

Safe Spaces

A look at equal rights to protection

Purpose

Alongside our partners, Women Win fights for gender equality globally and strives to amplify girls' and women's voices and believes that everyone has an equal right to protection from discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation. Sport can play a valuable role in the well-being and development of adolescent girls; however, if safety and inclusion are not at the centre of your programme design, development and implementation, your programmes risk causing more harm than good.

Where are you?

This section will explain the importance of safeguarding in designing sport programmes for girls, discuss the unique safety risks and challenges when working with girls and sport, and provide practical tools and guidance on implementing safe programming.

In this PDF, you will explore the following topics:

- 01 What is Safeguarding?
- 02 Safeguarding and Girls' Sport Programmes
- 03 Understanding the Risks and Priorities
- 04 Safeguarding Policies and Procedures within your Organisation



01

Safeguarding



what is safeguarding?

Safeguarding is the policies, procedures and practices that protect the health, safety, well-being, and rights of individuals and actively prevent violation of these rights.

This means upholding the highest standards of safety for participants, partners, staff and any other individuals involved, particularly vulnerable groups. Children¹ are often one of the most vulnerable groups, and protecting them and their rights from harm and exploitation needs to be central to your approach. Additional information about safe guarding can be found in the [International Safeguards for Children in Sport](#).

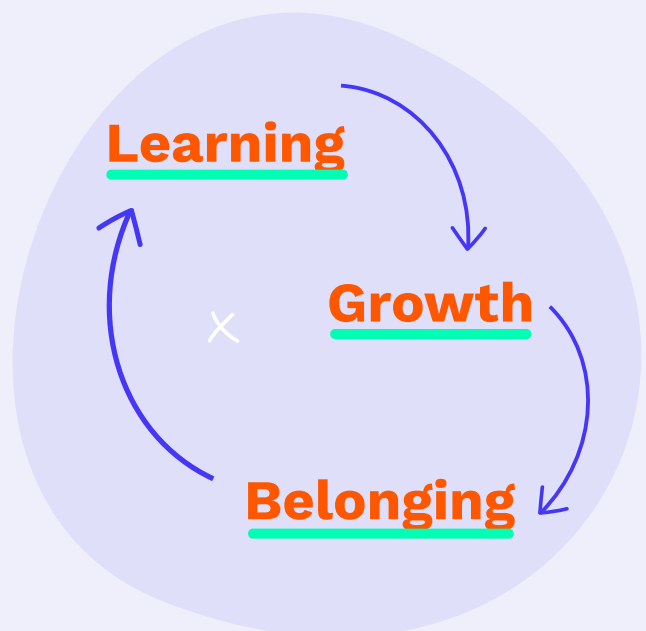
02

Safeguarding and Girls' Sport Programmes

When designing sport programmes for adolescent girls and young women, it is particularly important to approach safe guarding with a **gender lens**.

Participation in sport programmes can have **countless benefits** for girls: they can offer a place of growth, learning and belonging.

They can also offer development opportunities, introduce role models, and provide a girl-centred space that otherwise might not exist.



¹ For the purposes of this resource, children refers to those younger than 18.



However, if this space is not both physically and emotionally safe for participants, these benefits are inhibited. If any of your girls is fearful of being in physical or emotional jeopardy, they will not take the risks necessary to experience the full benefits of a sport programme. If a girl is afraid, they may be ostracised or bullied, and are unlikely to share their personal questions and thoughts. If they feel unsafe or intimidated by the physical playing conditions during your practice, they might not want to play the game.²

Centring Girls' Voices

Girls' voices have been largely **left out of child protection and safe-guarding discourse**, and they have not been supported in **taking an active role in their own protection**.

Children, and girls in particular, must be **given a voice within programmes and empowered to drive the agenda** by determining the meaning of protection in their context and in their sport. Creating truly safe **and inclusive spaces requires putting the participants at the centre of the process**.

In order to ensure the safety of your participants, you must understand their whole reality. This means **actively engaging** with participants and creating spaces where they **feel valued**, can voice their concerns and needs without fear or judgement and are connected to others who will help keep them safe and protected.



² Brady, Martha (2005). Creating Safe Spaces and Building Social Assets For Young Women In The Developing World: A New Role For Sport. Women's Studies Quarterly 2005, vol.33, no.1&2, pp. 44-45.

