suspicion and/or allegation
2. Recording the relevant information
3. Reporting the relevant information

#### **Step 1 Responding to disclosure, suspicions and/or allegations**

Anyone responding to disclosure, suspicions and/or allegations must always:

- Stay calm; do not show disgust or disbelief
- Ensure the child is safe and feels safe
- Listen carefully to what is said
- Ask questions only where they are really necessary to clarify what you are being told (always avoid asking leading questions)
- Keep an open mind – do not make assumptions or judgments, show disgust or disbelief
- Take the concern seriously
- Reassure the child and stress that they are not to blame
- Be honest and explain you will have to tell someone else to help with the situation (do not agree to keep secrets between you and the child)
- Maintain confidentiality – only tell others if it will help protect the child

#### **Never:**

- Approach any alleged abuser to discuss the concern
- Rush into actions that may be inappropriate
- Make promises you cannot keep
- Take sole responsibility

Always consult someone else (the person in charge or the designated officer) so you can begin to protect the child and gain support for yourself



## **Step 2 Recording the incident**

Information passed to the ECB, children's social care, police and/or the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) must be as helpful as possible, which is why it is important to make a detailed record at the time of the disclosure/concern.

The ECB Incident Reporting Form should be used wherever possible. Information recorded must include the following:

- Details of the child including full name, age/date of birth, address and gender
- Details of the parent or guardian and whether they have been informed or not
- Details of the facts of the allegation or observations
- Details of the person alleged to have caused the incident/injury including the name, address and date of birth or their approximate age
- A description of any visible bruising or other injuries
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what happened and how
- Witnesses to the incident(s)
- Any times, dates or other relevant information
- A clear distinction between what is (known to be) fact, opinion or hearsay
- A signature, date and time on the report

## **Step 3 Reporting**

The ECB reporting structure

The principle strand of the "Safe Hands" safeguarding policy is the provision of an appropriate mechanism to provide correct, and comprehensive, reporting procedures for concerns.

The ECB has a reporting framework which operates on three levels.

- The primary level involves a Welfare Officer at local level such as in a club or league.
- Supporting the Club Welfare Officer is a County Welfare Officer (County WO) who is appointed by, and accountable to, the County Cricket Board.
- Supporting the County Welfare Officer is the ECB Safeguarding Team, part of the Ethics and Compliance Department.

## **» Good Practice 5**

Sport organisations publish a protocol or procedure for handling reports of abuse, including clear advice for staff on how to respond to a disclosure and how to escalate concerns if required.

As illustrated above, making a report of sexual violence – including reports of incidents often considered to be ‘mild’ or less serious – can be a very difficult experience. Therefore, the period immediately after disclosure is a highly sensitive and trying time for the victim and must be carefully considered.

*“What hurts deeply, is the silence of the authorities after you report your experience.”*

Colin Harris, former UK footballer, and VOICE Ambassador

A breakdown in communication, post-disclosure, will almost certainly have a negative impact on the individual. Whilst the official process of recording, reporting and

managing a disclosure is crucial, an organisation must necessarily ask: what are the needs of the victim/survivor?

The various harms caused by childhood sexual abuse are well-established (for example, see [advice from the NSPCC](#)) and victims frequently experience guilt, shame and anxiety. Public disclosures, in particular, may lead to unforeseen consequences that lie beyond the control of the individual.

However, the impact of abuse and the experience of living with a personal history of CSA, varies from individual to individual. Therefore, the needs of any individual should not be assumed. The experiences of disclosure reported by VOICE participants (above) emphasize the importance of offering sustained support after disclosure.

### » Learning Example:

#### Experiences of Victims following Public Disclosure

Based on VOICE research, there are a range of potential consequences for a public disclosure and the loss of anonymity this brings. These include, but are not limited to:

- Negative responses from: family, sport, police, media;
- Threats from the perpetrator;
- Legal action by perpetrators and accusations of defamation against the victim;
- Campaigns (in person and online) against the victim(s) (or ‘whistleblower’) by those supportive of the accused;
- Negative impact on family and friendships and the emotional pain for the ‘survivor’ who sees and takes responsibility for their distress;
- Emotional difficulties of coping with police investigation, criminal trial and media coverage;
- Negative psychological impact of: not being believed, being blamed, being excluded, allegations not being taken forward for prosecution, seeing offender continuing to work with children.
- Negative financial impact associated with, for example, high legal fees, counselling/therapeutic support, loss of earnings or loss of employment.

**” A breakdown in communication, post-disclosure, will almost certainly have a negative impact on the individual.**



## » Good Practice Example:

### Voices in Sport Foundation in Belgium

In the aftermath of the VOICE-project, four Belgian survivors of child sexual abuse founded the non-profit organisation 'Voices in Sport' (2019). This foundation aims to represent victims of sexual violence in Belgian sport, offer a listening ear to fellow survivors, as well as support Flemish policy development and implementation to create safer sport environments.

Fully meeting the needs of the victim, in the short-, medium-, and long-term, will be beyond most local sport organisations. Nevertheless, an appropriate and ethical response to a disclosure of sexual abuse should always involve a clear and genuine expression of interest about the wellbeing of the child/athlete/member who has made the disclosure. For many this may come naturally, however, receiving a disclosure of sexual violence, especially within a context that is familiar, trusted and valued, can be extremely disorientating. This emphasizes the importance of agreed protocols to ensure the interests of the individual making the allegation are appropriately and substantially considered.

Any sport organisation must understand both how they can support a victim within their sphere of responsibility, and also the limits of what they can do. Whilst this will inevitably vary according to the resources available, supporting an individual following disclosure requires sensitivity, balance and a sound understanding of the issues at stake. Therefore, the prior establishment of relationships with appropriate external agencies (GP3) – a network of support – will be invaluable at this point.

The sport organisation should seek advice from specialist agencies on how they might best support the individuals involved, including those against whom an allegation is directed. Where the victim is an adult, perhaps disclosing

abuse after many years of silence, it is important to keep in mind that they may not be prepared for the serious psychological impact the disclosure may bring.

*"I was not aware that the relief of disclosing would also bring with it the distress of re-traumatization as I went through the process of giving statements about the abuse."*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

It is highly likely that the individual will have developed strategies for concealing the abuse, and its effects, from family members, and friends. It is unlikely that these strategies, often developed to protect loved ones, will be easily or quickly overcome.

