



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

SPORT

WELLBEING AND WELFARE IN SCOTTISH COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY SPORT



A comprehensive and holistically approached guide to
wellbeing & welfare in student sport



Kyniska Advocacy and Scottish Student Sport (SSS) have come together to create a comprehensive, holistically approached, Wellbeing & Welfare guide for students at higher education institutions across Scotland. This resource is about creating cultural change through organisation-wide education on wellbeing and welfare in student sport.

This resource is primarily for students, from participants to coaches, welfare and wellbeing leads to committee members, but should be accessible to everyone involved in all aspects of student sport.

This guide is not designed to focus on either adults or children specifically, but rather takes a human-rights based approach to fostering safe and sustainable experiences in student sport.

GOALS

This toolkit sets a **‘gold standard’** reference for how to approach and tackle abuse in student sport; how to spot it, prevent it, and support those who are affected by it.

This toolkit is equally accessible to all sports, ensuring coherency and consistency in welfare and wellbeing practices across sports in England.

TW: abuse, abuse in sport, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, rape



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Participant

Any person involved in any capacity in sport, including athletes, coaches, volunteers, officials, psychologists, nutritionists, physical therapists and support people.

Practitioners

Those with positions of responsibility or authority such as paid staff, coaches, physical therapists, psychologists, nutritionists and officials.

Coach

An individual who guides and instructs athletes to develop their skills, achieve their potential, and who helps to foster a positive and supportive sports environment. Coaches often play a multifaceted role that goes beyond technical and tactical instruction, encompassing mentorship, athlete welfare, and ethical conduct.

Welfare Officer/Safeguarding Lead

These terms will be used throughout the toolkit to refer to those in the organisation whose responsibility it is to oversee reporting, investigating and maintaining education needs around safeguarding, welfare and misconduct concerns.

Student Athlete

A student athlete is an individual who actively engages in sports, physical activities, or competitions, irrespective of age, skill level, or competitive status. Student athletes encompass a broad spectrum of participants, including but not limited to amateur, professional, youth, para and recreational athletes.

Perpetrator

A perpetrator is an individual against whom accusations or suspicions of engaging in abusive behaviour, misconduct, or harm have been made, but these claims have not yet been substantiated or proven through a formal investigation or legal process.

Complainant

This term is used to refer to the individual(s) submitting a formal complaint or report to their sports organisation. NB: this person is not always the person who has experienced abuse.



Abuse & Harm Definitions

Physical

Physical abuse can be considered as any individual intentionally or knowingly using physical force or contact against another individual in an unwanted and non-consensual manner. Physical abuse includes any contact or non-contact action that inflicts harm or pain on the body.

As well as direct physical abuse such as assault, or unauthorised physical contact, in sport physical abuse can also look like:

- Knowingly or purposefully overtraining a participant or forcing them to train through illness or injury.
- Using training as punishment e.g. if the coach expresses that they dislike something a participant has done and subsequently increases training load in correlation with this.
- Encouraging or promoting eating disorders, fasted training, disordered eating. Commenting negatively on athletes' bodies which has a direct impact on the athlete's body.

Sexual

Sexual abuse is any contact or non-contact sexual activity that happens without consent or understanding, or without forced consent. Sport is inherently physical and so contact between athletes and coaches is normal. This can be used as a pretext for sexual violence. Many people with lived experience have reported that the sexual violence they experienced followed, or happened during, legitimate physical contact such as sports massage or physiotherapeutic and medical examinations.

Psychological

Psychological abuse is behaviour that aims to cause emotional or mental harm. In sport it is important to note that promoting disordered eating by commenting on athletes' body composition, weight, judging what they eat, suggesting leaner is better also constitutes psychological harm.

Neglect

Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet an individual's basic and essential needs, either deliberately, or by failing to understand these. It includes ignoring a person's needs or withholding essentials to meet needs, such as medication, food, water, shelter and warmth.

Financial

Financial abuse is a form of abuse when one individual has control over another's access to economic resources, which diminishes an individual's capacity to support themselves and forces them to depend on the perpetrator financially. It can also include someone manipulating or coercing someone into giving them money or having control over someone's finances.

Institutional

Institutional abuse is the mistreatment or neglect of an adult at risk by a regime or individuals. It takes place within settings and services that adults at risk live in or use, including any organisation, in or outside the Health and Social Care sector.

Institutional abuse may occur when routines, systems and regimes result in poor standards of care, when poor practice and behaviours are in place, within strict regimes and rigid routines which violate the dignity and human rights of the adults and place them at risk of harm or within a culture that denies, restricts or curtails privacy, dignity, choice and independence.



