



**GIRLS RUGBY
CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

Updated December 22, 2021

1. Child Protection Policy

1.1 Introduction

Everyone who participates in Girls Rugby is entitled to do so in an enjoyable and safe environment. Girls Rugby has a moral and legal obligation to ensure that, when given responsibility for young people, coaches and volunteers provide them with the highest possible standard of care.

Girls Rugby is committed to devising and implementing policies so that everyone in sport accepts their responsibilities to safeguard children from harm and abuse. This means to follow procedures to protect children and report any concerns about their welfare to appropriate authorities.

The aim of the policy is to promote good practice, providing children and young people with appropriate safety/protection while in the care of Girls Rugby and to allow staff and volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues.

A child/young person is defined as a person under the age of 18 (Children's Act 1989)

1.2 Policy Statement

Girls Rugby is committed to the following:

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- All children, whatever their age, culture, ability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity should be able to participate in rugby in a fun and safe environment.
- Taking all reasonable steps to protect children from harm, discrimination and degrading treatment and to respect their rights, wishes and feelings.
- All suspicions and allegations of poor practice or abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- All Girls Rugby staff and volunteers who work with children will be recruited with regard to their suitability for that responsibility, and will be provided with guidance and/or training in good practice and child protection procedures.
- Working in partnership with parents and children is essential for the protection of children.

1.3 Monitor and Review of Policies and Procedures

The implementation of procedures should be regularly monitored and reviewed. Girls Rugby staff/volunteers should regularly report progress, challenges, difficulties, achievement gaps and areas where changes are required to the National Office. The policy should be reviewed every 3 years or whenever there is a major change in the organization or in relevant legislation.

2. Promoting Good Practice

2.1 Introduction

To provide children with the best possible experience and opportunities in rugby, everyone must operate within an accepted ethical framework such as The Girls Rugby Honor Code.

It is not always easy to distinguish poor practice from abuse. It is therefore NOT the responsibility of staff/volunteers or participants in rugby to make judgements about whether or not abuse is taking place. It is however their responsibility to identify poor practice and possible abuse and act if they have concerns about the welfare of the child, as explained in section 4.

This section will help you identify what is meant by good practice and poor practice.

2.2 Good Practice

All personnel should adhere to the following principles and action:

- Always work in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication with no secrets).
- Make the experience of rugby fun and enjoyable: promote fairness, confront and deal with bullying.
- Treat all young people equally and with respect and dignity.
- Always put the welfare of the young person first, before winning.
- Maintain a safe and appropriate distance with players (e.g. it is not appropriate for staff or volunteers to have an intimate relationship with a child or to share a room with them).
- Avoid unnecessary physical contact with young people. Where any form of manual/physical support is required, it should be provided openly and with the consent of the young person. Physical contact can be appropriate so long as it is neither intrusive nor disturbing and the young person's consent has been given.
- Involve parents/guardians wherever possible (e.g. where young people need to be supervised in changing rooms, encourage parents to take responsibility for their own child. If groups have to be supervised in changing rooms, always ensure parents, coaches, etc. work in pairs).
- Request written parental consent if program officials are required to transport young people in their cars.
- Gain written parental consent for any significant travel arrangements (e.g. overnight stays).
- Ensure that at away events adults should not enter a young person's room or invite young people to their rooms.

- Be an excellent role model, this includes not smoking, drinking alcohol, or engage in any other inappropriate behavior in the company of young people.
- Always give enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Recognize the developmental needs and capacity of the young person and do not risk sacrificing welfare in a desire for club or personal achievements. This means avoiding excessive training or competition and not pushing them against their will.
- Secure written parental consent for the program to act in loco parentis, to give permission for the administration of emergency first aid or other medical treatment if the need arises.
- Keep a written record of any injury that occurs, along with details of any treatment given. This should be reported through the Injury Report Form on the Girls Rugby website.

2.3 Poor Practice

The following are regarded as poor practice and should be avoided by all staff and volunteers:

- Unnecessarily spending excessive amounts of time alone with young people away from others.
- Taking young people alone in a car on journeys, however short.
- Taking young people to your home where they will be alone with you.
- Sharing a room with a young person.
- Engaging in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay.
- Allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any form.
- Allowing young people to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- Making sexually suggestive comments to a young person, even in fun.
- Reducing a young person to tears as a form of control.
- Allow allegations made by a young person to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Do things of a personal nature that the young person can do for themselves.
- Communicating directly with a child outside of designated practice/game times without the parent/guardian included.

When a case arises where it is impractical/impossible to avoid certain situation (e.g. transporting a young person in your car), the tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of the parent/guardian and the young person involved.

