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# PCSOS Training

## Strategies for Creating a Safe Sports Environment

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# Module103: Strategies for Creating a Safe Sports Environment



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# What is a Safe Environment?

- What is a Safe Environment?: A safe environment in sport is defined as an inclusive and supportive sporting climate where all participants, especially children and young athletes, are free from physical, psychological, emotional, and social threats, as well as all forms of abuse, violence, and discrimination (Mountjoy et al., 2015).
- Key Concepts
- **Physical Safety:** This includes ensuring training fields, sports halls, and other facilities comply with safety standards; sports equipment is healthy and age-appropriate; and athletes are protected from overtraining, injuries, physical neglect, and abuse (Öztürk & Aşçı, 2024).
- **Psychological and Emotional Safety:** The foundation of psychological safety is shielding athletes from attitudes and behaviors that damage self-confidence, humiliate, oppress, or demean them, and ensuring support from coaches, families, and administrators (Dümangöz & Horozoğlu, 2021).
- **Social Safety and Inclusion:** Socially safe environments in sport guarantee that no individual faces discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic differences, and provide equal opportunities to all athletes, forming the basis of egalitarian approaches in sport (UNESCO, 2015).

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# Principles of Physical Safety: Facilities and Equipment

- Physical safety is considered one of the fundamental determinants in ensuring a safe environment in sport.
- Especially in sporting activities involving children and young athletes, the structural suitability of facilities and the compliance of equipment with standards play a critical role in preventing potential accidents and injuries.
- Ensuring physical safety not only protects the individual's bodily integrity but also contributes to building a sense of security within the sports environment and enhances athletes' long-term motivation to participate (Anadolu University, 2023).

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# Principles of Physical Safety: Facilities and Equipment

- **Facility Safety:** The physical safety of sports facilities should be evaluated in terms of both architectural design and structural integrity. Key safety measures that must be present in facilities include:
  - **Flooring and Surface Characteristics:** The floors of sports areas should be selected according to the specific sport, featuring non-slip, shock-absorbing properties that minimize the risk of injury.
  - **Lighting and Ventilation:** Facilities must be equipped with adequate natural or artificial lighting, and ventilation systems should ensure a hygienic and breathable environment.
  - **Emergency Exits and First Aid Facilities:** All facilities should have emergency exit doors, fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and accessible healthcare personnel.
  - **Accessibility:** Ramps, elevators, and appropriate arrangements must be provided to ensure safe access for individuals with disabilities.
  - **Maintenance and Inspection:** Periodic maintenance and safety inspections of facilities enable the early detection of physical risks.

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# Child-Specific Risk Factors in Sport

- **Equipment Safety**

The safety of sports equipment is of great importance both for performance and health. The key principles to consider in equipment use are as follows:

- **Compliance with Standards:** All equipment used (balls, rackets, helmets, protective clothing, etc.) must comply with standards set by national and international sports federations.
- **Suitability for Age and Physical Characteristics:** The size and weight of equipment should vary according to the athlete's age, gender, and physical characteristics. Specially designed equipment for child athletes should be preferred.
- **Use of Protective Gear:** In certain sports disciplines (e.g., football, cycling, boxing), the use of protective equipment (helmet, knee pads, mouthguard) must be mandatory and strictly monitored.
- **Hygiene and Maintenance:** Regular cleaning and hygienic storage of shared sports equipment reduce infection risks and extend the equipment's lifespan.
- **Education and Awareness:** Informing athletes and coaches about proper equipment use helps prevent accidents caused by improper handling.

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# Health, Hygiene, and Emergency Preparedness

- In ensuring a safe sports environment, the safety of physical structures and equipment is as vital as the accessibility of health services, maintenance of hygiene standards, and the level of preparedness for emergencies.
- Particularly in sports environments involving intense physical contact, risks such as the spread of infectious diseases, sudden injuries, and crisis situations can directly threaten athletes' health.
- Therefore, establishing a comprehensive and sustainable system for health, hygiene, and emergency preparedness in sports facilities is indispensable.

