

**THIS DOCUMENT IS AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF THE GSA NATIONAL
SAFEGUARDING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.
THE FULL SAGF/GSA SAFEGUARDING POLICY CAN BE FOUND ON THE GSA
WEBSITE:**

<https://gymnasticssa.co.za>

SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Part 1

Policy



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 GSA is committed to safeguarding and protecting our athletes from harassment and abuse (described collectively as non-accidental violence) and ensuring that all participants are treated fairly and respectfully. We recognise that the welfare of our gymnasts is paramount and put their safety and well-being at the centre of everything we do.
- 1.2 Everyone has the right to participate in gymnastics in an environment free from non-accidental violence irrespective of their race or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, culture, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability socio-economic status, physical attributes, and athletic ability. Article 19 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) enshrines the right for all children (defined as anyone under the age of 18) to be safe from violence.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Non-accidental violence includes all forms of harassment and abuse and takes place worldwide in all cultures and environments. Evidence of recent and non-recent incidents of harassment and abuse indicate it occurs at all levels of sport.
- 2.2 Although any sport participant can experience non-accidental violence, sport-based research confirms that athletes are particularly at risk and some groups are more vulnerable than others. This includes elite athletes and disabled athletes, especially if they are children.
- 2.3 The risk of harassment and abuse increases when there is a lack of protective measures in place that may mean that those who could have the motivation to harass or abuse can do so without restriction.
- 2.4 Abuse and harassment can have significant long-term negative impacts on athlete participation and performance as well as general health and well-being, particularly if the athlete has not been able to disclose their experiences or access support.
- 2.5 All sports organisations have an important leadership role in embedding a no-tolerance approach towards all forms of harassment and abuse. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) Consensus Statement: Harassment and Abuse in Sport (2016) highlights that “It is incumbent upon all stakeholders in sport both to adopt general principles for safe sport (...) and to implement and monitor policies and procedures for safe sport (...) which state that:

all athletes have a right to be treated with respect, protected from non-accidental violence (...)"

- 2.6 In addition, the IOC Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance encompass safeguarding and makes it compulsory for organisations that belong to the Olympic movement to adopt these principles, implement relevant measures and monitor compliance.
- 2.7 The Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG) is committed to the principles of safe sport and good governance and has developed policy for the prevention of abuse and harassment within gymnastics which requires each member federation to adopt and implement their own suitable policy and procedures, either independently or in partnership with the relevant National Olympic Committee (NOC) or the relevant government organisation.

3. DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

- 3.1 Harassment and abuse can be expressed in five forms which may occur in combination or in isolation. These are defined in the IOC Consensus Statement (2016) as follows:



- 3.1.1 **Psychological abuse**

Any unwelcome act including confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, infantilization, or any other treatment, which may diminish an individual sense of identity, dignity and self-worth.

- 3.1.2 **Physical abuse**

Any deliberate and unwelcome act – such as punching, beating, kicking, biting, and burning – that causes physical trauma or injury. Such acts include forced or inappropriate physical activity (e.g. age, or physically inappropriate training loads, when injured or in pain), forced alcohol consumption or forced doping practices.

- 3.1.3 **Sexual harassment**

Any unwanted and unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, non-verbal or physical. Sexual harassment can take the form of sexual abuse.

- 3.1.4 **Sexual abuse**

Conduct of a sexual nature, whether non-contact, contact or penetrative, where consent is coerced / manipulated or is not or cannot be given.

- 3.1.5 **Neglect**

The failure of a coach or other person with a duty of care towards the athlete to provide a minimum level of care, which may cause harm, allow harm or create an imminent danger of harm.

- 3.2 Harassment and abuse can be based on any grounds including race or ethnic origin, culture, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability socio-economic status, physical attributes and athletic ability. It can include a once-off incident or a series of actions. It may be in person or online. Harassment may be intentional, unsolicited and coercive.
- 3.3 Harassment and abuse often result from an abuse of authority, meaning the misuse of power by people in positions of trust, influence or authority (perceived or actual) against another individual.
- 3.4 Some athletes may also carry out acts of harassment and abuse. For young people under the age of eighteen, peer abuse describes incidents when an athlete is exploited, bullied and/or harmed by another athlete or group of athletes of similar age.
- 3.5 The means and methods by which harassment and abuse is carried out include: contact, non-contact, verbal and via electronic communications. It may involve deliberate acts as well as failure to act and omissions or may take the form of bullying or hazing which are

defined as follows:

3.5.1 **Bullying**



Intentional behavior usually repeated over time that hurts another individual or group.