*"But when you keep quiet about this for so long, you have this emotional tsunami right behind you. You know it's getting closer and closer and suddenly there was that combination of events and there it was – then the world imploded. Then I had to face it all. I ended up in a secure institution because I was very keen to find a bridge. I was in a very big black hole. It made me pretty unstable – it's been quite a voyage. I'm much steadier now, although I still find some of the bits very difficult. It's impossible to erase them. The whole process has been one of coming to terms with all those things that made me so unbelievably uncomfortable that I couldn't speak. That's what it's been all about. Now I can speak."*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport (Hartill, 2016<sup>2</sup>)



<sup>2</sup>Hartill, M. (2016). Sexual abuse in youth sport: a sociocultural analysis. London: Routledge.

If an individual has chosen to disclose to you or your organisation, this must be seen as a privilege and a significant responsibility.

It is important that the organisation maintains contact and supports the individual to continue to attend/participate, if they wish, or else support them to maintain some connection with the sport.

The organisation should be proactive and Designated Officers should seek advice from victim-support networks in their region. Such agencies can help an organisation to assess, for example, the possibilities of accessing financial and therapeutic support, and reaching wider support networks.

Therefore, in an appropriate, sensitive and timely fashion, the organisation might seek to facilitate discussion of:

- therapeutic support
- legal services
- financial support
- meeting with and sharing experiences with fellow athletes or other members in the club
- engaging with the umbrella agency (such as a national governing body)
- an official acknowledgement or apology from the organisation (see below)



A Designated Officer from the club/organisation should be responsible for maintaining reasonable contact following disclosure. However, it is good practice to discuss and confirm with the individual who they would want as a key-contact and to plan how communication can be best maintained.

The personal circumstances of volunteers must be carefully considered in this regard and it should be made clear that volunteers, including Designated Officers, helping to run sport activities cannot undertake the role of a counsellor, therapist, legal advisor, social worker or suchlike. However, offering comfort and emotional support to members should always be a feature and function of an ethical sports club.

There are various possibilities of how to continue working with individuals who have disclosed an experience of sexual violence/abuse. The following list is based on the results of the VOICE-project and may help you in preparing your support. Please be aware that support should be based on the individual needs of survivors:

1. Ask the individual about her/his support needs and establish the extent to which s/he consents to the sharing of this information;
2. Offer (but don't impose) regular communication and respond promptly to all communication;
3. Do not make promises you cannot fulfil but assist the individual (or his/her family) with practical support, e.g. introduce them to appropriate agencies/charities;
4. Review your policies, procedures and prevention strategies and report to your membership on any changes or lessons to be learned (ensuring confidentiality is not breached);
5. Ensure your organisation is promoting appropriate messages about supporting victims and whistleblowers;
6. Where appropriate, apologize on behalf of your organisation (see below in chapter 9);
7. Explore the possibility of how those with a lived experience of abuse in sport might inform your prevention strategies;
8. Record the actions undertaken in order to evidence adherence to policy and inform reflection and future strategy development.

### » Good Practice 6

Following disclosure, where possible and appropriate, maintain contact with the individual (or parents/guardians) and assist them to access the support they need.

Where there is little awareness or authentic concern for child welfare, bullying and sexual violence between children can also go unchecked. Research from the UK has suggested that a great deal of peer-on-peer sexual violence in sport goes unreported and ignored.

Although it has largely gone unrecognized and is often normalized, bullying has always been a feature of sports environments. Bullying – the intimidation of others through physical and non-physical means – finds its most organized expression within initiation rituals or practices sometimes referred to as ‘hazing’. Children who take-up sport are often socialized into environments that seek to discriminate and ‘weed-out’ those who fail to closely conform to the values and practices espoused by hyper-masculinist and hyper-competitive environments.



**” Bullying – the intimidation of others through physical and non-physical means – finds its most organized expression within initiation rituals or practices sometimes referred to as ‘hazing’.**

In such environments, domination over others through aggression and intimidation is simply part of the currency or culture of sport – the ‘law of the jungle’ prevails and only the ‘fittest’ survive. Many studies and high-profile examples have revealed that such a culture has been encouraged amongst young people by associated adults, often in positions of influence within a youth-sport environment. Unsurprisingly, then, bullying and harmful

sexual behaviour by and between young people is also a significant issue within sport. Yet, the environments that produce and endorse this behaviour are, necessarily, ill-equipped to identify and prevent it.

Therefore, bullying and other forms of abuse (including sexual violence) between children has rarely been recognized within sport and most often dismissed as an isolated incident or inconsequential and natural (‘boys will be boys’, ‘that’s just how sport is’, etc.).

When peer-on-peer abuse is recognized, if it is taken seriously, it is often the psychology or personal history of the child (either victim or victimizer or both) that is identified as the source of the problem, rather than the culture of the sport context in which it occurs.

Indeed, it is evident that boys who have been sexually abused in sport have sometimes responded by pushing the hyper-masculinist norms of male-sport even further, for example, engaging in excessive alcohol consumption or violence. Such patterns of behaviour constitute a culturally endorsed means of coping with their contradictory experiences – i.e. of being seen as a ‘tough’ athletic boy whilst being simultaneously ‘feminized’ and terrorized through the sexual violence of a more dominant male.

Despite the volume of evidence that has now been accumulated in relation to sexual violence in sport, sport organisations and those with responsibility for children in sport rarely raise the issue of sexual abuse with their young athletes or provide them with the opportunity (or language) to raise such matters. Indeed, speaking 'up' or 'out' about such things is often discouraged within sport settings where the welfare of the team or the club (or the sport) often takes precedent over the individual. This response will certainly be encouraged by perpetrators who hold positions of influence within the sports environment.

The organisational disposition or culture of not speaking about abuse and bullying will, more often than not, deter those attempting to report or disclose abuse. Thus, children often have to tell multiple adults about their abuse before they are taken seriously, if at all. For many, if the first response is negative, they will never tell again. There have now been many high-profile examples of victims disclosing abuse in sport contexts that were followed by inadequate responses from organisations entrusted with the safety and wellbeing of their young members. Crucially, expressions of disbelief or denial from an individual or organisation can have devastating consequences for a victim who is trying to disclose and come to terms with their experience.

