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**PROTECTING CHILDREN
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PCSOS Training

Child Protection: Intervention and Reporting Protocols

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Module104: Child Protection: Intervention and Reporting Protocols



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The Need for Intervention and Reporting in Sport – Fundamental Reasons

- The risks children may face in sports environments create not only a societal responsibility but also a professional ethical obligation. It has been scientifically proven that child abuse and neglect negatively impact children's physical, psychological, and social development.
- Abuse in sport encompasses not only sexual abuse but also physical, emotional, and economic dimensions. Reporting and intervention protocols are indispensable for early warning and effective resolution. Sports administrators and coaches constitute the first line of defense in protecting children's safety.
- Therefore, they must be aware of their ethical responsibilities and legal obligations (Brackenridge et al., 2011). Globally implemented child protection policies recommend that sports organizations develop their own protocols and regularly update them (IOC, 2017). Proper intervention and reporting in this process ensure not only the protection of the victim but also the preservation of the institution's reputation and legal integrity.



Ethical Obligations – Professional Standards and Responsibilities

- Child protection is not only a legal obligation but also a professional ethical responsibility.
- Coaches and sports administrators must provide a safe environment for children by demonstrating trustworthiness and exemplary behavior.
- Ethical codes developed worldwide recognize the protection of children's rights as a fundamental principle (David, 2005; Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014).
- Ethical obligations include respect for confidentiality, fair treatment, the principle of non-maleficence, and the consideration of power imbalances.
- Additionally, the approach of “not intervening without certainty” in suspicious situations prevents further harm to the child. Given the serious consequences of ethical violations, ongoing training and supervision of sports personnel are recommended (Roberts et al., 2019).
- Many federations have established ethical training modules and ethics helplines (UEFA, 2021).

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Actors in the Reporting Process – Who Can Report?

- Individuals who initiate reporting in the context of child protection in sport are not limited to coaches and sports administrators.
- All adults surrounding the child—including coaches, administrators, athlete parents, fellow athletes, field staff, and facility personnel—carry this responsibility (Lang & Hartill, 2015).
- Coaches and administrators, due to their continuous interaction with the child, are often the first to notice signs of possible abuse or neglect.
- However, the responsibility to initiate a report applies to everyone regardless of how they witness the incident or their professional role (Mountjoy et al., 2016).
- Sports federations and clubs should organize informative training sessions for all stakeholders to establish a clear culture regarding who can report and how to do so.
- It must be remembered that the duty to report is not a matter of personal conscience but a corporate and legal obligation.

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Timing and Appropriate Authorities for Reporting – When and Where to Report?

- In child protection processes, timing is a crucial factor in ensuring the child's safety.
- When a suspicious situation is detected or a report is received, it must be reported immediately. Delays can lead to further harm to the child (Brackenridge et al., 2011).
- Within the organization, reporting is first made to the institution's child protection officer or relevant manager, followed by official authorities.
- Internationally, federations may activate their internal reporting mechanisms and independent helplines (Fasting & Brackenridge, 2009).
- Coaches and administrators are required to fulfill their reporting obligations directly, even at the suspicion stage, rather than attempting to “collect evidence.” Reporting should be done not only for confirmed abuse but also in cases of suspicion (UNICEF, 2016).

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Digital Tools and Modern Reporting Methods

- With advancements in technology, digital tools are increasingly being used in child protection reporting processes.
- Online reporting portals, mobile applications, and anonymous reporting systems facilitate the reporting process while enhancing confidentiality (Donnelly & Kerr, 2018).
- For example, many international sports federations have developed secure reporting modules on their websites or mobile apps (IOC, 2022).
- These systems allow users to share details, locations, and timing of incidents either during or after the event.
- Digital reporting tools reduce misunderstandings and delays, while also sending instant alerts to authorized personnel.
- However, periodic training must be provided to all stakeholders for the effective use of these systems, and data security protocols must be strictly enforced (Malkin, 2020).

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The Importance and Limits of the Principle of Confidentiality

- The principle of confidentiality in child protection processes is critical both for ensuring the child's safety and for establishing a fair investigative environment.
- The identity, testimony, and personal information of the child involved in reported incidents must be protected (Gallagher, 2010).
- Confidentiality extends not only to the victim but also to the suspect and other witnesses.
- However, confidentiality is not absolute; if the child's safety is at risk, information must be shared with authorized authorities (UNICEF, 2016; Rhind et al., 2015).
- Organizations should share information only with directly relevant individuals during reporting processes and regularly inform their staff about confidentiality protocols. Failure to do so can result in misinformation, loss of internal trust, and legal issues.
- For sports administrators and coaches, confidentiality is not only an ethical responsibility but also a legal obligation, requiring careful handling in practice.

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Trust-Based Communication with the Child – Practical Approaches

- Trust-based communication with children is crucial for the effectiveness of protection processes.
- Coaches and administrators must use an open, compassionate, and non-judgmental communication style to help children feel safe (Fegert et al., 2013).
- Children should always feel that there is an adult available to talk to in any adverse situation. When asking questions, accusatory language should be avoided, and children should be given time and trust to explain themselves.
- Active listening, maintaining eye contact, patient approach, and age-appropriate language enable children to communicate more comfortably and accurately (Jones et al., 2014).
- Moreover, the child's statements should never be belittled; instead, they must be taken seriously with a clear message that immediate action will be taken.
- This approach encourages children to be more willing to share potential risks and enhances the effectiveness of protection mechanisms.

