



NORGES  
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GUIDELINES TO PREVENT  
**SEXUAL HARASSMENT  
AND ABUSE IN SPORTS**

NORWEGIAN OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE AND CONFEDERATION OF SPORTS

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## GUIDELINES TO PREVENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORTS

*(Adopted by the Executive Board of the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) in 2010) Sexual abuse and sexual harassment are completely incompatible with the intrinsic values of sports.*

Within Norwegian sports there is *Zero tolerance* for discrimination and harassment irrespective of gender, ethnic background, religious faith, sexual orientation and disability.

It is an important goal *to develop tolerance and understanding and to establish recognition* of people's equality in order to avoid discrimination, harassment and bullying. Everyone within sports should seek *to establish secure settings and a secure atmosphere* for children, youth and adults alike.

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 to 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 consent to*.

### **The following guidelines apply within all Norwegian 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 athlete's, 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, managers, representatives, functionaries, judges, parents etc.) have the main responsibility for letting these rules be known in the organisation/sports environment, and that they are adhered to.

*For more information about background, facts, prevention and follow-up, information on the topics of sexual harassment and sexual abuse within sports reference is made to: [www.idrett.no](http://www.idrett.no)*

## GENERAL BACKGROUND

The first guidelines to prevent sexual harassment in sports were adopted by the Executive Board of the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) in 2001. In 2008, NIF's Women's Committee<sup>1</sup> fronted an initiative to revise the Guidelines and to update NIF's information in the area. The reason for this was new research and knowledge in the field, adjustments regarding new public guidelines and decisions, actual cases and NIF's introduction into sports, of a police certificate of good conduct.

Sexual abuse and sexual harassment are completely incompatible with the values of sports and there is Zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment irrespective of gender, ethnic background, religious faith, sexual orientation and disability in Norwegian sports.

To develop tolerance and understanding and to establish recognition of people's equality in order to avoid discrimination, harassment and bullying are important goals within Norwegian sports.

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<sup>1</sup> The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF)<sup>5</sup> In accordance with the regulation on penalty registration § 12, no 4

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE WITHIN SPORTS

### **Purpose, goals and values**

“An open and inclusive sport” has been chosen as the main goal for future sports policy. A condition for achieving this goal is that children, youngsters and adults are happy and can feel safe in their sport activity. It is therefore a goal *“to develop tolerance, understanding and to establish recognition of people’s equality in order to avoid discrimination, harassment and bullying”*.<sup>2</sup>

At the Confederation of Sports Assembly in 2007 the motion “Zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment irrespective of gender, ethnic background, religious faith, sexual orientation and disability” was carried. Zero tolerance implies that sexual harassment and sexual abuse must not take place. Therefore all organisations in NIF have a responsibility to hinder sexual harassment and sexual abuse. It is a prerequisite that both the 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 should occur.

Harassment and abuse are considered breaches of human rights, and occur in all countries, cultures and environments. This is harmful both for the individual, but also for sports as an organisation. It is therefore important to work to establish sound sports environments be they at the level of a club, league or federation. Everyone within sports has a responsibility to identify and counter harassment and abuse and to develop a sports culture characterised by respect and safety. Individuals in sports, as elsewhere in 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 CONSTITUTES SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL ABUSE?

### Harassment in general

A common denominator for harassment is that the behaviour is unwanted, offensive, threatening or annoying for the person subjected to it. Annoying or threatening behaviour may therefore be words or actions that make the person exposed to them feel offended, scared or in other ways upset. This means that such experiences are irrespective of whether the person responsible for the harassment does it on purpose or not. This is important because both women and men may have varying perception of what is unwanted or offensive.

The Gender Equality Act, the Anti-discrimination Act and Working Environment Act all ban harassment.

In the Gender Equality Act (Section 8) it is stated: *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.*<sup>3</sup>

This means that NIF has a responsibility to prevent and seek to preclude harassment from occurring within sports.

### 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 for instance staring, showing of pictures or objects with sexual allusions. Physical harassment is for instance 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 individual person's integrity.

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 implies that 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

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to. Such abuse may be punished in accordance with the Penal Code, which also defines sexual abuse in varying stages of seriousness. The mildest 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.

The Penal Code applies 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 years of age or an individual of any age who is mentally disabled. The code also includes sexual acts in the abuse of one’s position, in a relationship of dependency or in a relationship of trust.<sup>4</sup> To counteract such occurrences amongst children and persons who are mentally disabled, the NIF board has resolved<sup>5</sup> that *all sports clubs from and including 1 January 2009 are obliged to procure a police certificate of good conduct for persons who are to carry out tasks for the club that entail a relationship of trust and responsibility in relation to minors or persons with mental disability.*<sup>6</sup>

### **Grooming/persuasion**

Grooming/persuasion is a tool the abuser may employ to gain a position from where to carry out the 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 “caught” in a kind of net and unable to withstand the abuser’s sexual wishes. Research has shown that this especially 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 with the athlete that may be compared to a child/parent relationship.<sup>7</sup>

