

WORLD OBSTACLE GUIDELINES FOR PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORTS

Sexual abuse and sexual harassment are completely incompatible with the intrinsic values of sports.

Within obstacle course racing and related sports there is **zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment** irrespective of gender, ethnic background, religious faith, sexual orientation and disability.

It is necessary to develop tolerance and understanding and to establish recognition of people's equality in order to avoid discrimination, harassment and bullying. Everyone within obstacle sports should establish secure settings and a secure atmosphere for children, youth and adults in all sport related areas, including coaching, training, competition, pre- and post-, social, professional and family settings.

Adults must respect the athlete's personal space and never overstep the limits for acceptable behaviour. By sexual harassment we mean unwelcome sexual attention that is offensive to the object of such attention.

By sexual abuse we mean to trick or coerce a person into a sexual relationship the person does not want or is not sufficiently mature to understand the relationship or to consent to.

The following guidelines apply within all obstacle sports:

1. Treat everyone with respect, and refrain from all forms of communication, action or behaviour that may be perceived as offensive.
2. Avoid body contact that may be perceived as unwanted.
3. Avoid all types of verbal intimacy that may be perceived as sexually charged.
4. Avoid expressions, jokes and opinions that relate to the athlete's gender or sexual orientation in a negative way.
5. Seek to have both sexes represented in the support network.
6. Avoid contact with the athletes in private spaces unless there are several persons present or in agreement with parents/guardians or the sports management.
7. Show respect for the athletes, coaches and leader's private life.
8. Avoid dual relationships. If a reciprocal relationship is established, the situation should be raised and clarified openly in the milieu.
9. Do not offer any form of reward with the purpose of demanding or anticipating sexual services in return.
10. Take action and give notice if a breach of these rules is experienced.

The support network (coaches, trainers, managers, representatives, officials, judges, parents, etc.) have the main responsibility for letting these rules be known in the organisation/sports environment, and that they are adhered to.

BACKGROUND

Sexual abuse and sexual harassment are completely incompatible with the values of sports and World Obstacle, the Fédération Internationale de Sports d'Obstacles, has zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment irrespective of gender, ethnic background, religious faith, sexual orientation and disability in obstacle sports worldwide.

Developing tolerance and understanding and establishing recognition of people's equality in order to avoid discrimination, harassment and bullying are important goals of World Obstacle and are required by all national member federations.

These guidelines are based on guidelines developed by the Norwegian Olympics and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports. These guidelines may be used in conjunction with United States Safe Sport Code and Procedures, links available from the World Obstacle Safe Sport webpage at <https://worldobstacle.org/safe-sport>.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORTS

Purpose, goals and values

Ensuring an open and inclusive sport is a primary policy of World Obstacle. A condition for achieving this goal is that children, youngsters and adults are happy and feel safe in the sport and related activities. It is therefore necessary **to develop tolerance, understanding and establish recognition of people's equality in order to avoid discrimination, harassment and bullying.**

Zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment irrespective of gender, ethnic background, religious faith, sexual orientation, and disability is a global policy of World Obstacle. Zero tolerance means that sexual harassment and sexual abuse must not take place. All organisations recognised or sanctioned by World Obstacle have a responsibility to prevent sexual harassment and sexual abuse. It is a prerequisite that both the staff, employees and volunteers within sports follow the guidelines regarding sexual harassment and abuse, and that suspicion of sexual harassment and abuse is notified and/or dealt with if a situation occurs.

Harassment and abuse are considered breaches of human rights, and occur in all countries, cultures and environments. This is harmful both for the individuals and sports organisations. It is therefore imperative to establish sound sports environments at every level, including teams, clubs, leagues, associations, federations, coaching, training, local, regional and national organisations,

Everyone within sports is responsible for identifying and countering harassment and abuse and for developing a sports culture characterised by respect and safety. Individuals in sports, as in civilised society, may have different opinions as to what harassment and abuse constitute, and how it can be countered. This is especially so because to show emotion, often in the form of physical body contact, when someone wins or loses, is part of sports behaviour. The same applies to body contact when learning new movements and techniques. It is therefore important to be open regarding the issue and to discuss and agree on "where the limits" should be for what is termed acceptable behaviour, as well as to develop guidelines to prevent discrimination, harassment, bullying and abuse.

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL ABUSE?