Bullying & Harassment Definitions

Every individual has the right to experience sport in a safe environment, free from bullying and harassment. We understand that wellbeing can be seriously impacted by bullying and harassment and the importance of being able to identify when this could be taking place in a sporting context.

Bullying

Bullying is behaviour that can make people feel hurt, threatened, frightened and left out and it can happen face to face and online.

In a sporting context bullying could include:

- A player repeatedly insulting and belittling another teammate during practice or competition.
- Excluding individuals from activities or social gatherings, making them feel isolated and unwelcome.
- A coach yelling, criticising and humiliating players, creating a hostile environment and instilling fear in the team.

Harassment

Harassment is unwanted conduct that violates people's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Unwelcome or offensive behaviour that targets individuals based on factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability or other protected characteristics.



CHAPTER 1

WELLBEING & WELFARE 101

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This chapter will take you through some important definitions to keep in mind. We will explore the complexities of the definition of gender-based violence, and how these types of behaviours manifest in student sport.

NB: your institution might use the key terms below in slightly different contexts.



What is welfare in student sport?

When we talk about welfare, we refer to the basic physical and mental wellbeing of all people practising, participating or otherwise involved in sport, regardless of their age, race, gender, sexuality, or belief.

What is wellbeing in student sport?

Wellbeing encompasses the physical, emotional, social, and psychological aspects of an individual's health and quality of life. In the context of this welfare and wellbeing toolkit, wellbeing refers to the holistic support provided to participants to promote their overall health, happiness, and fulfilment.

By prioritising the wellbeing of participants, sports organisations can create an inclusive and supportive environment that fosters personal growth, positive relationships, and a sense of belonging for all individuals involved in sports activities.



Sample welfare/wellbeing officer checklist:

Initial Setup and Training

- ☐ Attend mandatory welfare and safeguarding training.
- ☐ Understand welfare and safeguarding policies, and reporting procedures
- ☐ Complete any additional training (e.g., mental health first aid).

Daily/Weekly Tasks

- ☐ Attend training sessions and events regularly.
- ☐ Maintain a visible and approachable presence.
- ☐ Ensure that a method of contact is available to all members.
- ☐ Check the designated safe space for accessibility and maintenance.

Monthly Tasks

- ☐ Conduct a monthly welfare reminder with members either via student club newsletter or social media..
- ☐ Distribute any updated welfare materials.

Incident Management

- ☐ Report and document all incidents promptly.
- ☐ Signpost affected individuals to appropriate support.

Community and Culture Building

- ☐ Promote a culture of support within the community.
- ☐ Solicit and use feedback for improvements.

Resources and Referrals

- ☐ Maintain an updated list of support services.
- ☐ Ensure emergency contact procedures are known.

By following this checklist, welfare/wellbeing officers can ensure they are consistently maintaining high standards of care, support, and safety for all participants.



Practical Tips for Promoting Physical, Emotional, and Social Wellbeing in Student Sports

1. Physical Wellbeing:

- **Structured Training Sessions:** Ensure training sessions are well-structured, varied, and cater to all fitness levels and incorporate proper warm-up and cool-down routines to prevent injuries.
- **Adequate Rest and Recovery:** Emphasise the importance of rest days and adequate sleep for recovery.
- **Safe Training Environments:** Ensure all equipment is in good condition and appropriate for the sport, maintain safe and clean training facilities and have clear procedures for handling injuries and emergencies.

2. Emotional Wellbeing:

- **Mindfulness Sessions:** Offer or share information about mindfulness or yoga sessions to help athletes manage stress.
- **Mental Health Awareness Campaigns:** Promote and share any campaigns to destigmatise mental health issues and promote available resources.
- **Counselling Access:** Ensure contact information for mental health support is prominently displayed and easily accessible.

3. Social Wellbeing:

- **Team Outings:** Plan regular team outings, such as movie nights, hiking trips, or cultural events.
- **Peer Mentorship:** Pair new student athletes with experienced team members for support and guidance.
- **Inclusivity Training:** signpost to any available training sessions, campaigns or information on diversity, equity, and inclusion to foster a welcoming environment.
- **By integrating these practical tips into the sports program, you can promote a holistic approach to wellbeing that supports the physical, emotional, and social health of all participants. This comprehensive strategy helps create a positive and supportive sports environment conducive to personal growth and team success.**



WELLBEING & WELFARE 101

What is safeguarding in student sport?

Safeguarding denotes the measures we take to protect the health, wellbeing and human rights of individuals and to create an environment where all individuals can be involved in sports activities free from the threat of abuse, discrimination, or exploitation. These measures allow people—especially children, young people and adults—to live free from abuse, harm and neglect. Safeguarding in sport is particularly important given the inherent physical nature of sport, combined with the imbalance of power between sports personnel (coaches, physios, sports doctors and university employees) and student athletes/participants.

