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SAFEGUARDING CODE

Definitions & References

SPORT EVOLUTION ALLIANCE

Sport Innovation Hub

THOMAS MORE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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1. Frameworks that underpin our Code

This Safeguarding Code is grounded in internationally recognised legal frameworks. This includes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the Lanzarote Convention (2007).

This Code is further guided by expert-developed standards, including the International Olympic Committee Consensus Statement: harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport (2016), and the International Olympic Committee Consensus Statement: interpersonal violence and safeguarding in sport (2024), ensuring alignment with international standards for the safeguarding of combat sports and martial arts (CS&MA) participants.

2. Policy statement

This Code serves to ensure a safe sport environment, where all those involved can enjoy the full benefits of CS&MA, with safety, dignity and respect. This is grounded in an understanding that safeguarding is a shared responsibility of all.

Clubs and schools that adopt this Code are committed to:

a. Fostering a psychologically and physically safe sport environment, free from abuse, neglect and discrimination.
b. Identifying, preventing, and responding to interpersonal violence (physical, sexual, psychological), bullying, and discriminatory practices, including those based on gender, religion, race, age, or ability.
c. Ensuring appropriate health and safety practices, including the promotion of safe weight cutting practices, the adequate management of injuries and concussions with medical oversight, and guaranteeing access to qualified support professionals. This includes mandatory first aid training for all coaches and first aid kits always available in the premises of the training and competition settings.
d. Adapting equipment, supervision and training practices to the developmental age and specific needs of participants.
e. Maintaining accurate injury history records for each participant to support prevention, safe return-to-play, and evidence-based health management. Records should contain the participant's identification information as well as the type, location and cause of injury. Recording the immedi-





ate measures taken, the duration of absence and the recovery protocol followed is strongly recommended.

f. Encouraging the reporting of safeguarding concerns and the provision of participants' feedback through confidential mechanisms, as well as ensuring that concerns are addressed transparently.

3. Scope of Application

This Code applies to all individuals and groups involved in or connected to the activities of the club or school. This includes coaches, athletes, caregivers, supporters, referees, administrative staff, individuals in leadership positions, volunteers, educators, medical and health professionals, as well as any third parties temporarily engaged in events, competitions, or other club-/school-related activities. All persons covered by this Code are expected to uphold its principles and comply with its safeguarding standards.

4. Code of Conduct

During training, competition and everyday interactions, all individuals covered by this Code must:

a. Respect and protect: treat every person with dignity, fairness and respect. Never engage in, encourage or tolerate interpersonal violence in any of its forms.

b. Prioritise safety: place the physical and psychological well-being of participants above all other goals, including performance goals. Adjust training intensity, drills, and contact levels according to participants' individual needs and abilities.

c. Maintain appropriate physical boundaries: ensure that any physical contact is necessary, clearly explained, and based on consent. Physical contact must only occur in a public space, with legitimate training, instructional, or safety purposes. Consent must be sought beforehand, and any refusal must be respected. When possible, techniques should be demonstrated verbally or visually before using hands-on correction. Where immediate action is required to prevent injury or ensure safety, coaches may intervene without prior consent, provided the contact is limited to what is strictly necessary and explained to the athlete afterwards

d. Promote inclusion: foster an environment that is welcoming and inclusive, free from prejudice or exclusion. Discriminatory language and behaviour are not accepted.

e. Follow safe practices: adhere to safe procedures, including concussion protocols, injury management protocols, and responsible weight-cutting protocols. Never pressure participants to train, spar, or compete when injured, unwell, or unsafe

f. Report concerns: promptly report any safeguarding concerns or violations through the appropriate channels. Do not attempt to handle serious incidents alone.

g. Lead by example: demonstrate integrity, account-

ability, and positive behaviour.

5. Education

To support the implementation of this Code, a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) follows its publication. The goal is to provide safeguarding knowledge on specific concerns regarding safeguarding in CS&MA.
All coaches, administrative staff, safeguarding officers and individuals in leadership positions must complete the MOOC and participate in ongoing safeguarding training.
While mandatory for coaches, administrative staff, safeguarding officers and individuals in leadership roles, the MOOC is open and accessible to all stakeholders, including athletes, caregivers, and volunteers. This ensures a shared understanding of responsibilities, standards, and safe practices across the entire CS&MA community.
Beyond the MOOC, clubs and schools are encouraged to support education within their organisation through one info session on a safeguarding topic (physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, neglect, concussion, weight cutting management) per year.