One feature of prevention that has had very little attention within sport is the inclusion of children within safeguarding/child welfare. Research from the UK has shown that, even where a system of child protection and training is well-established within a sport, adults are often reluctant to discuss relevant issues with children and young people. In effect, crucial information and knowledge is being withheld from children that may empower them.

Prevention of abuse is not, in any way, a child's responsibility, but neither is it appropriate to withhold knowledge from young people that may empower them to:

- a) recognize certain behaviours (of others and within themselves) as abusive and avoid contributing to or endorsing an abusive environment;
- b) understand the consequences of abuse;
- c) understand how best to avoid abusive situations or individuals; and
- d) appreciate that abuse is something they can talk about and tell others about if they (or one of their peers) experience it and that they are not to blame.



## » *Learning Example:*

### **Research into child protection in British Rugby League**

The following extracts are taken from a research study with the Rugby Football League (Hartill, Lang and Ashley, 2014<sup>3</sup>) that investigated the views of coaches and designated officers within British rugby league, approximately ten years after the introduction of child protection policy and procedures. Many of the participants had previously undertaken 'safeguarding' training. Whilst there was much good practice, one issue of concern was the communication with children and young people about safeguarding and related issues.

**Club Coach:** I can't see the point in drawing players' attention to it if there's no need to. If there was a problem, they would tell us about it. But if there's not, why mention it? Sometimes you do more harm than good. It's like bullying ... it's just a word that's bandied about. So the more you draw people's attention to it all, you know ...

**Designated Officer:** At the end of the day, they're here to play rugby, but a lot of people tend to delve deeper and question things that perhaps don't need questioning.

**Designated Officer:** We don't talk to the children specifically about safeguarding and child protection. A number of recommendations were also offered to the governing body, the Rugby Football League (RFL) in relation to this issue.

### **Recommendations:**

- a) Develop specific training and resources on communicating with children on safeguarding and welfare related issues and build this in to all standard training packages/qualifications;
- b) Establish youth ambassadors to represent children and young people's voices and ensure they are sufficiently represented and supported within decision-making processes;
- c) Communicate clearly that the RFL values the participation of children in the running of rugby league and encourage clubs and affiliated organisations to demonstrate this in their local context.

<sup>3</sup>Hartill, M., Lang, M. & Ashley, N. (2014). [Safeguarding and child protection in Rugby League: A research evaluation](#). Funded by the Edge Hill University REF Fund and the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit.

Furthermore, children and young people who are experiencing sexual exploitation may not view their experiences as 'abuse'. Often the perpetrator will cultivate the relationship to appear as a 'normal' sexual relationship whilst at the same time controlling and coercing the child into concealing the relationship.

*"We had like very set times when we could talk on the phone – he was also a player, he was 29 when I was 16. He would call me after his practice as that was the only time we could talk, so it was all very controlled. I remember he needed to take me into the forest to hide and have sex, like a prostitute literally ... and I invented a fake boyfriend so I could get away – like I had to create a fake boyfriend to make sure my parents were not going to be suspicious."*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

*"In all that time, nobody at the school contacted me and asked me whether I am okay. People were watching me and I noticed them talking about me behind my back. None of the teachers managed to ask me. They only watched me and in all that time I was thinking: 'Please, if only one of you would ask me, I would tell you everything.' This never happened. Everybody saw it – nobody said a thing."*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

Those that work in sport are well placed to play a significant role in the prevention of child sexual abuse and sexual violence more broadly. Some have used the close relationships that often develop within sports, between adults and children, for their own ends; others have 'turned away' and chose not to put a stop to the abuse of children. However, the vast majority of the sports community appreciate that the adult-child relationship within sport can play a vital part in the wellbeing and healthy development of the child, well beyond their sports performance. A crucial part of this support should be to promote children's rights and to enable children to increasingly participate, not just in the playing of sport, but also in the decision-making about their sport. This includes areas that may fall under child welfare and the prevention of abuse or what is sometimes referred to as 'safeguarding'.

Therefore, an organisation that seeks to proactively prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children will evidence the authentic engagement of children – their voices – in all aspects of their work.

Sport organisations must generally be far more proactive in advocating and upholding children's rights and protecting their integrity. Where the abuse of children and vulnerable adults is exposed, sport must ward against errors of the past by ensuring that the principle of the best interests of the child is always at the forefront of their policies and decision-making. This approach should in no way undermine an organisation's obligation to protect the rights of its staff or affiliated agents to be treated with professional courtesy, dignity and respect.

Ultimately, the proactive advocacy for children's rights should only enhance the wellbeing of all within sport and serve to enhance the integrity of the sport sector.

***” An organisation that seeks to proactively prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children will evidence the authentic engagement of children in all aspects of their work.***



## » **Good Practice Example:**

### **The Child Protection in Sport Unit**

*How to respond to concerns about harmful sexual behaviour in sport settings (CPSU Briefing)*

Harmful sexual behaviour by young people must be taken seriously by all organisations. It is not the responsibility of sports organisations to distinguish between experimental behaviours and exploitative and harmful behaviours, but concerns should be reported and responded to like any other potentially serious safeguarding or child protection concerns in line with club/organisations safeguarding procedures including consulting their local statutory services for advice.

Therefore, if you encounter behaviour that you are concerned could be sexually harmful you should:

- Stop the immediate behaviour that is causing harm by distracting the young person and possibly removing the individual young person and explaining that this behaviour is not acceptable. Describe the behaviour accurately to avoid any misunderstanding, e.g.:
- “You pulled Johns pants down, he was embarrassed and upset!”
- “You grabbed Jane’s breast, you embarrassed and hurt her! No one should be touched on their private parts without consent”
- Immediately report the incident to your safeguarding officer, e.g. club welfare officer with all details in line with organisational reporting procedures
- Record the incident, being as specific as possible about what was seen and heard. Include both the young person’s and the expert by experience’s response if known
- Give the record to your safeguarding officer who must consider the level of concern and may consult statutory authorities before making a formal referral, involving parents (unless this would pose a risk to the young person) and with the support of your national governing body if required
- In discussion with your safeguarding officer, make plans to ensure that the individual has no opportunity for unsupervised contact with other potentially vulnerable children or young people, including the suspected expert by experience. Your organisation may liaise with statutory authorities around further investigation and assessment of the young person and a plan to address any risk that they pose.