03 Understanding the Risks and Priorities



From the moment your organisation starts to think about designing and implementing a sport programme for girls, **safeguarding should be at the centre of every decision made in the process.** There is an inherent risk in achieving social change; your organisation should commit to reducing these risks and identifying what priority areas to address safeguarding in your programme design and in your organisation more broadly.

Risks

In order to keep girls' programmes safe, we must understand their whole reality and therefore it is important you identify risks in and around the context where you are planning to implement your programme. Some of these risks may occur in the day-to-day life of the girls in your context, but there are additional risks to consider when implementing a sport programme.

Some risks include:



If girls don't have the opportunity to practise a lot of sports and experience moving their bodies, they may be more susceptible to injuries.



If sports are not a culturally accepted practice for girls, there could be interference, harassment, or jeering from outsiders who disapprove of the girls playing in public spaces.



If a coach shows inappropriate interest in a player, the girl might not be aware that this attention is prohibited by the organisation's code of conduct and may feel powerless to stop the situation from happening.



The playing conditions: for example, during rainy seasons, the playgrounds could be flooded and slippery and be unsafe for girls to play on.



If the playing space is far from the homes of the participants, it can be a risk for them to travel long distances alone, or during some times of day. Safeguarding concerns may not be reported due to cultural influences or norms, particularly around cases of gender-based violence, child abuse, or sexual harassment.

To better understand the steps needed to create a safe programme, you must first identify and assess the risks that could occur in all elements of your programme. This includes the safety of the physical or virtual space where you meet with the girls and the transportation to and from the programme. To help in this step, you can complete the mapping exercise below to identify any potential risks when starting to work with this target group.

Complete the risk mapping by filling in the table for Activity 1 on the next page.

Ask yourself the following questions:



What are the daily risks faced by the girls who will participate in this programme?

What risks does participating in the programme pose to these girls?

After identifying all of the risks, you will be able to design plans and strategies to minimise or eliminate the risks identified. If you are unable to minimise or eliminate the risk, you should consider redesigning that element of the programme.

Priorities

Acknowledging your organisation's and programme's **strengths and weaknesses** in safeguarding can help identify areas in which your organisation needs to grow in its commitment to providing girls with safe sport programming. You can use the **Gender Inclusion and Safety Self-Assessment** tool to think about elements that you might consider incorporating in your programme design in order to remove barriers to participation for girls and ensure they can also experience the full benefits of sport. The tool can also promote dialogue about safety and safeguarding within your organisations and coaches, and with the participants in your programmes.

Activity 1: Mapping Risks

| Category | Weekly sessions for children, AGYW and women | Psycho-education workshops | Mental health clinics | Counselling and home based care | Livelihoods and AGYW |
|----------------------------------|--|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| When travelling | | | | | |
| In your environment | | | | | |
| Reporting concerns | | | | | |
| From other people (e.g. coaches) | | | | | |



Consider

A key part of understanding how to create safe spaces in your programming is to include the voices of girls in defining safety, and understand their priorities in implementing safe sport programming. Rather than thinking about how to get more girls into your sport programmes, we need to rethink and redesign sports programming to make them safe and inclusive to all. The primary way to understand how to create safe spaces for girls is to ask them! Drawing the Line is a card game that follows a play-based and participatory approach to better understand the level of safeguarding and inclusion in programmes through the perspective of the programme participants. The tool is intended for girls in your programme, but it can also be used with coaches, volunteers, or administrators as a way to gather other viewpoints on the safety and inclusivity of programmes.

04

Safeguarding Policies and Procedures within your Organisation

Part of creating a safe space means **developing clear guidelines for all staff**, as well as participants. Creating a **Safeguarding Policy** is a crucial step to making sure that your organisation has the proper procedures and practices in place to ensure the safety and well-being of your participants, partners, staff and any other individuals involved in your programming, particularly vulnerable groups such as children and girls. There must also be clear and accessible processes and procedures stating what to do if these policies and codes are violated. Your safeguarding policy should include the following:

- 01** Basic definitions of terms related to safeguarding, such as the different forms of abuse and discrimination
- 02** A child protection policy or procedures
- 03** Expectations and guidelines for all involved in your programming
- 04** A code of conduct for all involved in your programming
- 05** Clear reporting, response, and follow up procedures for safeguarding policy violations