3.5.2 **Hazing**



Hazing behaviors are known to occur in many different types of social groups, including sports teams as a way of initiating a new person when they join the group or want to be socially accepted by their peers.

3.6 Both bullying and hazing may take many forms and involve various mechanisms as outlined above.

3.7 Harassment and abuse are more likely to occur in an environment where poor practice, which is defined below, is not immediately challenged.

3.7.1 **Poor Practice**

Behaviors or inaction which may not always be immediately harmful, but which fall below the required standards and/or code of conduct and should be addressed. Some poor practice may lead to suspicions about an individual's motivation, even where no harm is intended e.g. being alone with a child, excessive or inappropriate touching etc.



3.8 **ACRONYMS**

3.8.1 **GSA** means Gymnastics South Africa

3.8.2 **NF** means National Federation

3.8.3 **FIG** means Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (International Gymnastics Federation)

3.8.4 **SAPS** means South African Police Service

4. **PURPOSE**

4.1 The overall purpose of the policy is to ensure athletes and others taking part in gymnastics can do so without fear of harassment or abuse. The key objectives of the policy are to:



- 4.1.1 Ensure everyone in gymnastics understands that all forms of non-accidental violence are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
- 4.1.2 Enable anyone who has witnessed or experienced harassment or abuse within gymnastics to report the incident without fear of victimisation or retaliation.
- 4.1.3 Ensure an appropriate and coordinated response to any incidents of harassment or abuse within or connected to participation in gymnastics, irrespective of whether they arise at international, national, provincial or club level.
- 4.1.4 Implement effective measures that minimise the likelihood of incidents of harassment and abuse arising.



5. SCOPE

- 5.1 This policy applies to all athletes, members of the athlete entourage including but not limited to coaches, trainers, judges, agents, medical personnel and any individuals acting on behalf of GSA such as directors, officials, administrators or members whether employed, contracted or voluntary (herein referred to as “participants”).
- 5.2 The policy applies specifically to any incidents of harassment and abuse that occur during or connected to participation in any GSA regulated activities or connected to any activities where the participant is representing GSA.



6. ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1 **GSA** accepts our responsibility to implement safeguarding arrangements and procedures to protect all participants from harassment and abuse and will:
 - 6.1.1 Provide effective leadership to promote and implement the policy and embed a no-tolerance approach to harassment and abuse;
 - 6.1.2 Identify a competent person(s) to assess and respond to safeguarding concerns;
 - 6.1.3 Develop and implement a code of conduct which establishes behaviours and boundaries by which all participants, no matter how senior, are held to account;
 - 6.1.4 Ensure all participants understand and abide by GSA policy, procedures and code of conduct;
 - 6.1.5 Ensure all participants understand and comply with the FIG policy, procedures and code of conduct when representing GSA at FIG events;
 - 6.1.6 Ensure everyone is provided with appropriate training to recognise, identify and respond to signs of harassment and abuse;
 - 6.1.7 Share information with relevant stakeholders, including the South African Police Services (SAPS) and/or Social Services Department and the FIG;
 - 6.1.8 Respond to all incidents or concerns, and provide appropriate support to the individual(s) involved, including the person who reported the concern;
 - 6.1.9 Ensure that confidential, detailed and accurate records of all concerns are

maintained and securely stored; and

- 6.1.10 Ensure robust safeguarding arrangements and procedures are in place (see checklist) including background checks to prevent unsuitable individuals from being appointed to a position of authority.

Clubs

- 6.2 Each Club must ensure that:
 - 6.2.1 Effective arrangements are in place to protect participants from harassment and abuse within the club environment.
 - 6.2.2 Every member who is involved with the club is aware of the following:

Those incidents of harassment, any form of abuse, bullying or hazing, as defined in this document under point 3, must be reported to the GSA National Safeguarding Officer. Any participant who is representing the club at a GSA event understands and complies with GSA policy, procedure and code of conduct.
- 6.3 All participants must comply with GSA policy and code of conduct and specifically not engage in, allow, condone, or ignore incidents of harassment and abuse and be supportive of other participants who report concerns.
- 6.4 Any participant who has reason to believe that another participant has or is experiencing harassment and abuse connected to their role in the sport has a duty to report it to GSA.
- 6.5 Failure to comply with the policy and procedures will be investigated and may ultimately result in disciplinary action against the individuals concerned.

7. MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 7.1 The policy will be reviewed to ensure it continues to meet our responsibilities as a national organisation and to reflect any relevant changes in the environment in which we operate and any significant incidents in the sport.

Part 2

Procedure for reporting and responding to abuse

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following procedures apply to any incidents, concerns, allegations or disclosures of harassment and abuse brought to the attention of GSA (herein referred to as “complaints”).
- 1.2 If a complaint of harassment or abuse is perpetrated by or against a child, any action taken must be in accordance with the GSA safeguarding children policy and procedures.
- 1.3 Where the alleged perpetrator is under the jurisdiction of another national federation, the matter will be reported by GSA to the FIG and the relevant NF or National Olympic Committee.
- 1.4 Any participant who has reported or experienced harassment or abuse involving a person or persons belonging to another organization or unconnected to the sport will be provided with support from GSA.

2. REPORTING

- 2.1 Anyone can report an incident of harassment or abuse. Mechanisms for receiving the information are as follows:
 - In writing using the GSA template form **GSA Safeguarding Editable Templates**.
 - By phone or email to the GSA



3. WHISTLEBLOWING

- 3.1 Although incidents can be reported directly by the affected individual, the term “whistle blowing” is used to describe a complaint relating to the conduct of an individual made by someone other than the affected person.
- 3.2 GSA recognises that some individuals may be fearful of the consequences of making a complaint under these procedures, particularly where the perpetrator is in a position of authority. In these circumstances, where possible, the identity of the whistleblower will remain confidential.



- 3.3 Any person who makes a complaint in good faith must not be subject to reprisal or other adverse consequences because of submitting a report. These protections shall not apply to a person who intentionally makes a complaint that is false, vexatious, retaliatory or frivolous.

4. ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 Any complaints pursuant to this policy received by GSA will be referred to the responsible person(s) who is the first point of contact for complaints and concerns under this procedure.
- 4.2 The responsible person(s) will make an initial assessment of the Complaint to determine the nature of the concern and whether the matter relates to a Participant under GSA jurisdiction.
- 4.3 If the complaint is believed to be a criminal offence, the responsible person(s) will refer the matter to the Police and other relevant authorities and/or regulatory bodies without delay.
- 4.4 If the complaint is not considered to be a matter for the police, the responsible person(s) should:
- Refer the complaint to another relevant organisation;
 - Proceed with an internal investigation;
 - Resolve the matter informally;
 - Dismiss the complaint as unfounded or as insufficiently serious to require any action by GSA.
- 4.5 The responsible person(s) will assess whether any of the affected parties require support and arrange for support to be provided where deemed appropriate.

5. INTERIM MEASURES

- 5.1 GSA may impose interim protective measures, including the suspension of the participant where one or more of the following circumstances applies:
- The participant is believed to present a significant risk to other participants;
 - The reputation of the sport is at risk; and/or
 - The participants' ongoing presence may hinder investigations.

6. INVESTIGATION

- 6.1 In most cases, GSA will delay internal investigations until the outcome of criminal proceedings is known. Once a matter has been referred back from the police, the objective will be to conclude any investigations in a timely manner.
- 6.2 Where an internal investigation is required, the GSA shall instruct an independent investigator to carry out the investigation, in accordance with these procedures and to an appropriate timeline agreed by responsible person(s).
- 6.3 Where relevant, the investigator may request information from the police and any other relevant organizations.
- 6.4 The investigator may require written or oral representations from relevant parties, taking special care if interviewing vulnerable witnesses.
- 6.5 The investigator shall prepare a report and include all relevant evidence for consideration by the responsible person(s) who may determine that:
- The matter is referred to an independent GSA disciplinary panel for consideration;
 - Further investigations are instigated;
 - A risk assessment is completed;
 - Instructions, advice or guidance is provided to the relevant parties; and/or
 - No further action is taken.