What makes student sport particularly complicated in this regard is the fact that students with positions of responsibility in sport are often also friends with or are familiar with the students over whom their responsibilities extend. This complicates the power balances and can create conflicts of interest which is why it's so important for students with positions of responsibility to attend key training sessions to help create safe, healthy and sustainable sporting experiences.



Detailed Step-by-Step Practices to Promote Safe Spaces in Student Sport

Step 1: Awareness and Education

Complete available introductory safeguarding learning (online or in-person).

Review materials on types of abuse and harm.

Step 2: Creating a Safe Environment

Greet everyone with respect and encourage positive interactions.

Set personal boundaries and respect others' boundaries.

Use inclusive language and avoid any form of discrimination.

Step 3: Recognising Signs of Abuse and Harm

Learn the common signs of physical, emotional/psychological, and sexual abuse (take me to [page 19](#)).

Observe and document any unusual behaviour or injuries.

Always report any behaviour you are concerned about through appropriate reporting mechanisms (take me to how to do this [page 22](#)).

Step 4: Supporting Affected Individuals

Listen without judgement to anyone disclosing abuse.

Provide reassurance and explain the next steps.

Connect them with counselling or support services.

Key Takeaways:

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Stay informed, vigilant, and proactive.

Encourage open communication and respect confidentiality.

Report concerns promptly and support affected individuals.



ABUSE AND HARM IN STUDENT SPORTS SETTINGS

Abuse and harm may occur between any individuals and involves behaviours that violate an individual's rights, dignity, and safety, and may have profound and long-lasting effects on their overall wellbeing and participation in and out of sport. REMEMBER: in student sport, all of these roles can be done by a student which adds complexity, as explained on [page 8](#).

01. Coach- Athlete Abuse

Abuse and harm between a coach and an athlete in a sports setting can take various forms and may involve behaviours that exploit power differentials and perpetuate harmful dynamics. This is particularly relevant for those sports where coaches may have direct physical contact with their athletes such as combat sports and sports where manual handling for technique corrections may be customary.

02. Sports-Personnel-Athlete Abuse

Abuse and harm that may occur between sports personnel, including physiotherapists, nutritionists, psychologists and others who work closely with athletes and participants, can manifest in similar ways as described previously with coaches. However, it may also encompass a broader range of behaviours and power dynamics within the sports environment.

03. Athlete-Athlete/Peer to Peer Abuse

Peer-on-peer abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- physical and sexual abuse
- sexual harassment and violence
- emotional harm
- on and offline bullying
- relationship abuse

It can even include grooming children for sexual and criminal exploitation.

It's hard to say just how widespread a problem it is. But we know that there's extensive evidence of peer-on-peer abuse in the context of both sexual and criminal exploitation. In autumn 2023, the NSPCC announced a 29% increase in children seeking help from Childline due to peer-on-peer sexual abuse. The issue has, understandably, been scrutinised in the media recently.



ABUSE AND HARM IN STUDENT SPORTS SETTINGS

Sexual Assault & Harassment

Sexual harassment includes when someone calls you derogatory sexualised names, talks about you in a sexual way that makes you feel uncomfortable (like commenting on your body), or spreads sexual rumours about you. This could be in person or online.

If someone grabs or touches you in a way you do not like, or you are forced to kiss someone or do something else sexual, this may be classed as sexual assault. If you are forced to have sex or someone has sex with you without your agreement (consent), this is rape.

Intersectionality & Diversity

It's important to recognise how abuse and harm intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability.

We therefore must acknowledge and take into account the unique experiences and vulnerabilities of marginalised groups within the sports community and ensure that support services are accessible and inclusive.



CHAPTER 2

SPORT, ITS ORIGINS & POWER DYNAMICS

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A Brief History of Sport and Its Impact

Sport has been an integral part of human society since ancient times, serving as a reflection of the values, culture, and structure of the societies in which they developed. In ancient Greece, the Olympic Games began in 776 BC, fostering a spirit of competition and physical prowess among free male citizens, while women and slaves were excluded. This exclusivity laid an early foundation for gender and class disparities in sport. Similarly, ancient China featured martial arts and archery competitions, often tied to military training and the ruling elite, further emphasising hierarchical power structures.

In the Roman Empire, gladiator games and chariot races were spectacles controlled by the state and used to demonstrate power, control the masses, and reinforce social hierarchies. These events showcased the brutal exercise of power, where the lives of participants were often at the mercy of the rulers. The impact of these early sports extended beyond mere physical activity, fostering community cohesion and offering platforms for social interaction while also reinforcing societal norms and power structures.