01

Child Protection Policy

While a safeguarding policy includes protections for everyone involved in your organisation and/or programming, child protection policies are also important for organisations that work directly with children. Even though sport programmes play a valuable role in the well-being of children, they can also be, if the proper policies and procedures are not in place nor practiced, a place where children are abused, excluded or exploited. Girls' greater vulnerability to violence in many settings amplifies this risk. This is why child protection policies, especially policies and processes in which the children themselves take part in the creation, are extremely important to ensure that a sport

programme reaches its objectives of empowering youth and contributing to their well-being. If child protection is overlooked, then your sport programme is in danger of putting those very children in situations that could expose them to even more harm and negative experiences. To ensure an atmosphere of child protection, their perspective must be at the centre of programme design, development and implementation. This means actively engaging with participants and creating spaces where they feel valued, can voice their concerns and needs without fear or judgement, and are connected to others who will help keep them safe and protected.

02

Reporting and Response Processes

An important and necessary aspect of a safeguarding policy is the reporting, response and referral process. This means the required steps and procedures of reporting any safeguarding violations and the necessary follow up. Establishing these procedures is important because it provides a clear guide for coaches and other adults, as well as children, on how to handle policy violations and cases of abuse that may have happened within the organisation itself or at a participant's home. Without specific knowledge about how to report safeguarding violations or respond to a report, a coach, participant or organisation representative might be unprepared to best handle these situations.

In sport programmes, coaches are in a unique position to both identify safeguarding violations and be the recipients of reports. Because of this, your organisation should have specific, detailed guidelines about how to report violations, who to report them to, and what the response procedures are. This will help avoid additional harm to both the reporting and responding parties. However, coaches and organisation leaders must also be aware of what their role does not include. Coaches should not play the role of a social worker, therapist, police, doctor, or other qualified professional. It is important that there are referral processes in place for safeguarding policy violations or cases that should be passed along to a qualified professional or where the reporting part might have need of additional resources.

03

Safeguarding Officer

One way to prepare your organisation to implement your safeguarding and child protection policy and processes is to **hire a Safeguarding or Child Protection Officer**, ideally someone with experience in this field. This could be someone who worked for a social services organisation previously or another community institution in which their role was to supervise safeguarding procedures and/or protection of children. This person should have deep knowledge about the local support resources available for children.

We recognise that most organisations might not have the budget to hire a staff member specifically for this role. Another option is to appoint a current staff member or volunteer for this role and train that person to be the person in charge of upholding the policy, procedures, and processes. You could also have that person attend other training by external organisations such as child welfare, social services or government agencies that deal with children and abuse.

This person should have the following responsibilities:

- 01 Ensuring the implementation and upholding of the Safeguarding Policy and relevant procedures
- 02 Organising safeguarding and child protection training for all involved in programming
- 03 Overseeing the review and revision of the policy at regular intervals
- 04 Involving participants (e.g. children, girls) in the definition and identifying of safeguarding practices and procedures
- 05 Overseeing the reporting, responding, and follow up processes for safeguarding violations.



04

Code of Conduct

Your organisation has a responsibility for zero tolerance of harmful practices such as sexual harassment, gender inequality and discrimination that are unfortunately a common reality and problem in sport programmes. Any girls' sport programme that truly takes into consideration the emotional and physical safety of its participants must create and implement a code of conduct that guides the behaviours, processes and procedures that ensure girls are protected.

It is important for your organisation, staff, administration and anyone else involved in the day-to-day operations, to identify a set of standards for a Code of Conduct. This could be as simple as a list of behaviours that are acceptable, not recommended and never acceptable. Once everyone agrees on them, have all staff members (and any visitors or volunteers) sign the code: everyone involved must commit to this Code of Conduct. This list should then be displayed in a public space within your organisation where all visitors, staff and, most importantly, the girls themselves can see what conduct they should expect from their coaches and what is not acceptable.



[Click here to view of an example Code of Conduct](#)



Image source: Pass it Back, ChildFund, Laos

05

Training for Internal Staff and Coaches

Everyone in contact with girls has a role to play in their protection. They can only do so confidently and effectively if they are aware of and have the necessary understanding of key principles of protection, and the opportunity to develop, practise and implement key skills. Therefore, you should ensure that every individual in your organisation that has regular contact with the girls receives annual safeguarding training. This may include basic safeguarding training delivered as part of the staff member or volunteer's induction or annual update.

