

The BASES Expert Statement on Safeguarding in the Sport and Exercise Sciences

Produced on behalf of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences by Dr Emma Kavanagh, Dr Zoe Knowles FBASES, Dr Abbe Brady, Dr Daniel Rhind, Dr Misa Gervis, Dr Andy Miles FBASES and Prof Richard Davison FBASES.

Introduction

Within the context of sport and exercise science, safeguarding concerns a professional obligation to protect all parties (for example the client, athlete and/or self) from maltreatment or harm (Mountjoy *et al.*, 2016). Safeguarding should embrace relational (others), individual (self) and organisational (culture) considerations. The understanding of physical, emotional and social well-being and freedom from discrimination are the focus of safeguarding education. In this expert statement we provide information in three key areas: 1) a brief summary of the research themes and findings surrounding maltreatment in sport; 2) a discussion of safeguarding within the sport and exercise profession and finally; 3) recommendations for sport and exercise scientists on matters of safeguarding.

Background and evidence

Though widely promoted, the benefits of sport and exercise are not automatic, and individual well-being cannot be guaranteed simply through active participation. Participation may have inherent underlying threats or dangers in an unhealthy culture where maltreatment can occur (Mountjoy *et al.*, 2016). Maltreatment is now recognised as an all-encompassing term that typically subsumes an array of abusive acts or behaviours against the individual, and includes acts of physical and/or psychological violence against the person within the context of a power differential (Stirling, 2009). Existing research remains skewed towards the sport setting with little known about maltreatment or safeguarding in the exercise or physical activity environment.

Studies have explored female (Brackenridge, 2001) and male (Hartill, 2009) experiences of sexual, emotional (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2009) and physical abuse, forced physical exertion (Kerr, 2010) and abuse via technology (Kavanagh & Jones, 2014). Maltreatment in sport can be experienced directly and/or indirectly through involving and impacting bystanders and witnesses (Raakman, Dorsch & Rhind, 2010). Traditionally, there has been a focus on the *coach* as the perpetrator and the *athlete* as the victim, yet research has demonstrated that anyone can become a perpetrator of maltreatment in sport including coaches, parents, peers, scientific and medical staff (Kavanagh & Jones, 2014; Stirling, 2009).

In 2011, a total of 652 maltreatment cases were recorded as occurring within UK national governing bodies, highlighting abuses, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, bullying, inappropriate behaviour via technology, racial abuse, sexual harassment and poor practice (Rhind *et al.*, 2014). Risk of experiencing psychological, physical and sexual violence rises as athletes progress up the talent ladder and performance pathway (Mountjoy *et al.*, 2016) and the impact of maltreatment can be long-term and extremely damaging posing a significant threat to individual physical, social and psychological health. With the acknowledgement that maltreatment can occur in any environment there is a need for safeguarding initiatives to promote participant and practitioner health and well-being.

Safeguarding in the sport and exercise sciences

BASES seeks to promote a culture whereby the importance of

safeguarding and welfare within sport and exercise sciences is a priority. BASES meets statutory requirements for safeguarding by having a designated and trained Welfare Officer, as well as a Code of Conduct and a Welfare Policy with associated procedures for reporting/investigating issues of safeguarding. All practitioners share the responsibility for working in an ethical manner that prioritises safeguarding clients, the self and the integrity of the profession.

In acknowledging the complexity of real world issues it is helpful to consider professional practice as existing on a constantly changing spectrum whereby judgements of practice also exist at the levels of individual (self), relational (others) and organisational (culture). The BASES safeguarding practice barometer (see Figure 1) seeks to capture such dynamic and multi-level considerations.

The analogy of a barometer provides a tool with which to raise the practitioner's self-awareness around *climate* (disempowerment-empowerment), *practice* (harmful-optimal) and *personal state* (low well-being to high well-being). Change begins with observing and by asking relevant questions. At the individual level sport and exercise scientists may judge whether their practice safeguards both themselves and their clients by addressing questions such as: am I working in accordance with the BASES Code of Conduct and am I ethically sound in my practice? At the relational level, sport and exercise scientists may ask: how effective are my working relationships with clients and other staff and am I working in a manner to support client(s)' well-being? At the organisational level, the questions may include, have I considered the climate of the broader culture in which I work? Have I noticed or experienced any change in circumstances or conflict between what I have been asked to do and the BASES Code of Conduct, and if so, to what extent did my response uphold the integrity of my profession?