Throughout history, sport has been a tool for diplomacy, health promotion, and national pride, yet it has also mirrored and perpetuated societal inequalities. The influence of colonialism saw Western sports being imposed on colonised regions, often disregarding indigenous games and reinforcing cultural hegemony. This historical context of exclusion and dominance has profoundly shaped modern sports' organisational structures and cultures.



MODERN-DAY POWER IMBALANCES IN SPORT THROUGH A GENDERED LENS

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Despite the positive impacts, modern sport is not without its power imbalances, particularly through a gendered lens. Historically, sport has been male-dominated, with women's participation often restricted or undervalued. While significant progress has been made in promoting gender equality, disparities remain.

Women athletes often receive less media coverage, lower pay, and fewer sponsorship opportunities compared to their male counterparts. This inequity is rooted in longstanding societal norms and institutional biases. Additionally, female athletes are sometimes subject to objectification and inappropriate scrutiny over their appearance rather than their performance.

Power imbalances also manifest in leadership roles within sports organisations, where men predominantly hold decision-making positions. This lack of representation affects policy-making and the prioritization of women's sports issues.

The legacy of exclusionary practices and the hierarchical nature of early sports have contributed to problematic power dynamics in contemporary settings. These dynamics often manifest as abuses of power, where coaches, officials, or other authority figures exploit their positions. This exploitation can take various forms, from coercive control and emotional manipulation to sexual abuse and financial exploitation.

Understanding the historical context of sport helps us recognise why these power imbalances persist and why certain individuals might abuse their positions. It underscores the importance of proactive measures to address and dismantle these dynamics, promoting a more equitable and safe environment for all participants.



CHAPTER 3

STUDENT-ATHLETE AGENCY

Boundaries and Consent

Establishing boundaries and understanding consent are crucial for maintaining healthy relationships and personal well-being in sports environments. For student-athletes who might occupy various roles within university and college sports—such as club president, athlete, friend, welfare officer and teammate—navigating these concepts is particularly important.

Understanding Boundaries

Boundaries are the physical, emotional, and mental limits we establish to protect ourselves from being overextended, stressed, or manipulated. They ensure respect, safety, and a healthy balance in relationships. For student-athletes in multiple roles, clear boundaries help manage the complexities of their interactions and responsibilities.

Physical Boundaries

These involve your personal space and physical touch. As an athlete, it's important to communicate your comfort levels regarding physical contact, whether it's during practice, competition, or social interactions. For example, a coach should always seek consent before initiating physical adjustments in training.

Emotional Boundaries

These protect your feelings and emotional well-being. They are essential in maintaining healthy relationships, especially when roles overlap. For instance, as a club president or welfare officer, you need to manage your emotional availability to avoid burnout and ensure you can effectively support others.

Time Boundaries

These involve how you allocate your time and energy. Balancing multiple roles requires setting clear limits on your availability. Prioritise your commitments and communicate clearly when you need time for rest or personal activities.



STUDENT-ATHLETE AGENCY

Understanding Consent

Consent is a clear, voluntary, and informed agreement to participate in an activity or interaction. It's a fundamental aspect of respect and autonomy in all relationships, whether athletic, professional, or personal.

Active Consent

Consent should always be active, not passive. This means ensuring that all parties involved clearly express their willingness to participate. For example, before organising a late training session, ensure all team members explicitly agree to the schedule.

Ongoing Consent

Consent isn't a one-time check; it's an ongoing process. Continuously check in with yourself and others to ensure comfort and agreement in all activities. For example, if a teammate initially agrees to a specific training intensity but later shows signs of discomfort, it's crucial to reassess and respect their current feelings.

Mutual Respect

Consent must be mutual and based on respect. Recognise and honour the autonomy and choices of others. For instance, as a welfare officer, ensure you respect the privacy and boundaries of those seeking your support, even if you're friends outside the sports context.

Navigating multiple roles

As a Club President and Athlete

Balance leadership responsibilities with your own training and well-being. Set clear boundaries with teammates to ensure professional conduct during club activities while maintaining camaraderie outside official roles.

As a Romantic Partner and Teammate

Balance personal relationships with team dynamics by establishing clear boundaries. Avoid favoritism or conflicts of interest by maintaining professionalism during team activities.

As a Welfare Officer and Friend

Strive to maintain confidentiality and professional boundaries when supporting friends. Separate personal feelings from your duties to ensure impartial and effective support.



STUDENT-ATHLETE AGENCY

Practical Tips for Establishing Boundaries and Consent

Communicate Clearly

Openly discuss your boundaries and expectations with coaches, teammates, and friends. Clear communication helps prevent misunderstandings and ensures everyone is on the same page.

Listen Actively

Pay attention to others' verbal and non-verbal cues. Respect their boundaries and consent, and encourage an environment where everyone feels safe to express their limits.