Additional source: Hackett, S (2010). Children, young people and sexual violence. In Barter, C and Berridge, D (eds) Children behaving badly? Exploring peer violence between children and young people.

## » **Good Practice 7**

Communicate ageappropriate messages about safety and welfare to children in sport, seek young people’s views about issues that affect them, ensure all children understand who they should speak to about abuse, and include children in the development and implementation of safeguarding in your organisation.

For those in sport organisations working with survivors of sexual violence, it is also very important to look after yourself. Dealing with allegations of abuse can be very stressful for all those involved, particularly those with responsibility for child protection and welfare. It is also

important to remember that many individuals who take on this responsibility within sport are volunteers and/or may have little or no experience of dealing with cases of child abuse or neglect. This can also be true of those who are in paid roles.

**” Organisation leads should consider how they can support those with direct responsibility for child protection issues, since each organisation has a duty of care towards staff and volunteers.**



### » Learning Example:

#### Experiences of Safeguarding Lead Officers in the UK

The following views are taken from a research paper by Hartill & Lang (2014)<sup>4</sup> that investigated the experiences of Safeguarding Lead Officers (SLO) within national governing bodies of sport in the UK.

SL02: ... no, I didn't have the personal support that I needed, and we had cases that weren't very nice. I did struggle with that, you know, going home and thinking about what had actually taken place. And also, I didn't have anybody to bounce ideas off or even say "look this is really upsetting, read this". I had to keep it all within myself.

SL03: ... as a lead officer with a non-statutory background I found that extremely challenging. ... I still think dealing with cases within governing bodies ... is quite difficult because they're all different and they'll all bring up different things ... it's a very specialist area ... For me [I've learned] through fairly awful experience. I hope the sector has learnt to support people better, but I'm not sure that is the case. ... the role can be very isolating ... we need to make sure that it is more than just one person's responsibility ... it needs specialist support, not everybody can deal with that stuff – and actually I think people shouldn't be asked to deal with that stuff without having those support functions in place. It's a huge responsibility dealing with cases. I think a lot of early lead officers went through that and a lot of them fell by the wayside as a result ... It's too much without the right support.



<sup>4</sup>Hartill, M. & Lang, M. (2014). "I know people think I'm a complete pain in the neck": An examination of the introduction of child protection and 'safeguarding' standards in English sport from the perspective of national governing body Safeguarding Lead Officers. *Social Sciences*, 3(4): 606-627.

In many countries, the concept of a 'welfare officer' or suchlike will be unfamiliar within the sport sector. Therefore, it is often not clear what the role specifically involves, possibly even to those who have recruited someone to that position.

The establishment of peer-networks is a common and valued method of supporting individuals within these roles and helping them to navigate the challenges associated with work in this field. Such networks might be established at local, regional and national levels.

Organisation leads (chairperson/CEO) should consider how they can support those with direct responsibility for child protection issues, since each organisation has a duty of care towards staff and volunteers. This might include, for example:

- ▶ supporting attendance at relevant training/professional development;
- ▶ organising specific events to exchange learning and good practice; and
- ▶ investigating services and resources available to support designated officers.

If your organisation is affiliated to a national agency/body, seek advice and guidance from the designated officer so you can seek support for your staff/volunteers who may have to deal with potentially distressing disclosures, difficult investigations and their aftermath. Ideally, regular supervision by a qualified counsellor/practitioner should be secured in order to address the emotional and mental health needs of those working in this area.

### » Good Practice 8

Those working with victims/survivors (e.g. Designated Officers) in sport organisations must receive appropriate training and be appropriately supported, especially when challenging cases arise. The opportunity to talk to (and 'off-load') to supervisors or peers in the organization should be identified in the role description and monitored by those in leadership positions.

## GP 9 Apologizing and Acknowledging

A number of contributors to the research made it clear that acknowledgement and apology from the leadership of the sport organisation is a crucial element in enhancing their wellbeing and mental health.

Officials in sport organisations may assume that they are not in the position to apologize for what has gone wrong in former times. However, it must be understood that unless the organisation fully recognizes its failures and, at least, offers an appropriate expression of apology, survivors and their families will be unable to fully move beyond the abuse.

Therefore, an official apology is a very important aspect of reconciliation which may, in some small but perhaps significant way, help a survivor to overcome feelings of self-recrimination, guilt and shame.

Moreover, an organisation that does take responsibility for any abuse that has occurred within its borders is making important steps towards both supporting survivors and safeguarding children in the future. In other words, acknowledgement is not only essential for the individual wellbeing of a 'survivor', but also fundamental to the

prevention of sexual violence within an organisation, sector or sport. It should be seen, therefore, not only as a crucial retrospective action, but also as a key proactive step towards more effective prevention.

*"Yesterday I had a conversation with my former trainer. She has apologized several times and I feel so freed today ... the spoken word ... the pronounced apology ... so important ..."*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project



This quote is taken from a post-interview communication with a VOICE-participant. This individual had been subjected to childhood sexual abuse by a doctor working for the sports organisation. Her words illustrate how important it is, at least for some, to receive an apology or genuine acknowledgement from the organisation in which the abuse has occurred. This individual had already contacted the leadership of the sport organisation asking for an acknowledgement of her experience. At time of writing the organisation had not responded. However, the opportunity to talk with her former coach and to receive an apology from her was clearly an important part of her attempt to move beyond the abuse.

There are different ways of apologizing and officials should choose them sensitively. From what we learned in the VOICE-project, it is obvious that the apology must be personal, full and authentic.

Maintaining the dignity of the individual and offering support for the victim should be the guiding principles, as well as honesty and openness. The views of the victim should be sought for feedback about how the organisation managed the situation and the offer of support for the future should always be made.

**” There are different ways of apologizing and officials should choose them sensitively.**

Finally, given the organisational failures that may have occurred and the extent of the suffering and emotional pain that may have been experienced, it must be anticipated that an apology may be rejected. This is an entirely reasonable response and a prerogative of the individual that must be respected.

The following extracts have been provided by one of the VOICE participants in order to illustrate the process of apology and the meaning it has for an individual's well-being and mental health.

