

Safe Sport Policy Manual - Speaking Notes for Town Hall, Oct. 14, 2020

Introduction

- I would like to take a few minutes to introduce you to our new Safe Sport Policy Manual and to highlight a few aspects of it.
- Posted on the AO web site October 7.
- As we said in the newsletter that evening, during the last two years, the AO Board of Directors and staff have been focused on strengthening the safe sport environment for Athletics in Ontario. At the core of these initiatives is a robust new safe sport policy framework. We want all Athletics Ontario athletes, coaches, parents, officials and volunteers to feel safe and trust the sport system.
- Athletics Ontario has a fundamental obligation and responsibility to promote the health, safety and physical and mental well-being of every individual who is involved in the sport of Athletics in Ontario.
- The new Safe Sport Policy Manual gathers together nine policies that form an important part of the initiatives we have been taking to foster and maintain a safe sport environment. AO has had many of the components of these various policies for some time, but we have updated the policies and procedures and consolidated all of them into a single and easier to follow manual, written in plain English.
- The policies are just that - policies. They are not written to be legal “codes”.
- It is the implementation of these policies, the understanding of them and the actions taken by those of you involved in our sport and by the people following the procedures outlined in the policies that will make a meaningful impact. Without fair-minded individuals, individuals who believe in the importance of a safe sport environment, using, implementing and administering them, these policies will just be words on pages, gathering dust in a binder on a shelf.
- In a nutshell, the Safe Sport Policy Manual outlines expected standards of behaviour that are designed to create a safe sport environment by preventing, as much as possible, inappropriate behaviour from occurring in the first place, and it contains policies and procedures to provide for consistent, timely, appropriate and meaningful action should any issues arise.
- I encourage all of you to read the manual and to ask us any questions you may have.

Details about some of the Policies

- I would like to highlight some of the aspects of the updated and new policies.
- There is an updated **Code of Conduct**. Let me point out just a couple new aspects:
 - Whereas before, the Code of Conduct purported to prohibit all public criticism, the updated Code says that all Participants have a responsibility to focus comments appropriately and to provide only constructive criticism; to not engage in making disrespectful, hateful, harmful, disparaging, insulting or otherwise offensive comments
 - Constructive criticism should be welcomed
 - There has long been a prohibition on associating with any person for coaching, training, etc., who is serving a sanction for doping. The updated Code of Conduct expands this

prohibition on associating to any person who has been expelled from Athletics Ontario or who is serving a sanction involving a period of ineligibility imposed by AO

- Intimate or sexual relationships where there is an imbalance of power, such as potentially between a coach and an athlete (although that is not the only relationship where there may be an imbalance of power) have been the source of problematic issues in all sports and a potential threat to a safe sport environment. The Code has long had a prohibition on such relationships between a coach and any athlete under the age of 18. The updated Code addresses relationships where the athlete is 18 or older as follows: the coach has the responsibility to disclose to Athletics Ontario any intimate or sexual relationship with an athlete they are coaching who is 18 or older and immediately to discontinue any coaching involvement with that athlete, unless that intimate relationship began before the coaching relationship
- There is also a general responsibility for all Participants to refrain from engaging in inappropriate personal or sexual relationships where there is a power imbalance between the Participants in their interactions, such as between athletes and coaches, head coaches and assistant coaches, Directors and staff, etc.
- These are just a couple of the updates we have made in the Code of Conduct. I encourage you to familiarize yourselves with the Code, and to ask us any questions you may have about it.
- The **Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy** is new and is a policy that insurers look for organizations to implement.
- This Policy does not take away from any of the obligations and expected standards of conduct outlined in the Code of Conduct or in any of the other policies, procedures, rules and regulations of Athletics Ontario. The purpose of this Policy is to bring attention to the special vulnerabilities of children and certain adults.
- Please also understand that we are not meaning to imply that all differently-abled adults are “vulnerable” within the meaning of this Policy.
- There is an updated **Complaints, Dispute Resolution and Discipline Policy**. The substance of this Policy used to be spread over at least three different policies, including a “harassment” policy. We know that there are many other forms of inappropriate behaviours and maltreatment than harassment, and it was time to bring together this most important keystone of safe sport policies in one policy.
- There is no use in having a Code of Conduct unless there is a simple and safe way for people to be able to bring breaches of the Code to the attention of people who will do something about it.
- With the Safe Sport Officers and clear procedures, we hope we have created a clear and useful way to address all forms of misconduct.
- Note that this Policy and the new **Whistleblower Policy** also anticipate the possibility of making an anonymous complaint. While these complaints can be difficult to investigate and resolve, I hope that these policies demonstrate that we recognize how difficult it can be to come forward and that we do not want issues to be left unattended to or unresolved.

- The actual procedures for dealing with a complaint may seem a little complex, but the goal is to have a fair way to deal with complaints.
- Note that confidentiality is very important and that retaliation and false allegations will not be tolerated.
- It may be best to deal in more detail with the **Complaints, Dispute Resolution and Discipline Policy** and the **Appeal Policy** at another Town Hall once people have had an opportunity to review those policies.

Conclusion

- These policies, including the updated Screening Policy as well as the obligations outlined in our Membership Policy, represent an integrated, concerted and proactive effort by Athletics Ontario to prevent problems before they occur. AO is committed to preventative measures but also to severe penalties for those who choose to breach our Code of Conduct and other policies.
- The new Safe Sport Policy Manual is just a part of the continued effort to foster and maintain a safe sport environment. Other critical aspects include the training of coaches and members of club management. Safe Sport requires everyone in positions of authority to help to create a culture of mutual respect and safety, where people can feel safe questioning behaviours they perceive as inappropriate and reporting misconduct. It is a continuous and ongoing process, and the changes we are making will continue to be reviewed, questioned, tested and improved.