Be Assertive

Don't be afraid to assert your boundaries. It's okay to say no or ask for changes in arrangements that make you uncomfortable. Assertiveness fosters respect and understanding.

Educate Yourself and Others

Engage in training and discussions on boundaries and consent. Promote awareness within your sports community to foster a culture of respect and safety.

Reflect Regularly

Take time to reflect on your boundaries and experiences. Regular self-assessment helps you stay in tune with your needs and ensures you can effectively manage your various roles.



CHAPTER 4

KNOWING THE SIGNS

This chapter will help equip you with the skills to spot abuse, though the signs listed are not exhaustive. If you notice a combination of these warning signs, it is time to seek help and advice. You do not need to wait for 'proof' to report a concern - you should talk to a designated welfare officer or safeguarding lead as soon as possible.

Spotting generally concerning behaviours from practitioners

- Insisting on physical affection such as hugging, tickling, etc.
- Refusing to allow an athlete privacy or to make their own decisions about personal matters.
- Being overly interested in the sexual development of a child or teenage athlete.
- Insisting on time alone with an athlete with no interruptions.
- Favouritism, making a particular athlete feel 'special' compared with others.
- Picking on a particular athlete, talking about them negatively with the rest of the training group.
- Discussing or sharing sexual jokes or materials with an athlete online or offline.
- Paying for things like physio or massage for athletes, buying expensive gifts or giving participants money. This might seem well-intentioned but can exacerbate power imbalances with the participant feeling they owe something to the individual.



If there is an immediate risk of harm to a child or young person then please report straight to the Police.



Behaviours perpetrated by practitioners that might suggest there is abuse occurring, categorised by different forms of abuse:

Physical Abuse:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury
- Encourages or forces athletes to train through injury or illness
- Using excessive physical force such as causing harm or pain (particularly relevant in sports that involve manual support from practitioners).
- Uses harsh physical discipline

Emotional/Psychological Abuse:

- To constantly blame, belittle, or berate
- Being unconcerned about an athlete or individual in your duty of care and refusing to consider offers of help for their problems
- To overtly reject or dismiss an individual in your duty of care
- To give individuals in their duty of care the silent treatment, or treat them differently in response to a perceived slight or disappointment (e.g poor performance, injury)

Sexual Abuse:

- When practitioners are unduly protective of an individual or severely limit the individual in their duty of care's contact with others.
- Being secretive and isolated
- Behaving in a jealous or controlling way with family members of individuals in their duty of care
- Constantly watching an individual and all their interactions
- Taking unsolicited photos

Neglect:

- Appearing to be indifferent to an individual in their duty of care
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs



SPOTTING ATHLETES IN TROUBLE

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This is again not an exhaustive list but are some key behaviours to be aware of. There are many reasons why an athlete's behaviour may change, but you should always check for these signs.

Behaviour Changes

- Becoming withdrawn or very clingy
- Suddenly having nightmares or other sleeping problems
- Regressing to younger behaviours
- Unaccountable fear of particular places or people
- Personality changes or suddenly seems insecure. Outbursts of anger, being very defensive
- Changes in eating habits
- Becoming secretive
- Having unexplained gifts such as toys, money, mobile phones, expensive clothes
- An increased risk of violent behaviour
- Antisocial behaviour
- Involvement in crime at any age
- Substance use
- Inappropriate sexual exploration / language for their age and development towards their peers.

Emotional/Psychological Changes

- Low self-esteem
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Post-traumatic stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Anorexia nervosa, anorexia nervosa athletica or disordered eating
- Poor body image
- Mistrust of others
- Poor peer relationships
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Self-harming
- Suicide

Sports Performance Changes

- Diminished performance
- Feeling obligated to continue with the sport
- Looking forward to the end of the season (counting down days)
- Changes in motivation and reduced enjoyment (possibly leading to burnout and quitting sports)
- Impaired focus
- Difficulties with gaining new skills

If you notice a combination of these warning signs, it is time to seek help and advice. You do not need to wait for 'proof' to report a concern - you should talk to a designated welfare officer or safeguarding lead as soon as possible. If there is an immediate risk of harm to a child or young person then please report straight to the Police.