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# Health, Hygiene, and Emergency Preparedness

- Accessibility and Organization of Health Services Rapid and effective intervention in potential health issues in sports settings is a priority to protect the quality of life and safety of athletes. Health services should be evaluated in terms of:
  - **Presence of Sports Physicians and Health Personnel:** Facilities must have trained health personnel capable of responding to injuries, fainting, or exacerbations of chronic conditions during training or competition. It is especially important to provide developmentally appropriate health services for children and young athletes.
  - **Regular Health Screenings:** Periodic health screenings conducted before sports participation and at regular intervals help identify potential risk factors in athletes in advance. Early detection of cardiovascular risks, musculoskeletal disorders, and infectious diseases is targeted during this process.
  - **First Aid Facilities:** Each sports facility must have a fully equipped first aid kit in an accessible location. It is both a legal and ethical requirement that coaches and relevant personnel receive basic first aid training.

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# Health, Hygiene, and Emergency Preparedness

- **Ensuring Hygiene Conditions:** Hygiene is a fundamental factor both in protecting individual health and preventing infectious diseases in shared spaces. In sports environments, hygiene conditions should be addressed in the following aspects:
- **Facility Cleaning Regimen:** Training and competition areas, locker rooms, showers, and restrooms must be cleaned and disinfected daily. Hygiene protocols should be strictly implemented, especially in common-use areas such as swimming pools and indoor sports halls.
- **Equipment Hygiene:** Shared sports equipment such as balls, weights, and mats should be cleaned after use to reduce infection risks. Disinfection procedures for commonly used items must be standardized.
- **Personal Hygiene Education:** Regular information sessions should be provided to athletes and coaches on personal cleanliness, handwashing habits, and the avoidance of sharing towels and clothing. These trainings are particularly effective in raising hygiene awareness among children.

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# Health, Hygiene, and Emergency Preparedness

- **Level of Preparedness for Emergencies:** Being prepared for emergencies such as fires, earthquakes, sudden injuries, fainting, and heart attacks in sports facilities is a crucial component of organizational safety. Emergency preparedness should be planned according to the following fundamental principles:
- **Emergency Plans:** Each facility must have a comprehensive emergency action plan that includes procedures for scenarios such as fire, natural disasters, and medical emergencies.
- **Trained Personnel:** Facility staff should be trained in emergency management and evacuation procedures. Regular fire drills and first aid exercises must be conducted.
- **Equipment and Signage Systems:** Emergency exit signs should be visible and unobstructed, and equipment such as fire extinguishers, emergency lighting, and automated external defibrillators (AEDs) must be readily available.

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# Psychological Safety: Stress, Pressure, and Communication Issues

- Safe sports environments require not only physical safety but also psychological safety — the presence of a social climate where individuals feel free to express themselves, are not afraid of making mistakes, and can engage in learning and development processes in a healthy manner.
- Psychological safety plays a critical role in managing the stress, pressure, and communication problems athletes experience within team relationships, interactions with coaches, and competitive settings.
- Neglecting these factors can adversely affect an athlete's performance and may lead to long-term disengagement from sport, psychological burnout, and mental health issues (Dümangöz & Horozoğlu, 2021).

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# The Role of Stress in the Sports Environment

- Stress is a fundamental factor that can affect both the physical and mental capacities of athletes.
- Athletes may experience stress from various sources such as expectations of success, performance anxiety, pressure from coaches, family expectations, or the nature of competitive environments.
- Particularly in young athletes, insufficient development of stress management skills can lead to low self-confidence and decreased motivation.
- It is important for coaches and sports administrators to recognize individual stressors affecting athletes and provide psychological support mechanisms (such as counseling or consultations with sports psychologists) to help maintain psychological safety.
- It should be remembered that stress is not merely a threat but can also create opportunities for growth when properly managed.



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# Communication Problems and Erosion of Trust

- Effective communication is one of the cornerstones of safety in sports environments.
- Deficiencies or negative forms of communication (such as belittling, ignoring, or using threatening language) within coach-athlete, athlete-athlete, and administrator-parent relationships can seriously damage psychological safety.
- Ensuring psychological safety requires openness, transparency, and mutual respect in communication.
- An environment where athletes can freely express their thoughts, feelings, and needs, and where feedback is constructive rather than judgmental, fosters healthy psychological bonds.
- Particularly when working with adolescent athletes, communication must be tailored to individual differences, based on empathy, and delivered in a supportive manner.

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# Ways to Build a Safe and Inclusive Sports Culture

- Sustaining social safety requires more than just individual attitude changes. At the institutional level, the following steps must be taken:
- **Education and Awareness Programs:** Coaches, administrators, athletes, and families should receive regular training on inclusion, prejudice, microaggressions, and related topics.
- **Anti-Discrimination Policies:** Sports clubs and federations must develop clear, actionable equality policies and implement transparent investigation and sanction mechanisms in cases of violations.
- **Role Model Creation:** The visibility of successful athletes from diverse identities should be increased, presenting diversity as an asset.
- **Structural Arrangements to Increase Participation:** Facilities must be physically accessible, and sports programs should be organized with consideration for socioeconomic barriers.