If during your care you accidentally hurt a young person, the young person seems distressed in any manner, appears to be sexually aroused by your actions and/or if the young person misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done, report any such incidents as soon as possible to Girls Rugby staff and make a written note of it. Parents should also be informed of the incident.

3. Defining Child Abuse

3.1 Introduction

Child abuse is any form of physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that leads to injury or harm. It commonly occurs within a relationship of trust or responsibility and is an abuse of power or a breach of trust. Abuse can happen to a young person regardless of their age, gender, race or ability.

There are four main types of abuse: **physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect**. The abuser may be a family member, someone the young person encounters in residential care or in the community, including sports and leisure activities. Any individual may abuse or neglect a young person directly or may be responsible for abuse because they fail to prevent another person harming the young person.

Abuse in all of its forms can affect a young person at any age. The effects can be so damaging that if not treated may follow the individual into adulthood.

Young people with disabilities may be at increased risk of abuse through various factors such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, isolation and a powerlessness to protect themselves or adequately communicate that abuse had occurred.

3.2 Types of Abuse

- **Physical Abuse** is where adults physically hurt or injure a young person (e.g. hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, biting, scalding, suffocating, drowning). Giving young people alcohol or inappropriate drugs would also constitute child abuse.

This category of abuse can also include when a parent/guardian reports non-existent symptoms or illness and deliberately causes ill health in a young person they are looking after. This is called Munchausen's syndrome by proxy.

In a sports situation, physical abuse may occur when the nature and intensity of training disregard the capacity of the child's immature and growing body.

- **Emotional Abuse** is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a young person, likely to cause severe and lasting adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve telling a young person they are useless, worthless, unloved, inadequate or valued in terms of only meeting the needs of another person. It may feature expectations of young people that are not appropriate to their age or development. It may cause a young person to be frightened or in danger by being constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted, which may make the young person frightened or withdrawn.

Ill treatment of children, whatever form it takes, will always feature a degree of emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse in sport may occur when the young person is constantly criticized, given negative feedback, or expected to perform at levels that are above their capability. Other forms of emotional abuse could take the form of name calling and bullying.

- **Bullying** may come from another young person or an adult. Bullying is defined as deliberate hurtful behavior, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. There are three main types of bullying.

Bullying may be physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, slapping), verbal (e.g. racist or homophobic remarks, name calling, graffiti, threats, abusive text messages), emotional (e.g. tormenting, ridiculing, humiliating, ignoring, isolating from the group), or sexual (e.g. unwanted physical contact or abusive comments).

In sport, bullying may arise when a parent/guardian or coach pushes the young person too hard to succeed, or a rival athlete or official uses bullying behavior.

- **Neglect** occurs when an adult fails to meet the young person's basic physical and/or psychological needs, to an extent that is likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. For example, failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect from physical harm or danger, or failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

Refusal to give love, affection and attention can also be a form of neglect.

Neglect in sport could occur when a coach does not keep the young person safe or exposes them to undue cold/heat or unnecessary risk of injury.

- **Sexual Abuse** occurs when adults (male, female, and non-binary) use children to meet their own sexual needs. This could include full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, anal intercourse and fondling. Showing young people pornography or talking to them in a sexually explicit manner are also forms of sexual abuse.

In sport, activities which might involve physical contact with young people could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed. Also, the power of the coach over young athletes, if misused, may lead to abusive situations developing.

3.3 Indicators of Abuse

Even for those experienced in working with child abuse, it is not always easy to recognize a situation where abuse may occur or has already taken place. Most people are not experts in such recognition, but indications that a child is being abused may include one or more of the following:

- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries.
- An injury for which an explanation seems inconsistent.
- The young person describes what appears to be an abusive act involving them.
- Another young person or adult expresses concern about the welfare of a young person.
- Unexplained changes in a young person's behavior (e.g. becoming very upset, quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden outbursts of temper).
- Inappropriate sexual awareness.
- Engaging in sexually explicit behavior.
- Distrust of adults, particularly those whom a close relationship would normally be expected.
- Difficulty in making friends.
- Being prevented from socializing with others.
- Displaying variations in eating patterns including overeating or loss of appetite.
- Losing weight for no apparent reason.
- Becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt.

Signs of bullying include:

- Behavioral changes such as reduced concentration and/or becoming withdrawn, clingy, depressed, tearful, emotionally up and down, reluctance to go to trainings or competitions.
- An unexplained drop off in performance.
- Physical signs such as stomach aches, headaches, difficulty sleeping, bed wetting, scratching and bruising, damaged clothes, bingeing (e.g. on food, alcohol or cigarettes).
- A shortage of money or frequent loss of possessions.

It must be recognized that the above list is not exhaustive, but also that the presence of one or more of the indications is not proof that abuse is taking place. It is **NOT** the responsibility of those working in Girls Rugby to decide that child abuse is occurring. It **IS** their responsibility to act on any concerns.