Harassment in general

A common denominator for harassment is unwanted behaviour, offensive, threatening or annoyance for the subject. Annoying or threatening behaviour may be words or actions that make the person feel offended, scared or in other ways upset. Such experiences are irrespective of whether the person responsible for the harassment does it on purpose or not. This is important because women and men may have different perspectives on what is unwanted or offensive.

Most countries have acts of government that ban harassment in the workplace and in public places. This may include Gender Equality, the Anti-discrimination, Anti-Sexual Discrimination, Employment and Working Environment acts.

An example is the Norwegian Gender Equality Act (Section 8) that states: *Gender-based harassment and sexual harassment are not permitted.[..]. The term "sexual harassment" shall mean unwelcome conduct that is annoying for the person subject to the attention. It is further stated that the employer and management of organisations or educational institutions shall be responsible for preventing and seeking to preclude the occurrence of harassment in contravention of provisions of this Act within their sphere of responsibility.*

All national member federations of World Obstacle have a responsibility to prevent and seek to preclude harassment from occurring within obstacle sports within their membership and country.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment may be verbal, non-verbal and physical. Verbal sexual harassment may be unwanted intimate questions relating to body, clothes or one's private life, "jokes" with a sexual innuendo, and proposals or demands for sexual services or sexual relationships. These may also be in the form of unwanted telephone calls, text messages or letters with a sexual content. Non-verbal harassment may be staring, showing of pictures or objects with sexual allusions. Physical harassment includes unwanted or unnecessary physical contact of a sexual nature, such as "pinching", pressing oneself onto the body of others or attempting to kiss or caress another person. The common denominator for all types of sexual harassment is that they are felt as offensive for the targeted individual.

There is a difference between flirting and sexual harassment. Flirting implies that the attention is reciprocal and is perceived as positive for both parties, in contrast with sexual harassment, which is unwanted sexual attention.

Sexual Abuse

Abuse happens when a person offends another person's rights. By sexual abuse we mean to trick or coerce a person into a sexual act the person does not want or is not sufficiently mature to consent to. Such abuse may be punished in accordance with a country's Penal Code, which may also define sexual abuse in varying degrees. Mild

forms of abuse are the showing of pornography or indecent exposure. Then comes "tampering"/groping, while the gravest forms of abuse are all forms of penetration into the body's cavities. This is defined as rape, irrespective of whether parts of the body or objects have been used.

Penal Codes generally apply to anyone who by words or actions displays sexually abusive or other indecent behaviour in a public place, in the presence of, or in the proximity of somebody who has not agreed to it, or in the presence of, or in the proximity of children under 16, 17 or 18 years of age or an individual of any age who is mentally disabled. Codes may also include sexual acts in the abuse of one's position, in a relationship of dependency or in a relationship of trust. To counteract such occurrences amongst children and persons who are mentally disabled, the World Obstacle Safe Sport Commission has resolved that *all national member federations require their member and sanctioned organisations, sports clubs, teams and comply with World Obstacle Safe Sport policies.*

Grooming / Persuasion

Grooming / persuasion is strategy abusers often employ to establish a position where they can carry out abuse. This may continue for years, without the person who is object of the attention being aware that an ever-stronger bond is being tied between her/ him and the "abuser", until she / he is unable to withstand the abuser's sexual wishes. Research shows that this typically occurs in a relationship between young athletes and coaches who are a bit older, or other persons the athletes trust and who have built up a relationship that is similar to a child / parent relationship.

Facts - Contexts and Assessments

Sexual harassment and sexual abuse are in commonly expressions of abuse of power. Examples of power relations in sports are the power that persons in the support network have over the athletes: this applies includes a coach who can help young athletes achieve their sporting goals. This type of trust and power is often called expert or power of position and may be exploited and lead to sexual harassment and abuse. It is important that all adults who have contact with athletes act as sound role models and have a professional attitude to their role, their responsibility and to where the limits are for "acceptable" behaviour.

This also applies to interactions between the athletes. Sexual harassment must be regarded as a collective structural and cultural problem, and not as an individual problem. The occurrence of sexual harassment indicates something about the environment within a club, team or league, and is a breach of the basic values of obstacle sports.

Openness, bringing the problem into the open and raising awareness of the consequences that sexual harassment may have for those exposed to it, for the environment and for the organisation and for sports are important. Research has also shown that there is less harassment in settings where there is approximately equal number of men and women, than in situations which are dominated by one gender.