With the reference to the Gender Equality Act these guidelines are primarily concerned with sexual harassment, but because the transition between sexual harassment and abuse is rather fluid, all measures that include prevention of sexual harassment will also be able to counter sexual abuse that are subject to the Penal Code.<sup>8</sup>

### **Facts – contexts and assessments**

Sexual harassment and sexual abuse are in most cases expressions of abuse of power. Examples of power relations in sports may be the power that persons in the support network will always have vis-à-vis the athletes: this applies not least to the coach who can help the young athletes achieve their sporting goals. This type of trust and power is often called expert and/or power of position and may be exploited and lead to sexual harassment and abuse. It is therefore important that all adults who have contact with athletes act as sound role models have a professional attitude to their role, their responsibility and to where the limits are for “acceptable” behaviour. This also applies to the interaction 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 and/or a league, and is a breach of the basic values of sports.

4 The Penal Code, chapter 19, Sexual offences

5 In accordance with the regulation on penalty registration § 12, no 4

6 NIF (2008). The procurement and handling of police certificates of good conduct – Guide for sports clubs in NIF, Oslo.

7 Brackenridge, C. H. (1997) “He owned me basically”: Women’s experience of sexual abuse in sport, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 32(2), 115-130.

8 These will in practice be cases for the police, which are handled by the police and not by the sports organisation’s own bodies (see the paragraph on how such cases should be handled).

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 club and for sports as an organisation are therefore important. Research has also shown that there is less harassment in milieux where there is approximately equal number of men and women, than in milieux which are dominated by one gender.

Studies both in Norway and abroad indicate that sexual harassment occurs in all sports and at all levels. Athletes are exposed to harassment about 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.<sup>9</sup> It is however assumed that when it comes to both 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 very vulnerable. Recent research also shows that youths under 18 years of age account for as much as 30 % of all sexual abuse of children that is known to occur.

Sexual harassment and abuse would appear to occur especially 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 in the picture that sexual harassment and abuse may occur.

The consequences of sexual harassment and abuse may be very serious, both for the athlete, the club and the league. Even what is termed as *lighter* forms of sexual harassment<sup>10</sup> have been shown to have potentially serious consequences for the athletes, also several 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. It is important to know that not everyone experiences serious problems after such occurrences, but it is potentially very harmful.

**For athletes such experiences may lead to, amongst other things:**

- reduced ability to concentrate
- sleeplessness
- anxiety, depression and physical stress reactions
- sleeping problems
- poor self-esteem, and 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
- quitting sports activities
- a negative effect on social activities
- a feeling of guilt and shame

9 Fasting, K. og Sundgot-Borgen J. (2000) Kvinner, Eliteidrett og Seksuell Trakassering, Olympiatoppen, kvinneprosjekt 2000. Oslo: Olympiatoppen, Kulturdepartementet og Norges idrettsforbund og olympiske komite. Fasting, K. og Knorre, N. (2005) Women in Sport in the Czech Republic. The Experiences of Female Athletes. Oslo and Prague; Norwegian School of Sport Sciences and Czech Olympic Committee.

10 Some authors use sexual harassment as an umbrella term for gender harassment, sexual harassment and abuse. Others break them up into slight forms and serious forms of sexual harassment. Slight forms of sexual harassment would be for instance verbal comments on the body etc. Concerning children and young people some psychologists contend that all forms of sexual harassment are to be regarded as abuse



It is important to realise that the feeling of guilt and shame may be very strong in a situation where abuse has occurred between a coach and an athlete. This is because the athlete will go a long way to achieve progress, and may thus feel that she/he is the one responsible for the abuse that has taken place. Very 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 fatal consequences in interaction with others, but also in other areas of life. For an athlete it may mean that one is unable to continue a sporting career.

It is self-evident that many of these reactions may influence the athlete's performance, irrespective of which level the athlete is at. 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 are witness to it. When it comes to sports as an organisation, highly publicised cases in the media, where there have been complaints and/or judgements, may lead to clubs/leagues experiencing problems with sponsors. Thus in the wider perspective, cases involving sexual harassment and abuse may lead to financial consequences for the sports in general.

Studies show that very few persons 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, if he was the one responsible for the harassment.<sup>11</sup> In this connection it is important to point out the negative effect there may be when both the athlete and not least persons in the support network refrain from speaking out on cases they are aware of, or suspect. One condition for being able to report on cases is that one must know whom to turn to and how to do this. In the preparatory work for the Gender Equality Act, the importance of the existence of such a system is pointed to. It states inter alia: *It is important that the one being the object of sexual harassment has a place to turn to with the problem. This will be an acknowledgment that the problem exists in the organisation. A system with clear and simple reporting processes must be in place, where complaints can be handled fast and with discretion. It is important that the organisation tackles 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 informal reprisals.* It is still more important to create an environment where sexual harassment does not occur.

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<sup>11</sup> Fasting, K., Brackenridge, C. & Walseth, K. (2002) consequences of Sexual Harassment in Sport. *The Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 8 (2), 37-48.

## PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE

An open, sound and safe sporting environment will in itself serve as a protection against harassment, and also against false accusations. But it may be difficult to put this in place if knowledge is lacking as to what constitutes harassment and which consequences it may have both for athlete, club and associations. Understanding of harassment and sexual abuse should therefore be included in the education of all managers, coaches and active athletes.

A condition for maintaining and strengthening a sound sporting environment is that the management agrees on what constitutes a sound environment. A discussion as to which attitudes and values should characterise a club is therefore important. This concerns questions on how to interact with one another, which expectations and requirements one places on parents, coaches and managers, how the club should be managed, etc. Relevant issues in relation to children and young people may be showering and bathing, the general tone amongst children and young people, sleeping over (are boys and girls to share the same room or have separate sleeping quarters on trips, and if so, are adults to stay with them, and what does age mean in this connection?) Some sports clubs and many national sport federations have ethical guidelines, written or non-written, but these are primarily linked to alcohol. There are however a number of awareness raising measures within Norwegian sports which may also have a preventative effect on sexual harassment and abuse. These relate to bullying, racism, fair play and language use. Clubs and associations that do not have ethical guidelines, which do not include a ban on sexual harassment, should refer to NIF's guidelines.

NIF's guidelines should be referred to in employment contracts for coaches and managers. The boundaries for acceptable behaviour should thus be apparent from the ethical guidelines, and it is important that this is discussed openly in the board, the support network and with the active athletes. Ethical guidelines may also be termed rules for daily interaction or rules of conduct. These will vary somewhat depending on the individual athletic discipline, whether it concerns a club or an association, in addition to the level of performance of the athletes. Examples of such rules within sports that exist today 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 players in the players' room, but in meeting rooms or other more "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 alone together 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<sup>12</sup> play an important role in the development of the athlete, either at the level of club or association. 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 last but not least, be able to adhere to the limits and speak out when someone oversteps them (negotiation). This is difficult for children and young people, but also for young adults if they do not find themselves in a secure environment. This is especially the case if a respected adult person, for instance the coach, is the one committing the violation. Adults must therefore respect the athlete's personal space and never overstep the limits for acceptable behaviour.

The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) have adopted guidelines against sexual harassment and abuse that shall be applied in all parts of the organisation. The management has the main responsibility for publicising the guidelines within the organisation/their sports environment and support network and the contestants are responsible for adhering to them.

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<sup>12</sup> The concept of support network includes persons from the entire support network and/or all adults who are involved in the sport.

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

### **If you are the object of sexual harassment or sexual abuse**

- Get in touch/seek help from someone you trust.
- Contact the management of the club/sports association, or the sports division, the national sports federation or NIF.
- Contact the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud.

### **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 person who is the object of this dares to raise the matter. This may be difficult, especially for children and young people. Athletes who, for instance, 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 therefore 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 one discovers or suspects that someone is exposed to sexual abuse the suspicion should be taken up with the management of the club. It is up to the management to decide whether the suspected person should be reported to the police, or whether other follow-up measures should be implemented, such as termination of contract, withdrawal of tasks or sports-related sanctions. The decision will have grave consequences for the suspect and the minor. It is therefore important that the club management, which has the formal responsibility for the club, reaches the decision.
- If the management, after thorough considerations – and preferably in cooperation with the person harbouring the suspicion – feels that the suspicion is unfounded, it must be decided not to go further with the case and try to stop any gossip and rumours from spreading.
- If the management has reason to believe that there are grounds for the suspicion, the matter is no longer a case for the club management. The parents should be informed immediately about the suspicion and should, in agreement with the club management, report the matter to the police. It is the police who, through questioning and examinations assess the case. The club management shall themselves not act as investigators. Nevertheless, it may be important to follow up such cases internally in the club/or confederation also during a possible court case in order to “take care of” other members both in the support network and amongst the athletes. The club must also decide if the case should be reported to the judicial body of the sports confederation itself.
- The management must ensure that professional secrecy is complied with. This concerns both the one being the target of sexual abuse and the one accused of such behaviour, as well as in relation to possible sanctions.

**Sexual harassment**

- If one discovers or suspects that anyone is exposed to sexual harassment, the suspicion must be taken up with the management of the club. It is the responsibility of the management to counter and to try and prevent sexual harassment from occurring in the club.
- If the management, after deliberations – and preferably in cooperation with the person harbouring the suspicion – thinks that the suspicion is unfounded, it must be decided not to go further with the case and attempts must be made to stop any gossip and rumours from spreading.
- If the management finds that there are grounds for the suspicion, it must act. Which procedure or line of action is taken will depend on the character of the case. In any case the management must have separate meetings with both parties. Depending on the results of the discussions, the management must consider whether to implement any reactions against the person concerned.
- The management must ensure that professional secrecy is complied with. This applies both to the one who is target of sexual harassment and the one being accused of such behaviour, as well as in relation to possible sanctions.
- The club must also decide if the case should be reported to the judicial body of the sports confederation itself.