3.4 Use of Photographic/Filming Equipment at Sporting Events

There is evidence that some people have used sporting events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of young people. All programs/locations should be vigilant, and any concerns should be reported to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer.

All families sign a media release and consent form during the registration process for photos and video taken during Girls Rugby activities and events. This release/form covers photos and videos taken by Girls Rugby staff and volunteers only.

4. Responding to Suspicions and Allegations

4.1 Introduction

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in Girls Rugby in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However, there is a responsibility to act on any concerns through contact with the appropriate authorities so that they can then make inquiries and take necessary action to protect the young person. This applies **BOTH** to allegations/suspicions of abuse occurring within Girls Rugby and to allegations/suspicions that abuse is taking place elsewhere.

This section explains how to respond to allegations/suspicions.

4.2 Receiving Evidence of Possible Abuse

We may become aware of possible abuse in various ways. We may see it happening, we may suspect it happening because of signs such as those listed in Section 3 of this document, it may be reported to us by someone else or directly by the young person affected.

In the last of these cases, it is particularly important to respond appropriately. If a young person says or indicates that they are being abused, you should:

- **Stay calm** so as not to frighten the young person.
- **Reassure** the child that they are not to blame and that it was right to tell.
- **Listen** to the child, showing that you are taking them seriously.
- **Keep questions to a minimum** so that there is a clear and accurate understanding of what has been said. The law is very strict and child abuse cases have been dismissed where it is felt that the child has been led or words and ideas have been suggested during questioning - only ask questions to clarify.
- **Inform** the child that you have to inform other people about what they have told you. Tell the child this is to help stop the abuse continuing.
- **Safety of the child** is paramount. If the child needs urgent medical attention, call an ambulance. Inform the doctors of the concern and ensure they are made aware that this

is a child protection issue. If the safety of the child is in question in the moment, you may need to call the authorities to address the situation.

- **Record** all information.
- **Report** the incident to Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer.

In all cases relating to Girls Rugby programming (e.g. abuse happening within Girls Rugby), it is required that you report to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer and together, the incident will be reported to Safe Sport at <https://www.safesport.org/report-a-concern>. Safe Sport is the organization that handles all child protection reporting from National Governing Bodies of Sport in the U.S.

In all cases not relating to Girls Rugby programming (e.g. suspected abuse at home or outside of the sport environment), it is required that you report to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer and together, the incident will be reported to the appropriate local authorities that handle child abuse.

In all cases relating to the mental health of an athlete within Girls Rugby programming (e.g. an athlete has self-inflicted wounds or has exhibited signs of mental health struggles), it is required that you report to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer and together, the incident will be communicated to the parents/guardians and the appropriate steps will be taken.

4.3 Recording Information

To ensure that information is as helpful as possible, a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure/concern. In recording, you should confine yourself to the facts and distinguish what is your personal knowledge and what others have told you. Do not include your own opinions.

Information should include the following:

- The child's name and age.
- The child's home address and telephone number.
- Whether or not the person making the report is expressing their concern or someone else's.
- The nature of the allegation including dates, times and any other relevant information.
- A description of any visible bruising or injury, location, size etc. Also, any indirect signs, such as behavioral changes.
- Details of witnesses to the incidents.
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising/injuries occurred.
- Have the parents been contacted? If so, what has been said?
- Has anyone else been consulted? If so, record details.
- Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? If so, record details.

4.4 Reporting the Concern

All suspicions and allegations MUST be reported appropriately. It is recognized that strong emotions can be aroused, particularly in cases where sexual abuse is suspected or where there is misplaced loyalty to a colleague. It is important to understand these feelings but not allow them to interfere with your judgement about any action to take.

Girls Rugby expects its members and staff/volunteers to discuss any concerns they may have about the welfare of a child immediately with the person in charge and subsequently to check that appropriate action has been taken.

For concerns within Girls Rugby programs:

- Volunteers should report to their Girls Rugby Program Coordinator/Manager or the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer if the Coordinator/Manager is not available.
- Girls Rugby Staff should report to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer.
- Volunteers and staff can also take responsibility and seek advice from Safe Sport directly if Girls Rugby staff are not available. Information is available at www.safesport.org.

For concerns outside of Girls Rugby programs:

- Volunteers should report to their Girls Rugby Program Coordinator/Manager or the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer if the Coordinator/Manager is not available.
- Girls Rugby Staff should report to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer.
- Volunteers and staff can also take responsibility and seek advice from local authorities if the situation is time sensitive and Girls Rugby staff are not available.

Where there is a complaint against a Girls Rugby staff or volunteer, there may be three types of investigation.