Studies indicate that sexual harassment occurs in all established sports and at all levels. Athletes are exposed to harassment as often from their peers as from persons in the support network /management – both men and women are subject to harassment and abuse, from both genders. Studies show that sexual harassment is something that girls and women are mainly subject to by men. It is assumed that when it comes to sexual harassment and sexual abuse there are a number of unreported cases, not least in relation to boys. Research shows that the chances of being exposed to this is greater in organisations and places of work where there is no preventative strategy, where the abuser is very determined, and the athlete is vulnerable. Athletes under 18 years of age account for up to 30 % of all sexual abuse.

Sexual harassment and abuse occur in locker rooms, in / at sports arenas, on trips, at the home or in the car of the coach and in connection with social arrangements. In social contexts it is primarily when there is alcohol involved that sexual harassment and abuse occur.

The consequences of sexual harassment and abuse may be extremely serious, for the athlete, their family and their organisations. “Lighter” forms of sexual harassment have potentially serious consequences for the athletes many years after the experience. This does not least apply to the athlete's own health. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence and abuse as a public health problem, which may cause serious problems for the person in question. Not everyone experiences serious problems after such occurrences, but it is potentially very harmful.

For athletes such experiences may lead to:

- reduced ability to concentrate
- anxiety, depression and physical stress reactions
- sleeping problems
- poor self-esteem, low self-confidence, for instance in relation to their own sporting achievements
- poor work /training performance
- negative impact on other club members and family life
- problems in trusting others
- problems in close relationships
- a ruined relationship between coach – athlete
- abandoning sports
- a negative effect on social activities
- a feeling of guilt and shame

The feeling of guilt and shame may be very strong in a situation where abuse has occurred between a coach and athlete. This is because the athlete will go a long way to achieve progress and may feel that she / he is the one responsible for the abuse. Many of those who have been exposed to abuse from a person with whom they had a bond also experience great difficulties in trusting their own judgement. This can have destructive consequences in interaction with others and other areas of life. For

an athlete it may mean that one is unable to continue a sporting career.

Many of these reactions can influence the athlete's performance, irrespective of the athlete's performance level. This relates primarily to athletes who are being exposed directly to sexual harassment and abuse, but it may also have the same negative impact on athletes who witness it. Highly publicised cases in the media have led to organisations experiencing problems with sponsors, and in some cases entire boards and staff being fired. Cases involving sexual harassment and abuse can and have led to financial consequences for the sports and those involved.

Very few people report incidents when they are exposed to sexual harassment and abuse. In a study involving 25 Norwegian female elite athletes who had been subjected to sexual harassment, none had made a formal complaint or reported what they had experienced. Several of the athletes however, had communicated with each other and devised strategies to avoid being alone with the coach, who was responsible for the harassment. The negative effect of neither the athlete or people in their support network speaking out on cases they are aware of, or suspect.

One condition for being able to report cases is knowing who to turn to and how to do this. It is important that a person subject to sexual harassment has a place to report the problem. This is an acknowledgment that the problem can exist in the organisation. A system with clear and simple reporting processes must be in place, where complaints can be handled quickly, decisively and with discretion. It is important that the organisation deals with the problem and does not trivialise it, so that the person concerned has confidence that the problem will be dealt with in a proper way, and not be afraid of reprisals. It is critical that all organisations create a culture where sexual harassment is not tolerated.

PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE

An open, sound and safe sporting environment helps protect against harassment and against false accusations. Knowledge of what constitutes harassment and its consequences is necessary for athletes and organisations. Understanding of harassment and sexual abuse must be included in the education of all staff, volunteers, managers, officials, coaches and athletes.

A condition for maintaining and strengthening a sound sporting environment is that management agrees on what constitutes a sound environment, e.g. the attitudes and values that characterise the organisation and how to interact with one another, which expectations and requirements one places on parents, coaches and managers, how the organisation is managed, etc. Relevant issues include showering and bathing, the general tone amongst children and young people, sleeping over (do boys and girls have separate sleeping quarters on trips and are adults to stay with them?)

World Obstacle national member federation ethical guidelines and code of conduct should be included in employment contracts. The boundaries for acceptable behaviour are explicit in these guidelines, and it is important that this is discussed openly in the board, the support network and with the athletes, coaches, staff, volunteers, parents, etc.