Additionally, having guidelines on recruiting coaches, facilitators and other staff (including volunteers) is crucial to creating a safe environment for girls in your sport programme. When recruiting potential staff, make sure to have a standardised process that includes background checks for both male and female coaches. Check not only with local police but also with the community and make sure that the coach would be an ideal role model or mentor for the programme. If you do have female participants and male coaches, make sure that you hire enough female coaches or facilitators so that there is at least one female adult in each group coached by a male. Below are excellent safeguarding training resources produced by international sport organisations and offered free online.

UEFA online course

FIFA online course



06

Integrating Girls' Voices

Girls from your context must be given a voice within your programme and should be empowered to drive the agenda by determining the meaning of protection in their context and in their sport. Integrating the girls' voices is important in all steps of your safeguarding:



By exploring and understanding the risks that may occur when they are participating in the programme.




By giving them the opportunity to share what programme safety should look like.



By co-designing the response framework to collectively decide together on the next steps when a safeguarding concern arises.

Creating Safe Spaces

 what is a safe space?

A **safe space** is an environment where girls feel physically and emotionally secure. It is a place where they are protected from bodily harm, including sexual abuse and preventable sport injuries.

In a safe space, girls feel free to openly express themselves in a confidential environment and are comfortable sharing their concerns and asking sensitive questions without fear of judgement or intimidation. Ultimately, the definition of a safe space depends on how girls feel within that space; therefore, your programme space needs to be consistently evaluated and maintained by programme leaders and participants.

Without safe spaces, a girl's growth and willingness to take risks and be vulnerable are inhibited. If they feel they are in physical or emotional danger, they will not be able to experience the full benefits of participating in a sport programme. This responsibility to create safe spaces falls not only on your coaches and facilitators who directly interact with girls on a daily basis, but on all staff and administration of your organisation as well. Everyone involved in your organisation has the responsibility to ensure girls feel emotionally secure and comfortable within their sport environment, and protected from physical harm.



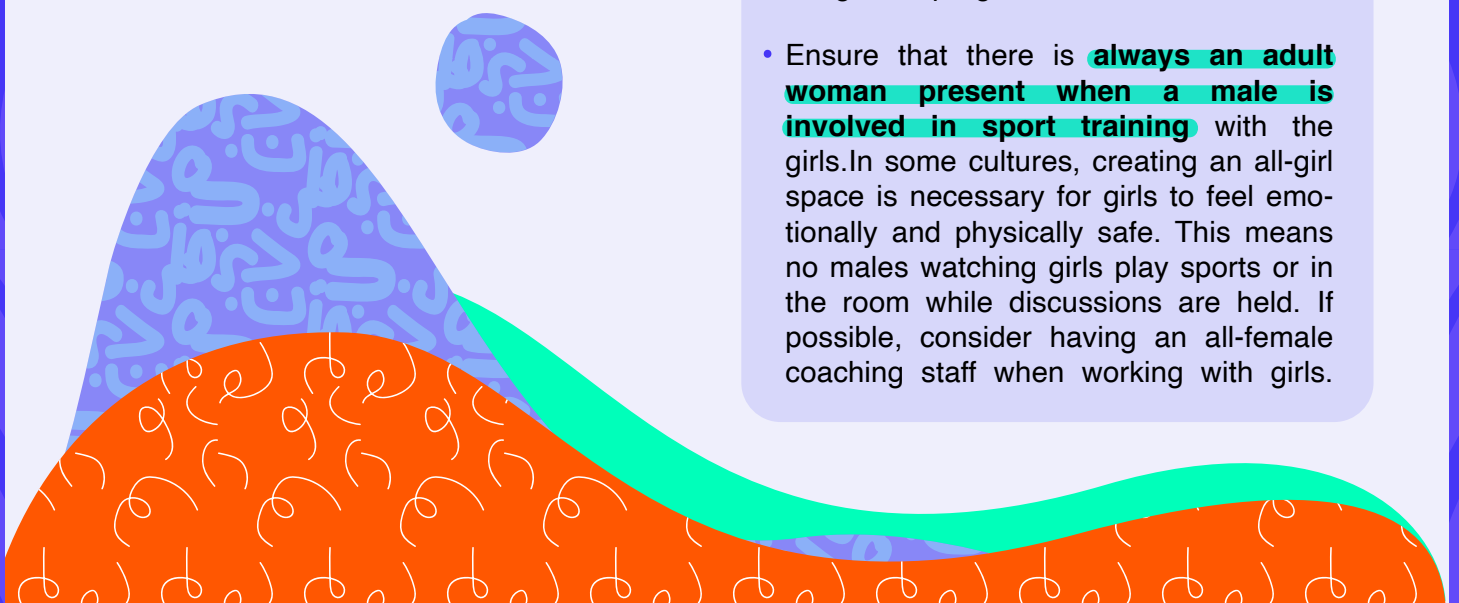
Image source: Moving the Goalposts, Kenya