### » *Learning Example:*

#### **A letter from a survivor of childhood sexual abuse to her former club concerning the topic of acknowledgement and apology**

9th July 2018

To the [name] Club

What [perpetrator] did to me (and others) – physically and mentally – has had a major effect on my life. As one grows older and starts looking at one's life, you realize the effects of different events. The dark shadow that [perpetrator] has left on my person has been immense, and the more I try to come to terms with it, the more I realize just how much he affected my life.

As a young child, I was known as being 'loving and giving'. I also loved this 'specialness' being demonstrated in the form of gifts and tokens of affection. The 'presents' that he gave me followed me round for years, no more than the memories, for which I could not rid myself, nor forget. I now hate that I threw them away, as they seem to be the only tangible proof to others of what happened.

I was groomed in a way that made him seem such an important man, so generous and loving to me, and he made me feel that I was special, and made me feel so lucky to be getting that attention. This reflects classic grooming process of adults abusing children, and numerous children will not be aware they have been made to feel special for sexual purposes.

I hate that I cannot hate him today – because he groomed me in a way that made him seem such an important man, so generous and loving to me, and I was so lucky to get that attention. How many girls and boys were affected by him, and to what extent?

As those with the responsibility for the running and conduct of its premises, staff and members, both in the past and now, I demand an official acknowledgement from you, the [name] Club. Acknowledging his child >



abuse, being believed and my abuse recognized by those in authority would lift such a weight off my shoulders, and give me back some freedom from these years of regret, suffering and pain. I am not the only one to have suffered a life sentence of pain at the hands of your staff member [perpetrator]; there are others who went through – and are still going through – the same physical, mental and life problems as I. I demand an apology for the attitude towards the letter that I sent to the Chairman, [name], in 2001. The fact that Senior Managers of [club] did not take seriously allegations of abuse and respond appropriately only added to my distress.

I have asked all along – on a personal level – for a photograph of [perpetrator]. I need to see that face again, in order to see him as the monster he was, not as a kindly man. The very least you can do is to acquire, and forward a photograph of your staff member, my abuser. Medically, it is imperative that I can look once more on that face that haunts me, to vent my anger and thus obtain closure.

As a highly rated [sport] club, with many young members, you should now have stringent Safe-guarding procedures in place, and have a good set up to keep young children like me safe in sport. I would like to hope that any child or parent who feels uncomfortable, knows exactly where to go, what to do, who to talk to. But do they? How sure are you your systems work?

As a parent myself, I would feel so much more comfortable knowing that the club in which my children play sport, have fully acknowledged, investigated and admitted to any past problems, as a first stage in moving on to a correct level of safeguarding.



### » *Learning Example:*

#### **The Apology-Letter from the club to the survivor**

11th July 2018

Dear [name],

It was good to meet you on [date] and I sincerely hope that the conclusion of the legal case, along with your subsequent visit to the Club, will help your recovery process.

As stated when we met, the Club sincerely apologises for the abuse you suffered at the hands of [perpetrator]; no child should have to suffer abuse. We also regret that in [year], when you initially approached the Club with your allegations about [perpetrator], the Club did not respond in a way that was more helpful to you.

In [year], further allegations were made and investigated by the police, and the Club cooperated fully with their investigations. In light of the seriousness of the allegations, the Club removed all traces of [perpetrator] from its Clubhouse.

The [club] is a vibrant, family orientated club, with over 300 children regular attending the site for coaching. We take safeguarding very seriously and have Welfare Officers in place for all our main sports. Our policies and procedures are reviewed annually and either meet or exceed those recommended by the [national governing body]. Maintaining high standards of Child Protection is extremely important and something all our staff, coaches and members take very seriously.

[name], our Club Manager, is looking forward to welcoming you and I hope you find this letter of apology helpful, I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully,  
[name]  
Chairman

” *Maintaining the dignity of the individual and offering support for the victim should be the guiding principles, as well as honesty and openness.*



### » *Learning Example from the VOICE-project:*

#### **Reflections of the survivor concerning the process of apology**

20 August 2018

The time leading up to the meeting with the Club was extremely stressful. I didn't know what to expect, and whether or not I would get an apology from them. I ended up in hospital for 5 weeks, as it was all just taking up too much room in my head. The hospital helped me.

Having dealt with the compensation side, I finally got to ask for an acknowledgement, apology, and a photograph of my abuser. I also prepared something to say to them, as did my husband. I felt this was important, as I wanted them to understand that it wasn't for the financial side that I had gone to a lawyer, but the apology was the most important thing for me - so important in the healing process.

Having been to the club in 2001, and not being believed, even having to prove to them that I had ever attended the club, this apology letter was huge for me. It has lifted a weight off my shoulders. I have had people say that since I have this letter, I can now turn a page and forget about the past; this is not the case. You cannot just 'forget' what happened, as it happened and can't 'un'happen. However, I see it as a start, a new beginning in the process of healing. There is no doubt that it has been very positive for me.

### » *Good Practice 9*

Offer an official apology to the victim on behalf of your organisation in order to acknowledge the harm suffered as well as the organisation's gratitude and respect to the individual for making the disclosure.



## GP 10 Staging a Forum for Acknowledgement

Victims of serious violations of human rights have the right to tell the truth about the abuses they have suffered and they have the right to be listened to. Thus, organisations and states have searched for ways of providing settings in which victims can recount their experiences to a specific commission or group of stakeholders who are in the position to acknowledge the violations and start a process of investigation and reconciliation.

Certainly, the [Ryan Commission in Ireland](#) is one of the best known and longstanding institutions in this field. More recent inquiries in this area include: [The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) (England and Wales) (2015-date); the German [Independent Commission for Acknowledging Child Sexual Abuse](#) (Unabhaengige Kommission zur Aufarbeitung sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs) (2018-date); and the Australian [Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#) (2013-17).

Although VOICE could not accomplish a comprehensive process of investigating and acknowledging sexual violence in European sport, it followed similar principles to the above and tried to take first steps into this direction in the field of sport. Thus, seven events of Acknowledgement were facilitated in the course of the VOICE-project in the respective partner countries.

Depending on local convention, these events were called “Hearing” or “Forum of Acknowledgement” or similar terms. These fora provided a platform for ‘survivors’ / ‘experts by experience’ to speak, in a safe space, to individual and organisational stakeholders within sport. These invitation-only events enabled interested stakeholders to hear first-hand accounts about the experience and impact of sexual abuse and exploitation that VOICE participants were subjected to, within their sporting lives.