SPOTTING STUDENT ATHLETES IN TROUBLE

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These behaviours demonstrated by participants might suggest there is abuse occurring, We have categorised them by different forms of abuse:

Physical Abuse:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes which the child may be hesitant to talk about or try to keep them covered
- Change in dress for practice to cover unexplained bumps or bruises
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after a practice or travel with the team
- Seems frightened of any of the staff and protests or becomes withdrawn when it is time to go to practice
- Reports injury by a coach, teacher or any one else within the institution

Emotional/Psychological Abuse:

- Shows extremes in behaviour, such as overly compliant or demanding behaviour, extreme passivity, or aggression
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other students, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking for example)

Sexual Abuse:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behaviour
- Sexually Transmitted Infections

Neglect:

- Begs or steals food or money
- Has injuries that are not cared for, or is forced to continue with training or competing with an injury
- Reports inadequate equipment for training or competition
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at training or competition that is supervising the athletes
- Alludes to a pattern of hazing or bullying within the team/group
- Stealing sporting equipment or other goods from the club

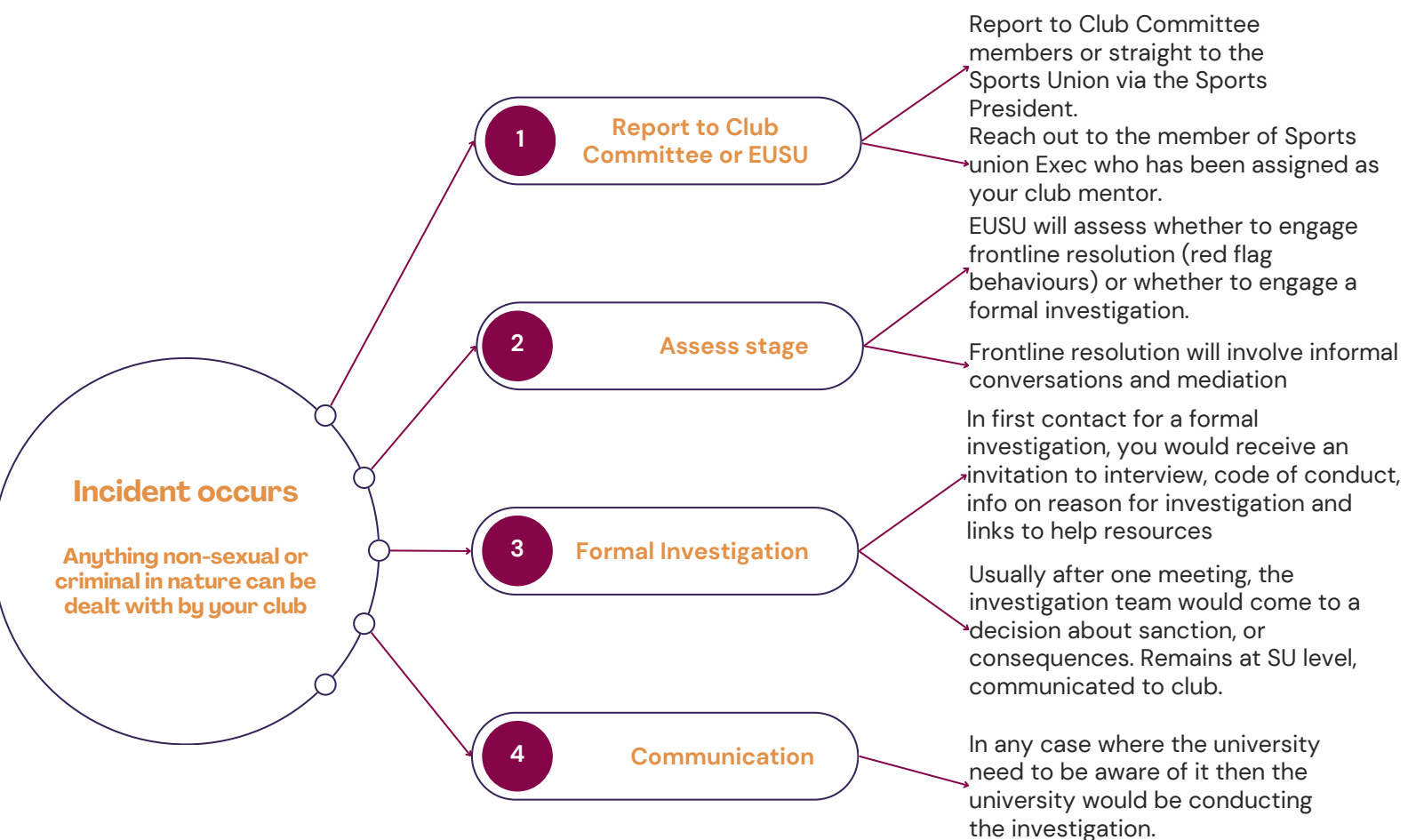


This chapter is to help give you information around reporting at Edinburgh University.

Who is responsible?

1. Club Committee Members can help you with on-pitch behaviour and know to signpost you to the right place for other concerns.
2. The Sports President at the Edinburgh University Sports Union can assist with escalation from clubs.
3. Harassment, bullying and gender-based violence will be covered by the University.