6. Medical certificate for participants

All participants who train and/or compete should provide a valid medical certificate from a medical doctor confirming they are cleared to participate in CS&MA. This medical examination must be completed before joining the club/school training or competition, and must be renewed annually.
All participants training and/or competing in CS&MA activities must be covered by valid national medical insurance. Clubs and schools are responsible for clearly communicating national insurance requirements and procedures to all participants.
The medical certificate and the health insurance complements, but do not replace, the responsibility of clubs, schools, coaches, and event organisers to maintain safe environments and follow all safeguarding protocols.

7. Safe Recruitment

To uphold the highest safeguarding standards, the recruitment and selection of coaches, administrative and leadership staff, referees and volunteers must follow strict procedures designed to protect all participants and ensure the integrity of the sporting environment.
All prospective coaches, staff, persons to occupy leadership roles and volunteers must undergo criminal background checks prior to appointment. Coaches must also hold valid coaching certifications, in line with their national requirements.
Additionally, all coaches are required to possess up-to-date first aid certification and to complete the MOOC that accompanies this Code. No individual shall assume a coaching role without meeting these requirements.

8. Safeguarding Officer

Each club or school must appoint at least one designated safeguarding officer who acts as the main point of contact for all safeguarding concerns, ensuring that they are handled promptly, confidentially, and in line with established procedures.
The safeguarding officer is responsible for oversee-

ing the implementation of this Code. This includes ensuring that all members understand and follow the Code, as well as monitoring its application in daily practice, and participating in the working group for the purpose of evaluating and monitoring the Code (section 16).
Safeguarding officers are responsible for ensuring that any non-compliance is addressed promptly. Where serious or repeated breaches are identified, appropriate disciplinary or corrective measures must be applied.
The Safeguarding Officer must have appropriate safeguarding training and certification through the MOOC that accompanies this Code, as well as a clear understanding of reporting obligations, referral pathways, and relevant legal frameworks. They are also responsible for promoting a culture of safety, supporting education initiatives, and ensuring compliance with safeguarding standards.
For larger clubs and schools, a safeguarding team is recommended to ensure proper coverage and accessibility.

9. Multidisciplinary team

Besides a safeguarding officer, each club or school should have access to a multidisciplinary team to support the health, safety, and well-being of all participants. This team should include, at a minimum:

a. A medical doctor or physiotherapist for injury prevention and management.
b. A concussion specialist or trained medical professional.
c. A sports psychologist or mental health professional.
d. A nutritionist or dietitian for safe weight management.

This team forms the club's/school's support system and helps coaches prevent, identify, and manage safeguarding concerns, including interpersonal violence and health concerns. The contact information (including name, role and professional address) of the professionals included in the multidisciplinary team should be available for all participants.

10. Reporting Channels

All safeguarding concerns can be reported by the victim or by a whistleblower through clear and accessible channels that allow for the possibility of confidential and anonymous reporting. Clubs and schools must provide multiple reporting options (e.g., dedicated phone line, online form, email, or in-person reporting to the safeguarding officer), so that reports can occur safely, even if the alleged perpetrator is someone in a position of authority within the club or school.
The reporting person must receive clear information about the process, expected next steps, and available support (such as access to helplines or victim support organisations, as well as contact of a psychologist), and should be kept informed, where possible, about the progress of the case, in line with confidentiality and data protection requirements.
Every report must be acknowledged and reviewed within 48 hours. If the issue cannot be safely or fairly handled by the club or school — for example, if it involves club or school management or there is a conflict of interest — it must be referred to an external authority, such as the national federation's safeguarding officer, an independent safeguarding body, or relevant public authorities (e.g., child protection or law enforcement services).

11. Whistleblowers

Whistleblowers should be protected from retaliation, including dismissal, intimidation, harassment, or any adverse treatment resulting from their disclosure. Reports can be made confidentially or anonymously, through the established reporting channels, and will be handled promptly and fairly.