Use of the barometer for personal reflection and to monitor safeguarding will elicit a broader perspective for review that acknowledges the importance of understanding what client well-being looks like and the complexity of potential safeguarding issues. Ultimately, the aim is for all three levels of consideration to be aligned to support empowered clients with high well-being. Sport and exercise scientists need to show openness to examining factors that support or impede practice, and the conviction and courage to challenge activities that detract from client well-being and neglect safeguarding imperatives.

Recommendations and action

Sport and exercise scientists should:

- Understand and apply the key principles of safeguarding and ensure that they can provide evidence that the appropriate action has been taken to protect themselves, the people they work with and their profession.
- Attend the BASES *Safeguarding Welfare in Sport and Exercise Sciences* workshop to ensure they are familiar with current legislative, organisational and professional requirements and are aware of relevant reporting and/or referral requirements.
- Keep up-to-date on matters of safeguarding by regularly checking for updates in the BASES Welfare Policy and Code of Conduct and adjusting their own practice accordingly.

- Identify and know in detail the appropriate safeguarding guidelines and reporting procedures for the context(s) they operate within whether in the UK or abroad (for example, National Governing Body policies and procedures).
- Stay up-to-date with guidance notes provided by key bodies, for example the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU, www.thecpsu.org.uk) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).
- Ensure they meet the necessary clearance and vetting requirements for the context(s) in which they operate (e.g. Disclosure Barring Services).
- Reflect on practice adopting the safeguarding barometer as a guide: individuals should commit to the use and evidence of safeguarding as a focus for reflection exploring the minimisation of risk within practice. ■

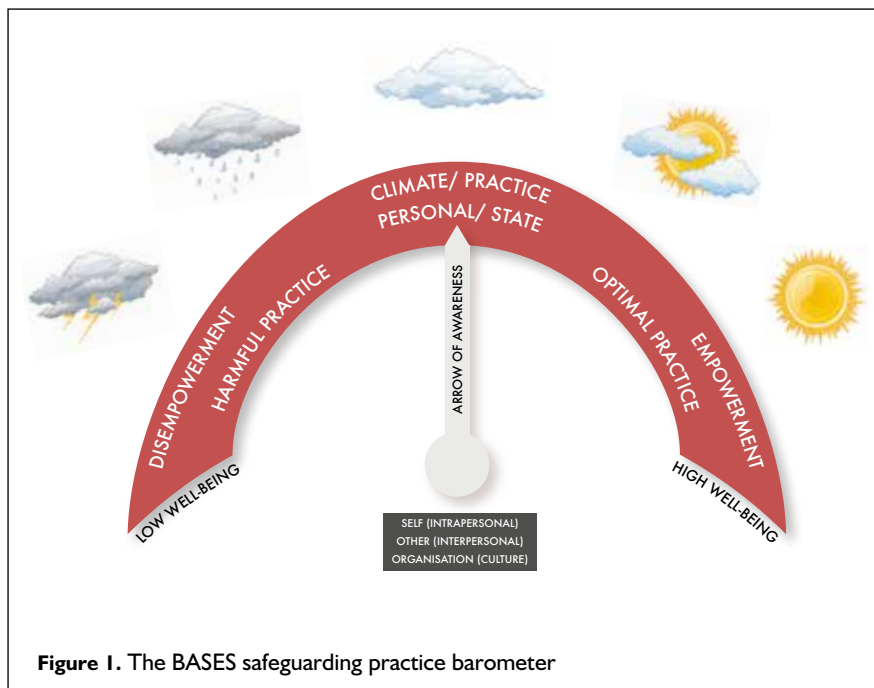


Figure 1. The BASES safeguarding practice barometer



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