The immediate aim was to provide an opportunity for the sport community to acknowledge these individuals and the abuse they had suffered. The broader aim was to develop understanding and support learning in sports organisations across Europe, but also to foster support for similar initiatives.

*„The event made me realize that you are not alone and many other people are fighting for the same cause. That was a new but a totally encouraging feeling for me. That also encouraged me to continue my project.“*

Mother of two sons who experienced sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

*„Wow, I am still very touched by the day ... I'm curious what will follow ... but I'm fine and I'm very happy to have been there and to have spoken“*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

Based on the experiences of the seven VOICE Hearings, we observe that the acknowledgement of survivors – their suffering as well as their fortitude and resilience – is fundamental to the effective prevention of abuse in sport.

Therefore, it is a central recommendation of VOICE that sport organisations, of appropriate scale and resources, such as national governing bodies or international federations, facilitate similar events of acknowledgement. Since such an event requires systematic and sensitive preparation, sport organisations will find it helpful to read the attached guide “Your experience matters” which was set up within the VOICE-project in order to support partner organisations to facilitate such an event.

**“Victims of serious violations of human rights have the right to tell the truth about the abuses they have suffered and they have the right to be listened to.**



## » *Learning Example:*

### **Acknowledgement**

Based on research in the VOICE-project, survivors expressed a need for sport organisations to:

- **Acknowledge** past failings in a genuine and meaningful way
  - ↳ Denial and minimization are not acceptable, cause further harm to victims and delay change
- **Acknowledge** the presence of sexual violence in your sport
  - ↳ Be proactive in acknowledging this, even if there are no recorded cases
- **Acknowledge** the ongoing consequences of sexual violence for victims/survivors/experts by experience
- **Acknowledge** the value of the 'lived experience' for improving organisational responses
- **Move beyond listening** to a more inclusive approach to child welfare where a wider range of voices are heard and individuals with lived experience are able to participate in an authentic and meaningful way.



## » *Good Practice Example:*

### **The Belgian VOICE Acknowledgement Forum: notes from the facilitator**

During the VOICE-project, a Belgian Acknowledgement Forum was organized comprising a full-day programme. The plenary session in the morning was chaired by a professional moderator and started with official statements of sport policy representatives, followed by a presentation on myths of sexual violence in sport. The acknowledgement ceremony then took place.

Nine Belgian VOICE survivors took the floor to make a statement on their personal experiences with sexual violence in sport. Some of them spoke live, one provided an audio recording, one read a poem and three testimonials were presented in short film documentary.

After the testimonies and an impressive applause, the moderator invited representatives of Flemish sport policy and politics to a panel debate. The secretary general of Sport Flanders, the president of the Flemish Sports Confederation, the president of the Parliamentary Commission on sexual violence in sport, and two VOICE ambassadors and elite athletes. The morning session was closed by a video message from Flemish minister of sport. He thanked the survivors for speaking up and promised to present stronger prevention measures in the near future. During the lunch break, we organized a poster session with scientific findings on sexual violence in sport. Also, a debriefing moment with the survivors took place in a closed room.

In the afternoon, two sessions of five parallel workshops on different aspects of prevention of sexual violence in sport were offered, led by practitioners from the field of child protection, sexual health and sport. The president of the Flemish International Center of Ethics in Sport (ICES) closed the day by summarizing the participants' feedback (posted on a 'post-its wall' after the acknowledgement ceremony) and looking forward to future initiatives.

More than 120 sport representatives attended the event. There was significant media coverage and political impact. It led to major adaptations in Flemish sport policy. The Acknowledgement Forum, related VOICE activities and media coverage have created a strong impetus for further prevention policy development and that the voices of our survivors have not only been heard, but also taken seriously. On a personal level, survivors felt acknowledged, empowered, and no longer ashamed to share their most sensitive experiences which led to support from family, friends and the world of sport.

## » Good Practice 10

Facilitate an event that offers ‘survivors’ of sexual violence in sport the possibility to recount their experiences, in a safe environment, to key stakeholders who are willing to listen and to learn from “experts by experience”.

### GP 11

## Beyond Acknowledgement: Working with Survivors of Sexual Violence

One clear message from VOICE is that, as important as it is to listen to and genuinely acknowledge the experiences of those who are living with the experience of sexual abuse, survivors also have a great deal to offer sport organisations in terms of enhancing their responses to abuse and strengthening their safeguarding initiatives and procedures.

*„Sports organisations need to listen to the victims of sexual violence and then actively involve them in work to prevent violence”*

Susan Greinig, Medical Programmes Senior Manager at the International Olympic Committee, during the final panel discussion with stakeholders from sport at the VOICE conference.

This outcome should be an aim for an organisation that has appropriate resources to support genuine involvement of survivors. However, sport organisations should not rush into such arrangements without significant consultation. In the UK, Sport England has nearly two decades’ experience of implementing safeguarding measures in sport and it continues to draw significantly on the expertise of non-sport organisations as well as expertise within academia.

While VOICE advocates the necessity of including survivors within safeguarding work, this must be an authentic engagement. A clear message from VOICE-participants was that their reasons for entering into dialogue with sport organisations were based on a strong desire to prevent sexual violence in the future. It is, therefore, crucial that organisations engage with victims on this basis – to genuinely involve them in future prevention work.

*“I’ve found it very painful when an organization promises engagement and involvement only to realize a couple of months later that this was only ‘talk’. It feels like another form of abuse.”*

Expert by experience of sexual violence in sport, participant in the VOICE-project

Furthermore, organisations should not see such engagement as a ‘quick-fix’ solution and any sense amongst ‘survivors’ that such engagement is simply a ‘talking-shop’ or a ‘tick-box exercise’ driven by image-management or public relations objectives, will be deeply counter-productive.

Furthermore, ‘survivors’ should not be expected to simply give up their time freely. Certainly, there should be no financial burden to those who are willing to participate. However, best practice is to provide reasonable financial compensation to participants for the time they are required to commit, just as other advisors or experts would be entitled to expect.

The aims, objectives, mechanisms and processes of any advisory group, or suchlike, should be mutually agreed in advance and significant time should be spent discussing proposals before a course of action is agreed. Preferably, aims and objectives should be measurable and accompanied by an action plan with a timetable for implementation and clear lines of accountability.