12. Competition and other events

Competitions must be planned and delivered in line with clear safeguarding protocols, including:

- Safe and appropriate facilities.
- Presence of a safeguarding officer.
- Medical and emergency procedures in place.

In case of travels, for competitions or any other CS&MA events or activities, the following measures should be adopted:

- A trusted person should be identified in advance. Where possible, this role should be fulfilled by the club's, school's or federation's safeguarding officer. The name, role and contact details of the designated trusted person should be communicated to the participant and their caregiver. Caregivers must provide explicit consent for the designated trusted person to assume this role.
- Accommodation arrangements should be shared with participants and caregivers in advance.
- Caregivers and participants must receive detailed information about accommodation arrangements, travel plans and supervision structures, daily schedules and meeting points, and contact persons at the event. In case of any change, this should be communicated promptly.
- Foreseeable one-on-one interactions between children and an adult should be communicated in advance and explicitly consented to by the caregiver. When possible, these interactions should always occur in open and observable spaces.
- Children should not be allowed to share a room with an adult, unless the adult is their caregiver.

13. Photographing and filming policy

To protect all participants, photography and video recording at training sessions and competitions are only permitted with prior consent from the club or school and the participant, and, in case of children, from their caregiver.

14. Referral

Clubs and schools are responsible for gathering and documenting safeguarding concerns in a clear, secure, and confidential manner, and, where needed, for referring cases to the appropriate authorities without delay. All information gathered should be in accordance with the terms of the European General Data Protection Regulation.

Clubs and schools are not responsible for conducting criminal investigations, but they must ensure that concerns are escalated to the proper level when necessary.

Each level — club, school, federation, and national authority — must fulfil its specific role within the referral chain to guarantee that cases are addressed promptly and appropriately. Serious concerns, including any form of abuse, neglect, or criminal behaviour, must be immediately referred to national safeguarding bodies and/or law enforcement authorities.

Clubs and schools must also ensure that individuals involved in a referral are supported throughout the process, and that confidentiality and data protection standards are maintained at all times.

15. Sanctions and Discipline

Behaviours considered inappropriate, abusive, or illegal will be sanctioned and disciplined in accordance with respective national laws and regulations. Criminal or legal proceedings are distinct from, and do not replace, internal safeguarding or disciplinary procedures. Clubs and schools must fully cooperate with competent authorities when requested, including by providing relevant information, documentation, or records, in accordance with national data protection and confidentiality requirements.

Where necessary to protect participants, a club/school or federation may take disciplinary measures such as restriction of duties, temporary suspension or exclusion while legal proceedings are ongoing.

In case of behaviours that do not fall under legal scope but breach this Code, clubs and schools may apply internal disciplinary measures according to their internal procedures, or, in case of absence of internal procedures, escalate the issue to the relevant federation. These may include verbal or written warnings, temporary suspension, or a definitive ban from the club or school, depending on the severity and recurrence of the misconduct.

All disciplinary actions must be proportionate, transparent, and documented, with the primary goal of maintaining a safe, respectful, and supportive sporting environment for everyone.

The person against whom concerns are raised should be informed of the allegations and given the opportunity to submit a response to the club/school or federation body responsible for the disciplinary procedures within 10 days of being informed.

Once the case has been addressed, the person who raised the concern and/or the affected person must be informed of the measures taken.

16. Monitoring & Evaluation

The implementation of the Safeguarding Code must be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

Clubs and schools must establish clear mechanisms to monitor compliance with this Safeguarding Code on an ongoing basis. Monitoring should be proactive, not only reactive to incidents. This may include:

- Regular checks and documentation of mandatory requirements, such as background checks, safeguarding and first aid certifications, medical coverage and MOOC completion.
- Biennial internal reviews to ensure that reporting channels, referral pathways, and safeguarding officer roles are active and functioning properly.
- Anonymous feedback channels (e.g., surveys, suggestion boxes, online forms) to allow athletes, caregivers, and staff to raise concerns or observations about this Code's implementation.

A formal evaluation should take place at least every 2 years, or earlier if significant incidents or regulatory changes occur. This process should include a working group to review procedures (e.g., reporting, referral, education) and assess how well the Code is being implemented within the club or school.