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Effects of False Reporting and Defamation – Consequences for Organizations and Individuals

- False reporting or unfounded accusations in sports environments can have serious consequences for both victims and the accused individuals.
- False reports damage the credibility of the organization while potentially causing lasting harm to individuals' careers, psychological health, and social reputations (Hartill & Lang, 2021).
- To prevent such situations, organizations must have detailed and multi-stage evaluation processes.
- Accusations or defamations should always be assessed objectively by a professional team (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2011).
- Research indicates that false reporting is rare but can have highly destructive outcomes (Fegert et al., 2013). ,
- Therefore, training programs should emphasize what constitutes false reporting, how it can be prevented, and how to distinguish it from genuine cases.

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Suspicion Management – Professional Approach and Forward Steps

- Managing suspicions of abuse or neglect requires professionalism and sensitivity. Sports administrators and coaches should neither cover up suspected incidents nor attempt to gather evidence or investigate independently (Mountjoy et al., 2016).
- The most appropriate course of action when suspicion arises is to report the matter to the authorized institutional officer or directly to official authorities.
- During reporting, information should be communicated clearly and impartially; only observed facts should be conveyed, avoiding suspicions, assumptions, or interpretations related to the incident (UNICEF, 2016).
- Furthermore, timely reporting of suspicious situations accelerates the protection of the child and prevents potential legal and ethical issues for the institution. Training programs should comprehensively cover the fundamental principles of suspicion management using case examples.

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Communication and Collaboration with Families – Balance and Boundaries

- Informing and involving the family in child protection processes is critical for the child's psychological and social support.
- However, communication with families must comply with confidentiality and legal frameworks (Gallagher, 2010).
- In particular, in cases of abuse, where family members may be potential perpetrators, information sharing should be conducted with caution.
- When a significant issue concerning the child arises, the organization's child protection officer or relevant manager should contact the family, sharing necessary information with the child's best interests in mind and ensuring the family's active involvement in the process.
- However, information sharing may be deferred if authorized authorities do not permit it or if it is deemed detrimental to the integrity of the process (UNICEF, 2016).
- Training programs should provide examples illustrating how to establish trust-based and professionally bounded communication with families.

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Internal Reporting Protocols – Effective Record Keeping

- Effective internal reporting in child protection processes within sports organizations ensures traceability of incidents and efficient process management.
- Reporting begins from the moment suspicion of abuse or neglect is first noticed and covers all stages of the incident in detail (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014).
- Internal reports must clearly document the date and time of the incident, observed findings, involved individuals, and actions taken.
- These records serve as critical evidence in any future legal or administrative investigations. Additionally, they contribute to institutional memory and help prevent similar incidents.
- Sports clubs and federations should develop standardized forms and electronic systems to facilitate the reporting process and provide regular training to all staff members on this matter.

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Post-Incident Follow-Up Processes and Ongoing Support

- After a child protection report is made and intervention is initiated, the child's situation should not only be monitored at the initial stage; continuous follow-up must be ensured throughout all phases of the process.
- Follow-up procedures include monitoring the child's physical and psychological well-being, referring them to health and social services when necessary, and supporting the recovery process.
- Sports clubs should maintain communication with the child and their family post-incident and, if needed, make new arrangements to ensure the child can continue their sports activities safely.
- Additionally, psychosocial support should be provided for other children and staff affected by the incident.
- „Periodic assessments and feedback meetings should be organized during this process to monitor the sustainability of the child's safety and well-being.
- Follow-up and support are not only individual responsibilities but also institutional obligations.

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Post-Process Evaluation and Institutional Learning

- Conducting institutional evaluations after incidents ensures that lessons are learned from the current case and future risks are prevented.
- Organizations should systematically analyze every report and intervention process to identify shortcomings, strengths, and areas needing improvement (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014).
- Based on these analyses, policies and procedures can be updated, training content redesigned, and reporting mechanisms enhanced.
- Furthermore, a culture of internal feedback should be encouraged, and all staff should be informed about incidents to facilitate knowledge sharing.
- Post-process evaluations are not merely retrospective checks but represent a strategic investment to ensure children can participate in sport within a safer environment in the future (Roberts et al., 2019).

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Key Components of an Internal Intervention Plan

- An effective internal intervention plan ensures rapid, transparent, and professional action in child protection processes. The first step in such a plan is the appointment of child protection officers and crisis teams within the organization.
- The plan should clearly define the stages of incident reporting, assessment, documentation, and collaboration with external agencies (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2011).
- All personnel must know their duties and responsibilities, who does what at the time of the incident, and the steps to follow; they should also be trained on how to manage suspected cases in accordance with the principle of confidentiality.
- Emergency communication channels, written reporting forms, regular drills, and internal guidelines are indispensable elements of the plan.
- Additionally, to evaluate and continuously improve the plan's effectiveness, periodic revisions and feedback meetings should be held. The intervention plan must be actively implemented not only during crises but throughout all stages of organizational culture.

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