The Process



Wellbeing Services

Support and Report

Mental Health Signposting

SU Code of Conduct



This chapter will help you navigate some of the trickier language used in this space to help you feel confident when talking about safeguarding and welfare.

Vulnerable vs. Legally Vulnerable*

Being in a sports setting as a participant, whether a child or an adult, creates vulnerabilities because of the power imbalance between athletes/participants and their coaches. This is particularly true for children.

Having vulnerabilities refers to individuals who may be susceptible to harm, exploitation or adverse circumstances due to factors such as mental health conditions, or other personal circumstances.

Being an athlete or sports participant makes you vulnerable by default; you are inherently vulnerable as you set goals and objectives, and open yourself to trusting those with another person who could use them to manipulate you.

These vulnerabilities may impact a person's ability to protect themselves, make informed decisions, or advocate for their own wellbeing. Recognising and addressing vulnerabilities is crucial in creating supportive and protective sports environments to ensure the safety and dignity of individuals who may be more susceptible to harm.

A “vulnerable adult” means a person aged 18 or over who is receiving services such as:

- accommodation and nursing or personal care in a care home;
- personal care or nursing or support to live independently in his own home;
- any services provided by an independent hospital, independent clinic, independent medical agency or National Health Service body;
- social care services; or
- any services provided in an establishment catering for a person with learning difficulties.

Is in consequence of a condition such as:

- a learning or physical disability;
- a physical or mental illness, chronic or otherwise, including an addiction to alcohol or drugs; or
- a reduction in physical or mental capacity.

Or, has a disability of a type listed below:

- a dependency upon others in the performance of, or a requirement for assistance in the performance of, basic physical functions;
- severe impairment in the ability to communicate with others; or
- impairment in a person's ability to protect himself from assault, abuse or neglect.



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY AND SENSITIVELY 25

When communicating with complainants/people with lived experience:

01. It is better to say “we’ll do everything we can to help you” as this leaves it open if some outcomes are not possible.
02. When corresponding with an individual who has reported a concern, it's crucial to approach the communication with sensitivity, empathy, and a focus on support.
03. Empathise with the complainant's distress e.g. “I am sorry you feel [angry, distressed, hurt].” “I recognise this is very difficult”.
04. Acknowledge the difficulty in coming forward e.g. “It is challenging to speak up about this type of behaviour” without jeopardising any potential investigation.
05. Express gratitude for their willingness to share their experience. E.g. “Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention. Your courage in sharing your concerns is important, and we take them seriously.”
06. Keep language clear and empathetic. Instead of using legal jargon, choose clear and empathetic language such as, “We understand that this may be a difficult time for you, and we are committed to ensuring a fair and thorough investigation.”
07. Offer information on available support services, counselling, or resources that the individual can access if needed.
08. Ensure they are aware of avenues for seeking assistance beyond the organisation's internal processes. Include links to MH resources (see page 15) , practical support, and supported reporting where appropriate. You could say, for example, “If you feel the need to speak with a counsellor or seek additional support, we can provide you with information on available resources. Your wellbeing is important to us.”



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY AND SENSITIVELY 26

Communicating with alleged perpetrators/persons subject of the complaint;

01. Use a firm and factual approach without implicating the anonymity of the complainant.

Example "We are writing to inform you that a concern has been reported, and an investigation is underway. The purpose of this communication is to gather your perspective on the matter."

02. Encourage the alleged perpetrator to provide their side of the story and any relevant information that may assist in the investigation.

Example: "It is important for us to gather information from all parties involved to ensure a fair and unbiased investigation. Your cooperation in providing your perspective is crucial to this process."

03. Signpost them to MH resources, acknowledging that taking part in an investigation can be challenging, and where appropriate (in cases where there may be judicial action) resources like The Defendant

Example: "I am sorry you feel [angry, distressed, hurt]." "I recognise this is very difficult". "We understand that participating in an investigation can be challenging. If you find it helpful, we can provide information on mental health resources that may offer support during this time."



What is Victim Blaming?

Victim blaming is any language or action that implies (whether intentionally or unintentionally) that a person is partially or wholly responsible for abuse that has happened to them. It is harmful and can wrongfully place responsibility, shame or blame onto a victim, making them feel that they are complicit or responsible for the harm they have experienced.

Avoid accusatory statements and lines of questioning such as:

"Did you do anything to provoke it?"

This question implies that the victim's actions may have caused the abuse, contributing to victim-blaming. It is essential to focus on the alleged perpetrator's responsibility.

This is also important when documenting any concerns in reports/referrals.

Case Study:

In a well-known case in London of an 11 year old girl who had been sexually abused, a report referred to her as "displaying promiscuous behaviour"- this is very emotive language that implies it is the fault of the child.