7. DISCIPLINARY & APPEALS

- 7.1 Any disciplinary proceedings, including the right of appeal, will be conducted in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Disciplinary Code.
- 7.2 The standard of proof for such proceedings is the civil standard of balance of probabilities. Consequently, GSA may seek to take disciplinary action irrespective of the outcome of any criminal proceedings.
- 7.3 The GSA will provide appropriate support and guidance to ensure all participants understand the disciplinary and appeal procedures, especially if children are involved.

8. SANCTIONS

- 8.1 Where it is determined that harassment and abuse has been committed, the Code of Ethics and Disciplinary Code shall impose an appropriate sanction upon the Participant.
- 8.2 The Case Management Panel may consider, singly or in combination, depending on the nature and severity of the conduct and whether there are any aggravating and mitigating circumstances the following:
- Written or verbal apology;
 - Formal warning;
 - Fine;
 - Risk assessment;
 - Training and/or supervision
 - Temporary suspension
 - Termination of [membership, licence, agreement or contract]; or
 - Any other sanction that the Case Management Panel considers appropriate in the circumstances.
- 8.3 Anyone who has been found to have harassed or abused another participant will have the right to appeal against the decision. Appeals must be made in writing to the Independent Appeals Panel within seven (7) days of the decision being issued.



9. NON-RECENT INCIDENTS

- 9.1 Serious allegations of sexual abuse may be made some time after the event where a non-recent allegation is made, the safeguarding manager should:
- Clarify whether there is a current risk to participants; and
 - Advise the individual of their right to make a formal complaint to the Police.
- 9.2 This policy does not apply any specific limitations periods for sexual abuse and any serious allegation of non-recent abuse will be treated in accordance with these procedures.

10. CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS AND FINDINGS OF FACT

- 10.1 GSA shall establish that an incident of harassment and abuse has occurred where:
- A GSA participant is convicted of a criminal offence; or
 - The FIG has determined that an allegation(s) of harassment or abuse against a GSA participant is/are proven.
- 10.2 The Independent Disciplinary Panel having considered any representations made by the participant and any other affected parties may determine that it is appropriate to impose a sanction relating to GSA activities.
- 10.3 The Independent Disciplinary Panel may apply the FIG sanction to some or all GSA activities



or determine its own sanction(s). Any sanction imposed by the GSA shall be subject to a right of appeal in accordance with the GSA Code of Discipline/Disciplinary procedures.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY



- 11.1 GSA recognizes the sensitive and serious nature of harassment and abuse and will strive to keep all matters relating to a complaint confidential. Information will only be disclosed to those organisations and individuals on a “need to know” basis. Anyone who is party to the information involved must also ensure that confidentiality is maintained unless the information becomes a matter of public record.



12. RETENTION OF RECORDS

- 12.1 Any information relating to complaints of non-accidental violence will be stored securely.
- 12.2 Any information about poor practice or complaints about harassment and abuse that may indicate that a participant in a position of trust is unsuitable to work or volunteer in the sport will be retained for as long as the participant remains active in the sport or for 10 years, whichever is longer, even if it were not possible at the time that the information was first reported to instigate any formal proceeding.
- 12.3 Any other records relating to other complaints will be retained for a period of [3 years] unless a similar complaint arises within that period.
- 12.4 Any records relating to disciplinary action taken by GSA should be retained in accordance with the retention periods set out in the GSA Code of Ethics and Disciplinary Code.



