

Safe Sport Policy Manual - Code of Conduct & Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy - Speaking Notes for Town Hall, Oct. 28, 2020

This is a summary only of some aspects of the AO Safe Sport Policy Manual. All AO Members should read the Code of Conduct in its entirety and familiarize themselves with the other policies in the Manual.

Introduction

- Athletics Ontario's new Safe Sport Policy Manual was posted on the AO web site October 7 and a couple weeks ago I highlighted a few aspects of it.
- 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.
- Over the next few weeks I will be focusing on each of the policies a little more closely and taking any questions you may have about them. Questions in advance of the Town Hall are most appreciated. I have been working with the policies for some time now, but I don't have them memorized!
- We did have a question about whether the implementation of the Manual will change the policies and documents people have to sign off on when they renew their membership. It does not. While we certainly recommend that everyone familiarize themselves with the Safe Sport Manual, the only thing in the Manual that you have to confirm you have read is the Code of Conduct. This is, of course, in addition to the other things referenced in the Membership Policy, such as the release, the Rowan's Law material regarding concussions, etc.
- As I said when I introduced the new manual, the policies are just that - policies. They are not written to be legal "codes".
- It will take fair-minded individuals who believe in the importance of a safe sport environment, abiding by, using, implementing and administering the policies. Absent such fair-minded individuals, these policies will just be words on pages, gathering dust in a binder on a shelf.

The Code of Conduct - Today's Focus

- In a nutshell, the Code 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.
- The Code is something of an educational piece, describing the types of behaviours that are positive and constructive and describing the types of behaviours that are not acceptable.
- Codes of Conduct are evolving things. For example, behaviours that at one time may have been "acceptable" or even the norm, are no longer acceptable. Often court cases, dealing with real life situations, help this evolution and refine our understanding of what is acceptable.

- For example, while once it may have been a defence to a complaint of “harassment” for the perpetrator to say “I did not intend to harass”, it is now clear that “harassment” is defined by the reasonable perceptions of the recipient of the behaviour and not by those of the perpetrator.
- You will see this in the description of “Harassment” at the beginning of the Code.
- There has been a similar evolution in the concept of “consent”.
- Because of this, we will be reviewing the Code regularly. Also please note that many descriptions of behaviours say they “include” certain things. This is because we may not write down every word for every type of behaviour, but you will get the idea.
- The **Purpose** of the Code is key and will inform any interpretation - s. 2 “The purpose of this Code is to promote a safe and positive environment within Athletics Ontario’s Sport Environment by making Participants aware that there is an expectation, at all times, of appropriate behaviour consistent with Athletics Ontario’s core values. Athletics Ontario supports equal opportunity, prohibits discriminatory practices, and is committed to providing an environment in which all Participants are treated with respect and fairness.”

Organization of the Code

- **Definitions** - please read them. There is a lot of information there. But we have tried to use the plain English meaning of words as much as possible and not get bogged down with defining things that are self-evident.
- The definitions are also key to understanding the scope and application of the Code.
- For example - let’s look at the **Application of this Code, s. 3** and the definitions of “Participants” and “Sport Environment”. “Participants” is purposely broad, and includes more than just AO members. Example - the member of another PSO misbehaving at an AO meet. And while Sport Environment is limited to any place where AO’s business or activities are conducted, and s. 3 states that this Code applies to Participant’s conduct in AO’s Sport Environment, s. 6 provides that it also applies to a Participant’s conduct outside AO’s Sport Environment when such conduct adversely affects relationships within AO and its Sport Environment and is detrimental to the image and reputation of Athletics Ontario. Example - AO member athletes/coaches getting into a fight or hurling insults at a high school meet. Could give rise to a complaint and disciplinary action.
- **Responsibilities** - after setting out some defined terms and describing its scope and application, the Code then sets out specific responsibilities, first for all Participants, and then additional responsibilities that are specific to AO’s Directors, Officers and Committee Members, to Coaches, to Athletes, to Officials and to parents/guardians and spectators.
- Finally, there is a section addressing social media specifically. While all of the behaviours listed in this section addressing social media are covered in the earlier sections on responsibilities, the language of social media is a bit different and there has been a tendency for people to think it is okay to do things over social media that they would never do in person. Hence, a specific focus on social media.

Details about some of the Responsibilities

- I would like to bring your attention to some of the responsibilities.
- A couple weeks ago when we introduced the new Manual, I highlighted a few things in the Code:
 - the issue of the responsibility of all Participants to focus comments appropriately and to provide only constructive criticism
 - the prohibition on all Participants from associating with any person for the purpose of coaching, training, competition, instruction, administration, management, athletic development, or supervision of the sport, who has been expelled from Athletics Ontario or who is serving a sanction involving a period of ineligibility imposed by AO
 - the responsibility of a coach 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
 - and the 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.
- I would like to quickly highlight a few more responsibilities, ones that may be less obvious than the expected rules about drugs and alcohol
 - Coaches are not to solicit, either overtly or covertly, athletes coached by others to join their team or club. This is a matter of respect. In a safe sport environment, people, athletes, coaches, all Participants, respect one another.
 - This includes respecting athletes playing with other teams or clubs and, in dealings with them, not encroaching upon topics or actions that are within the realm of 'coaching', unless after first receiving approval from the coaches who are responsible for the athletes. See s. 9 (i) and (j).
 - Athletes - report any medical problems in a timely fashion, when such problems may limit your ability to travel, practice or compete. It is disrespectful to your coach and possibly your teammates not to.
 - The responsibilities of parents, guardians and spectators - include respecting and showing appreciation to all competitors, coaches, officials and volunteers. I have heard some pretty awful stuff shouted from the stands at people on the track. It is disrespectful and can be very hurtful. It can be the subject of a complaint that can be dealt with under AO's Complaints, Dispute Resolution and Discipline Policy.
- I encourage you to familiarize yourselves with the Code, and to ask us any questions you may have about it.

Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy

- This is a new but now not at all an unusual policy for sport organizations. It 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.
- I would like to highlight the issue of “grooming” which is described in some detail in section 6 of the Policy. Grooming is an insidious form of maltreatment, and because it involves a slow, gradual and escalating process of building comfort and trust with an athlete and also, possibly, their parents, it is often very difficult to recognize.
- Be aware of the types of grooming behaviour, so that you can recognize when it may be happening. It can be the precursor to terrible abuse.

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.