Do use language that is neutral, non-judgmental, and avoids making assumptions about the individual's actions or choices.

Example:

Instead of saying, *"Why did you not report this sooner?"* you can say, *"We appreciate you coming forward now, and we are committed to addressing your concerns."*



CHAPTER 6

SIGNPOST TO SAFETY

This chapter is designed to give you context on different forms of support and specifically where to signpost people to.

Psychological support

This support typically involves access to a range of services aimed at addressing the psychological impact of abuse, including counselling, therapy, and support from Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) who can be used by any individual of any age.

These services offer a safe and confidential space for individuals to explore their experiences, process their emotions, and develop coping strategies to manage the psychological effects of abuse.

Sports organisations should also provide information and resources to connect participants with reputable counselling or psychotherapy services, either within their organisation or through external referral pathways.

Partnering with organisations that specialise in trauma recovery and mental health support can ensure that survivors receive the comprehensive care they need to heal and thrive

Practical support

Practical assistance is a cornerstone of support for individuals impacted by abuse, offering immediate aid and guidance in navigating the practical challenges stemming from their experiences.

This means providing comprehensive information about available resources and services, including shelters, hotlines, legal aid organisations, healthcare providers, and financial assistance programs.

Sports organisations can contribute by creating easily accessible resource guides or directories, ensuring individuals have access to essential support systems.



Emotional Support

While psychological support focuses on addressing the mental and emotional effects of abuse through counselling, therapy, and other interventions, emotional support emphasises creating a supportive environment where individuals feel heard, valued, and validated in their experiences. Emotional support can take various forms, including:

Active listening: Providing individuals with opportunities to express their feelings, concerns, and experiences without judgement or interruption. This involves attentive listening, empathy, and validation of their emotions.

Empowerment: Encouraging individuals to regain a sense of control and agency over their lives by offering them choices, respecting their decisions, and supporting their autonomy.

Peer support: Facilitating connections with other survivors or individuals who have experienced similar challenges, either through support groups, peer mentoring programs, or online communities. Peer support offers a sense of belonging, understanding, and solidarity.

Validation and affirmation: Acknowledging individuals' experiences, feelings, and reactions as valid and understandable. Affirming their strengths, resilience, and progress can boost their self-esteem and confidence.

Culturally sensitive care: recognising and respecting individuals' cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and values when providing emotional support. Cultural competency ensures that support services are inclusive, respectful, and relevant to diverse populations.

Trauma-informed care: adopting an approach that acknowledges the pervasive impact of trauma on individuals' lives and behaviours. Trauma-informed care emphasises safety, choice, collaboration, and empowerment in supporting people with lived experience of abuse



Resource	Contact Information	Type of Support
Police - Emergency	999	Practical
Police - Non-Emergency	101	Practical
Army of Survivors	Home The Army of Survivors	Practical and Emotional
Athlete Interactions	Athlete Interactions	Emotional
Care Scotland	https://www.careengland.org.uk/	Practical
Childline Under 12	0800 1111 childline.org.uk/kids	Practical
Childline Over 12	childline.org.uk	Practical
Kyniska Advocacy	https://www.kyniskaadvocacy.com/support	Practical and Emotional
Men's Advice line	https://mensadvice.org.uk 0808 8010327	Practical and Emotional
Modern Slavery Helpline	www.modernslaveryhelpline.org 0300 0121 700 (24 hours)	Practical and Emotional
National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans+, Domestic Abuse Helpline	http://www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse/ 0800 999 5428	Emotional and Psychological
The Survivors Trust	https://thesurvivorstrust.org/support-in-your-area/	Emotional, Practical and Psychological
Refuge – National Domestic Abuse Helpline	http://www.refuge.org.uk 0808 2000 247 (24 hours)	Emotional, Practical and Psychological
Women's Aid Helpline	https://womensaid.org.uk	Emotional, Practical and Psychological
National Domestic Abuse Helpline	http://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/0808 2000 247 (run by Refuge)	Emotional, Practical and Psychological
Sporting Minds	Raising Awareness For Positive Mental Health In Sport Sporting Wellness	Emotional
The Mix	https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support free information and support for under 25s in the UK – 0808 808 4994	Emotional
The Defendant	https://thedefendant.org.uk/	Practical and Emotional
Samaritans	https://www.samaritans.org/116 123	Emotional
Victim Support	victimsupport.org.uk 0800 160 1985	Practical and Psychological
Rights of Women	https://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/	Practical
Anti Bullying Alliance	Website here	Practical and emotional
Sport Resolutions	https://www.sportresolutions.com/athletes	Practical
Sport Integrity	https://www.sportintegrity.com/	Practical



THE STUDENT ATHLETE WELFARE & WELLBEING GUIDE