## » **Good Practice Example:**

### **Sport England Advisory Panel**

In the UK, following the VOICE Acknowledgement Forum (June 2017), the national funding agency for sport in England, Sport England, invited those that spoke at the Forum to meet and discuss how they might support them and move forward. The outcome of this meeting was the establishment of a new advisory panel principally populated by those with a lived experience of sexual abuse in sport.

This panel, funded by Sport England but with an independent chair, has the express aim of consulting with and including survivors of abuse in safeguarding developments and initiatives. Each panel member receives reimbursement for travel expenses and, in addition, receives a small honorarium in recognition of their time commitment.

Further information on this panel can be provided through contacting the author or via the VOICE email address.

*“it’s an extension of VOICE really ... but one which gives us much wider access to different governing bodies in sport, which makes it, I think, very powerful ...”*

*“... it is led by survivors ... that is a unique part of the panel ... it is the whole point ... but the panel gives survivors access to ... a power base ... that can help promote the voice, in other words give it an opportunity to be taken seriously...”*

Sport England Advisory Panel member and participant in the VOICE-project



**” Survivors have a great deal to offer sport organisations in terms of enhancing their responses to abuse and strengthening their safeguarding initiatives and procedures.**

## » **Good Practice 11**

Establish means by which those with a lived experience may be safely and authentically included in the development of organisational responses to sexual violence in sport.

## » GLOSSARY

Item	Source	Definition
Sexual Violence	World Health Organisation (2011) <sup>5</sup>	Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.
Sexual Abuse	UK Government (2018) <sup>6</sup>	Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.
Child Sexual Exploitation	UK Government (2017) <sup>7</sup>	Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.
Child Maltreatment	World Health Organisation (WHO) (2016) <sup>8</sup>	Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional illtreatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Exposure to intimate partner violence is also sometimes included as a form of child maltreatment.
Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children	UK Government (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. protecting children from maltreatment</li> <li>b. preventing impairment of children's health or development</li> <li>c. ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care</li> <li>d. taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes</li> </ul>
Child Protection	UK Government (2018)	Part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.

<sup>5</sup>World Health Organization (2011). Violence against women – Intimate partner and sexual violence against women. Geneva, World Health Organization.

<sup>6</sup>HM Government (2018). Working Together to Safeguard Children. A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. London: Crown Publications. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

<sup>7</sup>HM Government (2017). Child sexual exploitation: Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation. London: Crown Publications. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners>

<sup>8</sup>World Health Organization (2016). WHO Factsheet: Child Maltreatment. Accessed at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>

## GUIDE “YOUR EXPERIENCE MATTERS”

A guide for VOICE-partners to facilitate

“Acknowledgement Forums” with the VOICES of those affected by sexualized violence in sport



Funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

### » *Introduction*

This guide was compiled by the Steering Group of the project VOICE in order to support the partners in the process of preparing and facilitating of a national/regional ‘Acknowledgement Forum’ about the topic of sexualized violence in sport with relevant stakeholders to initiate formal dialogue between victims, sport organisations and victims’ organisations within each partner country.

In partnership with: 1) an influential (e.g. regional, national) sports organisation; and 2) a victim-support organisation (or similar).

For the purposes of this guide, we refer to those who have been affected by sexualized violence in sport as speakers with experience. This guide aims to assist the speakers with experience to share their reports to inform and influence others.

The project VOICE recognizes this is a big step for many people and it is important, we value that courage and create the right environment and support for this to happen without further trauma and so the individual feels the experience has been positive.

## 1. Aims and Function of the Event

The main aim should be to initiate dialogue between speakers with experience and those individuals and organisations of influence in the field of sport and safeguarding professionals. The event will acknowledge that abuse and exploitation occurs within the field of sport and that it is extremely difficult for those who have been affected by sexual violence to come forward and speak out.

The event will aim to inform individuals and organisations who can, in turn, influence institutional reform and cultural change, improve conditions for preventing sexual violence in sport.

## 2. Preparing for the event

### ↳ 2.1 Risk Assessment

When preparing the event, a risk assessment should be conducted by the participating organisations (university partner, victim-support organisation, sport organisation). Possible risks and solutions should be discussed thoroughly.

### ↳ 2.2 Name / Title of the event

Depending on the situation in each country, an adequate title + subtitle should be chosen for the event. Suggestions for possible titles in English: VOICE-Forum, VOICE-Acknowledgement Forum, VOICE-Hearing.

### ↳ 2.3 Venue

It is important when preparing for the event to consider those who are speaking about their experience as a key factor in selecting the venue. Speakers with experience should have a safe and supportive environment when speaking out. For example, a gymnast would perhaps not feel comfortable speaking in a gymnasium hall, hotels may be associated with previous experiences of sexual violence.

#### **We recommend:**

- a. that partners consider conferencing rooms, large airy meeting rooms in an adequate setting (e.g. at the victim-support organisation), etc.
- b. private break-out areas are available for anyone needing to remove themselves for a short period of time.
- c. Some form of low-level security to ensure that only invited participants are able to enter the event, including health and safety procedures.
- d. Consider how the formation of the room looks from a participant's perspective. If you have the opportunity, ask speakers with experience if they prefer a formal theatre style or a more informal circle.

### ↳ 2.4 Guidelines to support Speakers with Experience at the event

- a. Speaking openly about their experience of sexual violence can trigger flashbacks, Post Traumatic Stress, anxiety, etc., so it is important to ensure appropriate support is available throughout the process.
- b. Ensure you have the support of a victim organisation that is willing and able to support the speakers with experience if required, before, during or after the event.
- c. Allow the speaker with experience to attend with a supportive friend.
- d. Post event support is critical as reflective anxiety about disclosure may occur, therefore, you should have a documented plan in place to ensure support after the event.
- e. Establish clear ground-rules for the day.
- f. Be clear about the guiding principles with all those attending the event as a participant or speaker with experience.
- g. Ensure that everyone is clear that any questions posed to the speakers with experience are relevant and not intrusive.
- h. Ask attendees to be mindful of the trauma the speakers with experience may have experienced, and request they do not ask intrusive questions about the abuse itself.
- i. Guidelines for the event should be circulated to all speakers and attendees well in advance.
- j. Ensure all attendees understand that all names, places and organisations will be anonymized in any disclosures by speakers with experience.

