

Preventing sexual harassment among young people at sports clubs

Coaches can use these instructions to prevent sexual harassment in their groups or teams. You should also go through these steps if sexual harassment has already occurred in a group.

1. Revise the rules of the group

It is advisable to begin each season by setting clear, shared expectations and rules for behaviour. When examining behavioural expectations, you should also explain what kind of behaviour is unacceptable. Coaches should remind participants that sexual harassment will not be accepted.

2. Provide athletes with information about sexual harassment

Discuss sexual harassment together with the entire team or group. Examine what sexual harassment is.

What is sexual harassment?

- Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour that violates a person's sexual autonomy or bodily integrity.
- Sexual harassment has overlaps with bullying.
- Anyone can be the target of sexual harassment: girls, boys, non-binary and transgender people, and people of any age.
- Sexual harassment often creates an intimidating, humiliating, or distressing atmosphere.
- Sexual harassment occurs in all sports and at every level.

Examples of sexual harassment

- inappropriate sexual comments, such as jokes or sexually charged remarks or questions about a person's body or intimate private life
- sexual gestures or expressions, such as making gestures that refer to masturbation or intercourse
- inappropriate sexual content on different social media channels, WhatsApp and Snapchat messages, text messages, emails, telephone calls
- suggestions or demands for intercourse or other sexual acts

The examples mentioned above are offences if carried out by an adult or clearly older minor to a child or young person under the age of consent. They can also constitute an offence, such as sexual harassment, between people who are above the age of consent. Non-consensually touching another person in intimate areas, such as the buttocks, thighs, breast or genital areas, can meet the criteria for an offence regardless of the age of the target.

The differences between sexual harassment and flirting

Harassment

- Acts that violate another person's sexual autonomy
- One-sided
- Not based on consent
- Does not stop even if you ask the other person to stop
- Feels unpleasant to the target

Flirting

- Interaction that demonstrates romantic or sexual interest towards another person
- Mutual
- Both parties have given their consent through expressions, gestures, or words
- Both parties can stop the flirting if they wish
- Feels pleasant to both parties

The differences between good and bad touch

Bad touch

- Makes you feel confused, afraid, angry
- Feels threatening, oppressive, pressurising, coercive
- Does not stop when you ask
- Is physically or emotionally painful
- Makes you want to leave

Good touch

- Feels good and nice
- Puts you in a good mood
- Ends no later than when you want it to end
- Is mutual

3. Give athletes information about the consequences of sexual harassment

Together with the team or group, explain the effects that harassment can have.

For the perpetrator

- disciplinary measures applied by the club
- the matter may constitute an offence, whereupon it is the task of the police to investigate the matter and question the suspect
- the police can investigate sexual harassment as e.g. defamation, assault, sexual molestation or sexual abuse
- feelings of shame and guilt, plus a feeling of exclusion after the act is made public

For the victim

- fear, humiliation, distress, helplessness, guilt, shame, self-reproach
- difficulties trusting other people, feeling like an outsider
- difficulties with and fear of participating in practice

The recreational environment

- the group or team's cohesion will suffer if people take sides regarding sexual harassment
- absences from practice
- other people's guilt or distress that they were unable to help or intervene
- fear of becoming a victim of sexual harassment in the future

4. Remind athletes of how they can intervene in any harassment they observe or experience

Sexual harassment is enabled by a bystander culture in which no one in the environment intervenes in the harassment. Reiterate that it is ultimately the responsibility of an adult to intervene. Encourage athletes to tell someone if they observe or experience sexual harassment. Inform them who they can tell about sexual harassment.

Option 1: Confront the perpetrator and tell an adult

Together with the athletes, think about what you can say to the perpetrator if you see something that constitutes sexual harassment towards another person.

- "That's not OK."
- "Do you understand that what you're doing/saying is really hurtful?"
- "No one should talk to other people like that."

Option 2: Stop the situation, help the victim to leave the situation and tell an adult.

- If directly confronting the perpetrator feels unsafe, leave. Tell an adult, such as a coach, about the sexual harassment you witnessed. Do not stay and watch or laugh at the sexual harassment.
- Tell the perpetrator and other bystanders that you do not accept sexual harassment. Encourage others to leave the situation and tell a coach what happened.
- You can help a victim of sexual harassment to leave the situation. Ask the victim if they want to leave with you. You can ask other bystanders for their support.
 - "I don't agree with that. Let's leave and ask XX to come with us."
 - "Hey XX, I want to talk to you. Can you come with me?"

Option 3: Speak with the victim of harassment in private and tell an adult

- Tell the victim of harassment that the sexual harassment is not their fault.
- Offer to accompany the victim to tell a coach or other adult about the sexual harassment.

Option 4: Tell a coach or other trusted adult

The responsibility for intervening in sexual harassment always lies with an adult.

What can you do if you encounter sexual harassment?

- You always have the right to leave a situation without saying a word or asking anyone's permission.
- Tell the perpetrator that their behaviour is offensive or unpleasant, and that they should stop.
- Remember not to blame yourself for the harassment even if you are unable to defend yourself! Tell a trusted adult about the harassment and demand that action is taken.

5. Play a role in creating an environment that opposes sexual harassment

A coach can help to create an environment that opposes sexual harassment through their everyday words and actions.

- Avoid using gendered expressions that reinforce stereotypes, such as "boys'/girls' sports", "throw like a girl", "man up".
- Use gender-neutral speech. "You can ask your family, friends, and partners to watch a performance/competition/match."
- Ask permission before you touch a child or young person. Explain why you are touching them when e.g. assisting them. This will reinforce their right to their own body and boundaries.
- Always intervene in any offensive language relating to gender and sexuality. Passive attitudes, bystanding, denying events, or remaining silent all give the impression to the victim and the group that sexual harassment is acceptable.
- Do not joke or question athletes about their intimate life. Refrain from making any sexual comments or jokes.
- Strive to create an open atmosphere. Explain that athletes can confidentially report any harassment they experience. A person who has experienced harassment may remain quiet about sexual harassment in order to keep their position on a team or to retain their privacy.
- Always try to speak about athletes with respect. Treat athletes as holistic individuals. Do not objectify athletes or comment on their weight, whether or not they are going through puberty, or their muscles.

Sources:

Ei meidän koulussa (*Not in our school*). <http://www.eimeidankoulussa.fi/?lang=en>
https://www.ouka.fi/documents/64277/104164/Seksuaalinen_hairinta.pdf/725a79ad-78ff-49b5-8285-909bce86a5b4

Safeguarding athletes from harassment and abuse in sport IOC Toolkit for IFs and NOCs