Tips for creating a physically safe space:

- Ensure that the play space is free from **harmful objects**, such as broken glass.
- Always have **First Aid** materials ready in case of injury.
- Ensure that girls have adequate **protective gear** for sports that require it.
- Schedule sessions at times where girls do not have to **walk to or from home in the dark**.
- **Establish the rules** of the game girls are playing at the beginning of the game and enforce fair play.
- Adopt a **no-fighting policy** within the programme. This should apply to participants, coaches and volunteers and should include **physical and verbal** attacks.
- **Train** the coaches to ensure they are able to maintain safe spaces for the girls and **de-escalate conflicts**.
- Become acquainted with **neighbours** in the area.

Tips for creating an emotionally safe space:

- **Invite the girls to define** what is important for the creation of their safe space. Explore using a participatory approach such as **Drawing the Line** to facilitate this discussion.
- Have girls create and sign a **code of conduct** that sets ground rules for training sessions and sensitive discussions. Have them decide what parameters will be put on confidentiality and the resulting penalties when the agreed upon code is broken.
- Teach girls healthy and positive **communication skills** to help them peacefully resolve conflicts among one another.
- Consider **holding sessions in spaces that can be physically enclosed**, to keep outsiders out and to help girls feel secure. These do not need to be built from scratch. Explore the possibility of using existing courts, gyms and public spaces with community groups and partners.
- If possible, do not allow **non-participants** from **observing regular practice sessions** and discussions as girls are likely to feel intimidated or inhibited in front of an audience. This includes romantic partners, parents, and people not related to the girls or programme.
- Ensure that there is **always an adult woman present when a male is involved in sport training** with the girls. In some cultures, creating an all-girl space is necessary for girls to feel emotionally and physically safe. This means no males watching girls play sports or in the room while discussions are held. If possible, consider having an all-female coaching staff when working with girls.



Creating an emotionally safe space continued:

- **Discourage rumours and gossip** and be aware of **bullying**. Demand individual respect from and for all girls, and address bullying incidents early.
- Set out a box for girls to give **anonymous feedback** and suggest conversation topics for discussions. Although anonymous question boxes can be useful tools for helping girls feel comfortable initially, it should not be considered permanent. In a truly safe space, girls feel comfortable **expressing themselves openly**.
- Allow girls to speak about sensitive topics in the **language that is most comfortable to them**. However, be aware that girls who do not speak the majority language may **feel marginalised**.
- Although you should encourage parents to be actively involved in the sport programme in some way, having **too much parental involvement** could actually keep girls from **feeling comfortable** and being able to express themselves fully. Encourage parents to acknowledge that the girls **need their own space** as well.
- Provide **private changing rooms**. Although a permanent girls-only space is preferable, it is fine to use a space to change that is used by both men and women, as long as boys are prohibited from entering **during the time girls are using it**. In more conservative cultures or contexts, it may be necessary to establish same-sex spaces and/or clothing accommodations to ensure girls are comfortable.
- Adopt a **zero-tolerance policy** for **sexual abuse or harassment** as well as **procedures** to ensure that if there is a violation of this policy, all participants and staff understand how to address the problem and the right channels to go through.
- **Revisit these concepts continually**. Many programmes have new members joining regularly, and it is important to discuss rules and expectations with new members. Older or more experienced members can lead these discussions.



Consider

A key part of understanding how to create safe spaces in your programming is to include the voices of girls in defining safety, and understand their priorities in implementing safe sport programming. Rather than thinking about how to get more girls into your sport programmes, we need to rethink and redesign sports programming to make them safe and inclusive to all. The primary way to understand how to create safe spaces for girls is to ask them!

Drawing the Line is a card game that follows a play-based and participatory approach to better understand the level of safeguarding and inclusion in programmes through the perspective of the programme participants. The tool is intended for girls in your programme, but it can also be used with coaches, volunteers, or administrators as a way to gather other viewpoints on the safety and inclusivity of programmes.





Game
over!