Training recommendations from inquiries into safeguarding practice in sport
Sports-sector national governing bodies and funders briefing

Introduction

The aim of this briefing is to help national governing bodies (NGBs) and those who fund the sports and physical activity sector strengthen their child protection and safeguarding training by learning from the recommendations in previous reviews into sports organisations.

Note: See Learning from inquiries about safeguarding practice in sport for a more detailed report, which includes a list of references and the safeguarding reviews considered in producing this briefing paper.

The full report identified 6 summary points of collective areas of concerns raised when the different safeguarding reports were reviewed. This paper only focuses on the training requirements recommendations.

Training requirements recommendations

Concern was repeatedly mentioned that staff and volunteers are not always required by sports organisations to attend tutor-led safeguarding training to enable them to learn from their peers or from experienced tutors. Consistent messages in the reviews highlight the importance of safeguarding training to raise awareness and understanding of roles and responsibilities, and that it must be made compulsory as part of club affiliation and coach award.

The fact that tutor-led safeguarding training is not compulsory undermines its priority and adds to an inconsistent approach across the sector. The importance of safeguarding training in building confidence and providing clarity of responsibility is highlighted by Edge Hill University:

’Increases in self-perceived confidence were higher among the tutor-led cohorts compared to the online cohort, particularly in understanding safeguarding. The impact of training on learner confidence was also stronger within the tutor-led cohorts for those with no prior training or experience.’ (Hartill M. et al, 2021; p.6)

Key solutions to gaps in training

The training needs to focus not only on how to recognise and respond to child protection concerns, but also assist in the development of a safe culture within the sport and how to communicate with young people. The focus of coach education should not only be about the sharing of skills and knowledge but how to retain young people in sport.

Who training is for

Appropriate training and/or information should be made available for:

- parents and carers, from grassroots through to elite level
- all young people

Training recommendations

Appropriate training and/or information should be **compulsory** for:

- the board and senior management – every 3 years or as part of the induction process for all new board members, focusing on their strategic role in implementing safeguarding procedures. 
  
  There was a consistent message across the reviews calling for more management board ownership of safeguarding, with the need for board safeguarding training and a priority for appointing a board champion.

- all those in regulated activity – whether voluntary or paid – with a requirement to refresh their knowledge (continuous professional development) as a condition of their affiliation or their coaching award.

What training is required

Baseline awareness

All staff, coaches and volunteers should receive **safeguarding training** relevant and proportionate to the role they fulfil for the sport. This training must clarify what procedures to follow and help attendees understand their role in protecting children, regardless of whether they work directly with children and young people or not.

Tutor-led training

For anyone in a role with regular or significant responsibility for children (for example, coaches, club welfare officers, team managers and chaperones), initial safeguarding training must be interactive or (as a minimum) include a significant interactive element. This guidance is informed by research from Edge Hill University commissioned by Sport England.

Training plans

As part of a sports organisation’s 3- to 5-year safeguarding strategy, they should develop a training plan, with the resources and board or management ownership to ensure the targets are met.

Communication

Alongside the training and education resources for volunteers and coaches, information from sports organisations needs to be clearly communicated with parents and children. This should include communication appropriate to the age of the audience.

Online safety was highlighted in some of the reports as a specific area where communication to young people and their parents is important, including information about expectations around the use of social media, behaviour while using social media, and safeguarding issues across the online environment.

Focus and priority

There is a need for sports organisations to examine the style of coaching practice they want. Sports need to move from a culture of just focusing on increasing participation of young people to one of increasing retention of those young people to ensure a life-long involvement in and love of sport. This can only happen by increasing the focus on making the activity inclusive, safe, fun and enjoyable for all.

Monitoring

Organisations should build on current affiliation requirements and ensure training standards are in place within the sport. Systems should be put in place to note when an individual needs to refresh their knowledge with clear instruction on how to do this as part of their continuous professional development. This should be supported by an internal club self-auditing process to enable clubs at a local level to review their own possible training gaps among members, volunteers and staff.