13. INTERDEPENDENT/RELATED POLICIES

The following are the key policies that are directly relevant to the provisions contained in this policy:

- Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy
- Ethics and Disciplinary Code
- Safe Recruitment/Use of Criminal Record Checks
- Health, Safety & Welfare Policy
- Equality Policy
- Complaints and Disciplinary Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- The Children’s Act of 2005 as amended
- National Child Care and Protection Policy 2019



14. TERMINOLOGY

The terms used in this policy shall be interpreted as follows:

Balance of probability – means that it is more likely than not that a particular event or set of events occurred. This standard of proof is lower than the standard required from criminal conviction which usually requires proof beyond reasonable doubt.

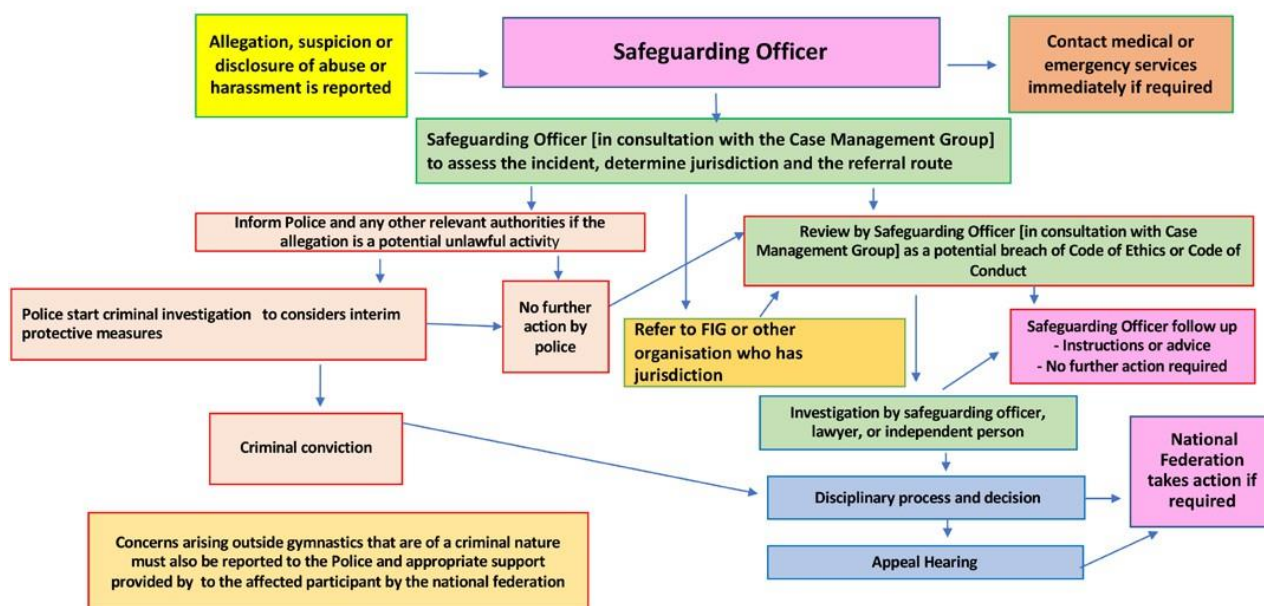
Regulated activity – means any activities or events under the direct jurisdiction of GSA.

Risk Assessment – shall mean the assessment of the risk posed to participants by individuals who have been alleged or proven to have committed harassment and abuse and considering the capacity of the GSA to protect participants. In more general terms, risk assessment involves identifying ways that people can be harmed and deciding what are the reasonable steps that need to be taken to prevent that harm.

Stakeholder – means a person, group or organization that has an interest or can affect or be affected by the policy and procedures. Key stakeholders include gymnasts, parents, clubs and coaches.



National Federation Flow Chart



References

1. FIG: Guidelines for the National Federation – Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
2. The Gymnastics Ethics Foundation (GEF)
3. Gymnasts 2028 – Framework for the GEF
4. GSA - Code of Ethics and Disciplinary Code
5. GSA / SAGF - Safeguarding Information Booklet
6. GSA / SAGF - Policy & Procedures for Safeguarding Participants in Gymnastics from Harassment, Abuse and Poor Practise.
7. GSA / SAGF - Safeguarding Editable Templates
8. GSA / SAGF - Safeguarding Education Information

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