### ↳ 2.5 Schedule and structure

Consider the schedule and structure of the day well in advance. Consider the balance of contributions and which individuals/organisations might make the most effective contribution.

## 3. Talking about the experience

- a. Advise and assist speakers with experience to prepare their speech. Inform them that the project can put them in contact with others who have been through this experience and who would be willing to support them throughout this process if required.
- b. Inform the speaker with experience of the necessity of non-disclosure of identifying details when speaking, including all names, places and organisations which must be anonymized.
- c. Be creative with methods of communication for the speakers with experience; some may not wish to stand up in front of strangers to speak about their experience.

rience. Alternative methods may range from audio recordings, film with speaker anonymized, written text by the speaker delivered by a friend/victim- support agency, story board illustrations, short drama, etc. (See Annex 1)

- d. You can assist the speaker to tell their narratives through a question and answer session.
- e. During the sessions, facilitators should be mindful of the delivery, look out for speakers:
  - Becoming distressed
  - Becoming agitated or anxious
  - Uncomfortable pauses in delivery
  - Other signs that may indicate intervention is required
- f. Interrupt the session with:
  - Do you wish to continue?
  - Do you require a break?
  - Would you like a glass of water?
- g. Have tissues on hand and be prepared to stand alongside the speaker with experience as support and finally intervene and stop the session if distress is evident.
- h. Code words could be discussed with Speakers with Experience that could act as prearranged signals, key words or phrases that indicate they are unable to continue and require immediate intervention.

## 4. Participants and Invitations to the Event

- a. National partners are in the best position to identify the participants that can most effectively assist us to achieve the project aims and objectives but we suggest the following:
- b. Consider sympathetic people of significant influence that are best positioned to affect cultural change. Invitees should be individuals with the highest level of influence in the field of protecting minors and athlete welfare, along with statutory agencies with a duty for the protection of minor/safeguarding children/child protection/victim-support.
- c. Consider high-profile athletes with a public profile that is conducive to the principles of the project.
- d. The event should be by invitation only and should not include general public, journalist or media representatives.
- e. Invitations should be extended to all participants of the interview study in Work package 2, including those who have contributed to research but are not sharing their experience on the day.
- f. A list of invited officials should be shared with the speakers with experience beforehand to ensure they have no personal difficulties with any other potential participants.

## 5. Running the event

### 5.1 Timing

- a. Consider those who may have to travel to/from event, the day will need to begin at a suitable time allowing time for travelling to the venue.
- b. Take time to introduce yourself to all your speakers on arrival.

### 5.2 Schedule

- a. Introduction of the day by the facilitator. Welcome the speakers, university, victim-support teams and sport organisations
- b. An overarching report from the university partner of VOICE, if time allows. (this will depend on how many speakers with experience take the opportunity to speak)
- c. Consider if the victim-Support team have useful contributions to make. (this will depend on how many victims take the opportunity to speak).
- d. Hear the speakers with experience reports. IMPORTANT: These contributions are the most important of the day and if possible not rushed through!
- e. Consider a break at this stage. This will allow those listening to absorb the messages. It can be traumatic listening to speakers with experience, so the break period is important to allow participants time to reflect and recover.
- f. Give the audience an opportunity to share their thoughts after the speakers with experience have spoken. Depending on the size of the event, breaking into smaller groups may make this more manageable and effective.
- g. Provide an opportunity for officials or group representatives to respond and feedback about their collective discussions/reflections.
- h. Capture the reflections – consider how the participants' discussions/responses can be documented.
- i. Thank speakers with experience with flowers or similar.

### 5.3 Recording

- a. In general, recording of the event should not be allowed and speakers with experience should have full control of content that is shared. If recording is relevant for compiling the report of the event or for producing educational resources, strict protocols on data protection should be followed.
- b. In exceptional circumstances it may be beneficial to record specific aspects i.e. to form part of an educational resource, if so than a process of informed and ongoing consent with agreed protocols should be established between the project and the individuals concerned.

## 6. After the Event

- a. Ensure a debrief session is available for both speakers with experience and their support. This should be arranged in advance and facilitated with the victim-support organisation.
- b. Hold a debrief session for the facilitating team to reflect on the event, preferably immediately after if possible. Ensure descriptive notes are taken throughout the event to serve as an aide memoire to inform and support the discussion as well as the report.
- c. Based on the facilitator debrief, offer critical analysis of this document and recommendations for procedures for similar forums, events, consultations. This can be included in the report.
- d. Write “thank you letters” to speakers with experience and other speakers.
- e. Write an invitation to participants to follow up on the process of prevention.
- f. Complete short report (as per project agreement).
- g. Feed the report into the VOICE -European workshop creating resources (WP 4).
- h. Implement your post event plan and ensure the victim-support organisation is on hand to offer support following the event for up to 3 months.

### Annex 1

Following the VOICE-Forums: Your Experience Matters event you may wish to consider how you can progress and maintain the motivation to address the issues that have been highlighted when listening to the speakers with experience.

Some of the following are suggestions that could be considered:

- a. A follow up forum with key interested parties from both those with experience and those with a key responsibility to improve the welfare of children in sport to plan an ongoing strategy
- b. To request meeting with key decision makers to seek a commitment to consider this as a strategic agenda item moving forward
- c. A full conference with findings to increase awareness and promote prevention more generally
- d. Development of a campaign

For More Information:

Website: [www.voicesfortruthanddignity.eu](http://www.voicesfortruthanddignity.eu)

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## **IMPRINT**

### **EU-funded project VOICE VOICES for truth and dignity**

Combatting sexual violence in European Sport through  
the voices of those affected  
2019

## **PUBLISHER**

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## **CITATION**

Hartill, M., Murphy, K., Taylor, S., Schröer, M.,  
Axmann, G., Viseras, G., Leach, K., Harris, C., Rulofs,  
B. (2019). *Good Practice Guide: Supporting individuals  
affected by sexual violence in sport - a guide for sport  
organizations*. Cologne: German Sport University

## **IMAGE CREDITS**

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WITHOUT YOUR VOICES  
THE VOICE MOVEMENT WOULDN'T  
EXIST.  
YOUR VOICES ARE THE  
POWER TO CHANGE.  
THANK YOU!!

We admire your strength  
to speak up! By doing  
this you are protecting  
new generations of children.  
THANK YOU  
FOR THIS 

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