This working group will be composed of, at a minimum, one safeguarding officer, one coach representative, one club or school administrative representative, one leadership or governance representative (e.g. a board member), one athlete representative and, where applicable, one caregiver representative. Where possible, the group may also include medical professionals, psychological support staff, and other relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure a multidisciplinary and well-informed evaluation of safeguarding practices.

To ensure transparency, all relevant stakeholders (including participants, coaches, staff, caregivers, safeguarding officers, and club/school leadership) may be actively involved in the evaluation and monitoring of the Code.

Definitions

Bullying: Bullying (or cyberbullying if conducted online) is unwanted, repeated and intentional, aggressive behaviour usually among peers, and can involve a real or perceived power imbalance. Bullying can include actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally and deliberately excluding someone (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Nery et al., 2020).

Child: All those below 18 years old (United Nations, 1989; Council of Europe, 2007; Mountjoy et al., 2016).

Child abuse/maltreatment: Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Discrimination: Discrimination is any unjustified distinction, exclusion, restriction, or unequal treatment of an individual or group based on characteristics such as race, ethnic or social origin, nationality, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, language, religion or belief, that undermines their dignity, creates a hostile environment, or impairs their equal access to participation, opportunities, or enjoyment of combat sports and martial arts (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010; Katsarova, 2021).

Grooming: Grooming is the process of gaining trust of a potential victim by exploiting their interests or needs in order to manipulate and systematically break down interpersonal boundaries, create opportunities for sexual abuse, reduce resistance, and discourage disclosure (Mountjoy et al., 2022).

Inappropriate contact: Inappropriate physical contact refers to any physical contact that is unnecessary, non-instructional, excessive, non-consensual, or outside the boundaries of safe and professional conduct in combat sports & martial arts. Such contact is inappropriate when it lacks a clear and legitimate purpose related to instruction, safety, or performance; violates personal boundaries; exploits power imbalances; persists despite signs of discomfort; occurs in private or non-transparent settings; or involves sexualised, intimate, controlling, or coercive behaviour. This definition excludes clearly defined, professionally accepted physical contact necessary for instruction, skill correction, safety, or appropriate celebration, when conducted openly, respectfully, and with regard for participants' dignity and well-being.

Interpersonal violence: Interpersonal violence involves the intentional use of physical force or power, including behaviours described as abuse, against other persons by an individual or a group of individuals. It can occur online, be perpetrated by different actors and take different forms (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Neglect: Neglect includes a failure to provide an adequate standard of supervision and support, as well as infrastructure to the extent that the health or development of the participant is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk. A participant is neglected if they are left uncared for or abandoned (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Participants: Those who participate in any combat sports & martial arts activity, at any level

Physical violence: Physical violence is an act attempting to cause, or resulting in, pain and/or physical injury, and includes beating, burning, kicking, punching, biting, maiming or killing, or the use of objects or weapons (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Psychological violence: Psychological violence involves the regular and deliberate use of a range of words and non-physical actions used with the purpose to manipulate, hurt, harass, weaken or frighten a person mentally and emotionally; and/or distort, confuse or influence a person's thoughts and actions within their everyday lives, changing their sense of self and harming their wellbeing. In sport, it could also take the form of non-physical actions that could cause physical or psychological harm to participants. Psychological violence could occur online and offline in different forms (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Safe Sport: A physically and psychologically safe and supportive athletic environment where participants can thrive and experience the full benefits of sport participation (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Safeguarding: All proactive measures to both prevent and appropriately respond to concerns related to harassment and abuse in sport, as well as the promotion of holistic approaches to participants' welfare (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). These measures can include reporting channels, clear codes of conduct, safe recruitment procedures, education and training on safeguarding, protocols for managing injuries and concussions, as well as accessible support systems for participants.

Sexual violence: Any unwanted sexual act, attempt to obtain unwanted sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting including but not limited to home and work. The different forms of sexual violence can occur both online and in person (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Violence: The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Whistleblower: A whistleblower is any individual who, in good faith, reports information about wrongdoing, misconduct, or safeguarding concerns that they know of or reasonably suspect

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