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# Maintaining and Promoting an Ethical Climate

- Sport is not only a reflection of physical competition but also of values, norms, and social interactions. In this context, an ethical climate refers to an environment where a shared moral understanding exists among all stakeholders in sport; values such as fairness, respect, honesty, and responsibility are internalized both institutionally and individually. The creation, sustainability, and widespread promotion of an ethical climate across all areas of sport are crucial for building a modern and inclusive sports culture (Constandt et al., 2020).
- **What is an Ethical Climate?**  
An ethical climate is the collective perception among members of sports organizations, teams, or institutions regarding how ethical decisions should be made. This climate:
  - Shapes individuals' attitudes toward unethical behaviors,
  - Provides guidance when facing ethical dilemmas,
  - Determines the acceptability level of behaviors,
  - Forms the foundation for trust- and cooperation-based relationships.
  - An ethical climate is shaped not only by individual ethical understanding but also by leadership attitudes, organizational structures, implemented policies, and cultural norms.

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# Safety Priorities for Different Age Groups

- Ensuring safety in sports environments is a fundamental right and responsibility for all individuals; however, it varies according to the developmental characteristics and needs of different age groups.
- Physical, cognitive, social, and emotional developmental levels determine how individuals are affected by sports activities and which safety measures they require.
- Therefore, developing age-sensitive safety approaches not only reduces risks but also enhances the quality and sustainability of the sports experience (American College of Sports Medicine, 2025).

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# Safety Priorities for Different Age Groups

- **Children (Ages 4–12): Developmental Protection and Supervised Participation**

Children in this age group are still developing motor skills, social norms, and self-expression abilities. Therefore, in sports environments:

- **Physical Safety:** Equipment should be age-appropriate in size and made from soft materials. Facilities must be secured against risks such as falling, collisions, and entrapment.
- **Supervision:** Continuous supervision by coaches and teachers is essential. In unsupervised areas, children may engage in risky behaviors.
- **Communication:** Safety rules should be explained in simple language and gamified. A sense of understanding and curiosity should be encouraged rather than fear.
- **Psychological Safety:** Children's right to make mistakes should be supported; guidance should be preferred over criticism, and sensitivity to bullying and exclusion should be emphasized.

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# Safety Priorities for Different Age Groups

- **Adolescents (Ages 13–18): Identity Development and Psychosocial Support**

Adolescence is a period marked by rapid physical capacity growth as well as heightened psychosocial risks. The safety priorities for this age group include:

- **Balance of Physical Load:** Excessive training and inadequate rest can damage growth plates. Training should be planned in accordance with age and developmental stage.
- **Performance Pressure:** As competition intensifies during this period, psychological safety should be ensured through approaches that support self-confidence. Adolescents should not be stigmatized for failures.
- **Privacy:** Special attention must be given to adolescents' privacy in areas such as locker room arrangements and health screenings.
- **Participation and Voice:** Adolescent athletes' opinions should be sought in the development of safety policies, and they should be actively involved in decision-making processes.

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# Community-Based Safety Approaches

- Traditional safety concepts have often been limited to top-down control and supervision mechanisms.
- However, creating a lasting and effective safety culture in today's sports environments requires addressing safety not only at individual or institutional levels but through a community-based approach.
- Community-based safety approaches refer to safety systems that are actively built and sustained by all stakeholders—including athletes, coaches, parents, administrators, and the local community—working together.
- This approach emphasizes that safety is not just a responsibility but also a shared value (American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine, 2023).

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# Protecting Children in Digital Environments

- Similarly, cyberbullying may target children among athletes or originate from fans. For instance, a young athlete being mocked, excluded, or insulted on social media by peers after a performance can negatively impact their psychological health.
- Clubs should educate their athletes about appropriate online conduct and guide them to treat each other with respect. Online privacy is another important consideration: unauthorized sharing of photos of child athletes or disclosure of personal information (such as address details linked to competition lists) on the internet can have undesirable consequences.
- Hence, many organizations require parental consent before using children's images and strictly prohibit publishing them alongside contact details (NSPCC CPSU, 2025).

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