Ethical guidelines are rules for daily interaction and of conduct. These vary depending on each countries law, the type of organisation, and to the level of performance of the athletes. Examples rule adaptations are:

- There is never consumption of alcohol together with the players on trips to and from national events.
- There should always be representatives of both genders in the support network.
- The coaches shall not have discussions relating to the athletes in the athlete's room, but in meeting rooms or other public arenas.
- In our club we sleep together in a dormitory when we attend cup tournaments - no adult sleeps alone together with the members.
- In our club the coaches do not shower with individual athletes.
- In our club there is a minimum of two athletes at every training session together with the coach.
- In our club the coaches / representatives do not invite individual athletes to their homes without several others also being around.

The management, with the support network play an important role in the development of the athlete. They are the ones responsible for creating safety and preparing the conditions for health and welfare, and for the development of the athlete's independence. Athletes should be aware of which boundaries are acceptable to them and be able to make others aware of what their boundaries are and be able to adhere to the limits and speak out when someone oversteps. This is difficult for children and young adults if they are not in a secure environment. This is especially the case if a respected adult, for instance the coach, is the one committing the violation. Adults must respect the athlete's personal space and never overstep the limits for acceptable behaviour.

WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE WHEN SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL ABUSE OCCUR?

What to do when subject to sexual harassment or sexual abuse

- Seek help from someone you trust.
- Contact the management of the organisation.
- Contact the national federation Safe Sport Commission or Committee

If you have a suspicion of sexual abuse or sexual harassment

To achieve a better sports environment and prevent sexual harassment and abuse it is important that the subject raise the matter. This may be difficult, especially for children and young adults. Athletes who are the object of sexual harassment by somebody in the support network may be afraid of reprisals or retribution, feel uncertainty, shame and guilt or fear of not being believed. It is important to emphasise that if anyone within the sports environment has a suspicion of sexual harassment or sexual abuse, they should give notice of this, either as a parent, part of the support network or athlete. For young athletes it is often easier to talk with another person than confronting directly the person whose behaviour is felt to be harassing.

Sexual Abuse

- If sexual abuse is discovered, this must be brought to the attention of the management of the organisation. It is up to the management to decide whether the suspected person should be reported to the police, and whether other follow-up measures should be implemented, such as termination of contract, withdrawal of tasks or and the minor. It is therefore important that the management reaches the decision.
- If management, after thorough considerations - and preferably in cooperation with the accuser - feels that the accusation is unfounded, the case should not be pursued, and gossip and rumours should be suppressed.
- If there are grounds for the suspicion, the parents should be informed immediately and should, in agreement with the management, report the matter to the police. The police in most civilized societies assess the case. The management shall not act as investigators. Nevertheless, it may be important to follow up such cases internally in the national federation during a court case in order to take care of other members in the support network and amongst the athletes. The national federation must decide if the case be reported to the Safe Sport Commission, Ethics Committee and / or Legal Commission of World Obstacle.
- The management must ensure that professional secrecy is complied with. This concerns the victim, the accused, and in relation to possible sanctions.

Sexual Harassment

- If sexual harassment is discovered, this must be brought to the attention of the organization's management. It is the responsibility of the management to counter and prevent sexual harassment.

- If management, after thorough considerations - and preferably in cooperation with the accuser - feels that the accusation is unfounded, the case should not be pursued, and gossip and rumours should be suppressed.
- If there are grounds for the suspicion, management must act. The procedure or line of action taken depend on the character of the case. Management must have separate meetings with both parties. Depending on the results of the discussions, management must consider whether to implement any reactions against the person concerned.
- Management must ensure that professional secrecy is complied with. This applies both to the victim, the accused, and in relation to possible sanctions.
- The national federation must decide if the case be reported to the Safe Sport Commission, Ethics Committee and / or Legal Commission of World Obstacle.

MORE INFORMATION

Safe Sport International

<http://www.safesportinternational.com>

International Safeguards for Children in Sport

<https://www.sportanddev.org/en/toolkit/child-protection-and-safeguarding>

Council of Europe and European Union Pro Safe Sport

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/pss/home>

Start to Talk

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-channel/stop-child-sexual-abuse-in-sport>

United States SafeSport

<https://safesport.org>