- **Criminal**, in which case the police are immediately involved.
- **Child protection**, in which case the social services (and possibly) the police will be involved
- **Disciplinary or misconduct**, in which case Girls Rugby will be involved.

As mentioned previously in this document, Girls Rugby are not child protection experts and it is not their responsibility to determine whether or not abuse has taken place. All suspicions and allegations must be shared with professional agencies that are responsible for child protection.

Upon reporting to Safe Sport or relevant authorities, Girls Rugby will follow up with investigations and appropriate next steps.

If there is any doubt, you must report the incident. It may be just one of a series of other incidences which together cause concern.

Any suspicion that a child has been abused by a Girls Rugby staff or a volunteer should be reported to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer, who will take appropriate steps to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk. This will include the following:

- Girls Rugby will refer the matter to Safe Sport.

- The parent/guardian of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from Safe Sport.
- Girls Rugby will handle any media inquiries and implement any immediate disciplinary proceedings.
- If the Program Coordinator/Manager is the subject of the suspicion/allegation the report must be made to Girls Rugby National Office and Safe Sport.

Allegations of abuse are sometimes made sometime after the event. Where such allegations are made, you should follow the same procedures and have the matter reported to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer, Safe Sport, and any relevant authorities. This is because other children in the sport or outside it may be at risk from the alleged abuser. Anyone who has a previous conviction for offenses related to abuse against children is automatically excluded from working with children.

All Girls Rugby staff and volunteers complete USA Rugby registration and criminal background screenings, as well as a Safe Sport online training and certification course.

4.5 Concerns Outside the Immediate Sporting Environment (e.g. a parent or guardian)

- Report your concerns to the Girls Rugby Program Coordinator/Manager.
- If the Program Coordinator/Manager is not available, the person being told or discovering the abuse should report to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer and together they will report to Safe Sport or the local authorities, whichever is deemed appropriate.
- Girls Rugby will decide how to inform the parents/guardians. Social Services may need to be involved.
- Maintain confidentiality on a need-to-know basis.

4.6 Confidentiality

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need-to-know basis only. This includes the following people:

- The Girls Rugby Program Coordinator/Manager
- The parents/guardians of the child
- The person making the allegation
- Social Services/Police
- Girls Rugby Board and Management
- The alleged abuser (and parents/guardians if the alleged abuser is a child)
- Safe Sport
- USA Rugby Safe Sport Liaison

Seek social services advice on who should approach the alleged abuser.

All information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws.

4.7 Internal Inquiries and Suspension

- The Girls Rugby Program Coordinator/Manager and Girls Rugby Management will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further police and social services inquiries.
- Irrespective of the findings of the social services or police inquiries Girls Rugby Management will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of staff or volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision; especially where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases, Girls Rugby Management must reach a decision based upon the available information, which could suggest that on the balance of probability, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of the child should remain of paramount importance throughout.

5. Mental Health and Child Safety

5.1 Introduction

Girls Rugby recognizes that the mental health of our children is equally as important as protecting them from abuse from outside sources. As such, it is the responsibility of all Girls Rugby staff and volunteers to look out for signs and symptoms of mental health concerns and report any concerns in order to protect our athletes.

5.2 Reporting the Concern

For concerns about the mental health of a Girls Rugby participant:

- Volunteers should report to their Girls Rugby Program Coordinator/Manager or the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer if the Coordinator/Manager is not available.
- Girls Rugby Staff should report to the Girls Rugby Chief Operating Officer.
- Girls Rugby staff will inform the parents/guardians and together figure out the best course of action.
- Girls Rugby will provide additional resources such as services or facilities in the community that can be of assistance for the athlete and their family.

6. Recruiting and Selecting Personnel with Children

6.1 Introduction

It is important that all reasonable steps are taken to prevent unsuitable people from working with children. This applies equally to paid staff and volunteers, both full and part time. To ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children the following steps should be taken when recruiting.

6.2 Registration and Checks

- All staff and volunteers are required to register with Girls Rugby and USA Rugby. By registering with USA Rugby, all coaches, referees, and admin will undergo a criminal background screening.
- All registered USA Rugby coaches, referees, and admin are required to complete the Safe Sport Course, as well as additional training courses.

- All coaches, referees, and admin will receive a Girls Rugby Honor Code and a copy of the Girls Rugby Child Protection Policy. All staff and volunteers will be required to sign both documents, to be kept on file with their applications/records.
- No staff or volunteers will be allowed to lead sessions without completing all of the above steps.

6.3 Training

In addition to pre-selection checks, the safeguarding process includes training after recruitment to help staff and volunteers to:

- Analyze their own practice against what is deemed good practice, and to ensure their practice is likely to protect them from false allegations.
- Recognize their responsibilities and report any concerns about suspected poor practice and/or abuse.
- Respond to concerns expressed by a child.
- