IMPROVING THE PRIORITISATION OF SAFEGUARDING CHILD AND HUMAN RIGHTS

INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS
FOR CHILDREN IN SPORT

Improving the prioritisation of safeguarding, child, and human rights

The purpose of this resource is to help you develop a clear action plan for improving this area.

Each resource follows a common structure:
- What we mean by this area
- Why it matters
- What good looks like
- Common traps to avoid
- Possible first steps
- Links to additional resources (where applicable).

What do we mean by prioritising safeguarding and human rights?

Every human being has economic, social, and cultural rights. These have been agreed and written down by the United Nations in a series of declarations and conventions.

As well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – which applies to everyone - there are some specific rights that apply to groups of people who need greater protections, such as children, people with disability, and women and girls.

Prioritising safeguarding and human rights means putting this at the heart of the way your organisation works. Part of this is about stakeholder engagement – people have a right to have a say in decisions that affect them - but it is also about thinking about the impact of all your work on people, and doing everything you can to make sure their human rights are respected, and they are safeguarded.

Why it matters

Prioritising safeguarding and human and child rights helps your organisation build a team that feels valued and included, as well as helping you identify and manage potential risks that may impact on your people. It enhances responsibilities towards, and relationship with, people.

It sits at the heart of all the other key cultural characteristics – it means:
- Treating people will dignity and respect
- Making sure everyone is included and not discriminated against
- Having a focus on making sure people feel and are safe
- Valuing and listening to people's opinions
- Developing accountability (a duty of care) towards your staff and athletes
- Making sure information is shared and accessible

An organisation that actively prioritises safeguarding and human rights, is far more likely to understand and respond to safeguarding risks and concerns.

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What does good look like? Key features of strong prioritisation of safeguarding and human rights

Read the following description and make notes on where you most want to improve the prioritisation of safeguarding and human rights in your organisation.

- **Leaders understand and prioritise the protection of human and child rights** – this includes talking about rights, thinking about the impact of decisions on rights, and making sure there is budget to support understanding about rights.
- **Leaders understand and champion safeguarding** – in everything you do. This means giving safeguarding status and visibility in the organisation, and making sure everyone understands that it is <u>as</u> important as the results in a match – it is the bedrock of the organisation.
- **Everyone is treated with dignity** – whatever their role, age, or status, everyone connected to your organisation is treated with care and respect in all circumstances.
- **Best interests are prioritised** - The best interests of people are a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect them. Leaders actively understand and reflect on what is in people's best interests when making plans and decisions.
- **Participation and involvement** – everyone has the right to have a say in matters that affect them and to have their views taken seriously. Staff and athletes are supported and given opportunities to be involved. They are provided with information, a space to express their ideas and feelings, and opportunities to ask questions.
- **Non-discrimination** – everyone is treated fairly and protected from discrimination, whatever their age, gender, ability, ethnicity, religion, language, family background or any other status. Having access to equal opportunities doesn't mean being treated identically; some people need more support than others to overcome barriers and challenges, and the organisation recognises this and provides support as needed.
- **Understanding of rights and safeguarding** – is embedded across the organisation. Knowledge of rights and safeguarding means staff and athletes can hold the people responsible for making sure their rights are respected to account, and are better able to recognise concerns.
- **Consideration in all decisions** – the impact of decisions on people and on safeguarding is actively considered – risks are identified and pro-actively mitigated – as a matter of course – by everyone at all levels in the organisation.
- **There is trust in the safeguarding system** – people trust that safeguarding concerns will be handled appropriately, and they use the system to make reports.
- **People feel empowered** – at the heart of a human rights-based approach is a shift in power dynamics. People talk about feeling empowered because they understand they have rights, and that the organisation has a duty to respect them.

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FOR CHILDREN IN SPORT

Common traps to avoid

Again, read through these traps, noting which you recognise a need to work on.

- **People paying lip-service to safeguarding** – people complete the risk assessment templates and assign responsibilities on paper, but nothing changes in practice.
- **Confusing rights with responsibilities** – rights are seen as conditional – you have rights but only if you do certain things.
- **When is comes to tough decisions, human rights and safeguarding are sidelined** – when it means investment, or changing entrenched practices, leaders fail to back the decisions that would really champion safeguarding and rights.
- **Assuming no reports means the safeguarding system is working** – an organisation that is getting low or no numbers of concerns being reported, is one where trust in the system is low, not one where there are zero safeguarding concerns. As people become aware of, and trust in the system, you should see the number of reports initially go up rather than down.
- **Seeing this an add-on** – and not part of the organisation's core business.
- **Reactive rather than proactive** – responding to safeguarding and human rights concerns as they emerge rather than trying to understand risk and prevent issues from happening.
- **Seeing rights and welfare as a negative for results** – people use the false argument that athletes are less successful if there is too much focus on their rights, and not enough on winning. They see rights as a 'barrier' to success on the field of play.
- **A focus on compliance** – safeguarding and human rights becomes about following the system and ticking the box, rather than challenging and changing the culture to make it person-centred.
- **Safeguarding is seen as one person's role** – rather than a collective responsibility, it is assumed that the safeguarding lead has all the responsibility for safeguarding.

Possible actions to improve prioritising safeguarding and human rights in your culture

1. Make prioritising safeguarding and human rights a priority. Have an honest conversation as a team about the biggest opportunities for improvement, and review progress.
2. Make safeguarding and human rights a feature of all-staff meetings – talk about these areas as part of your core work, and not an add on.
3. Make it clear that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility – and not just your organisation's safeguarding lead. Role-model this in your actions.
4. Make sure your organisation's safeguarding policy and human rights statement are up to date, and have been read by everyone. Add a standing item on this area to all senior leadership and board discussions, and appoint a board lead for this area.
5. Give the staff that lead on safeguarding and human rights opportunities to showcase and celebrate their work with athletes and staff.
6. Introduce human rights and safeguarding impact assessment tools to help guide decision making.

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FOR CHILDREN IN SPORT

Additional Resources – The Human Rights Treaties

- A summary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UNCRC_summary-1_1.pdf
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf
- A summary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/convention-on-the-elimination-of-all-forms-of-discrimination-against-women-cedaw
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20the%20present,respect%20for%20their%20inherent%20dignity.
- The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf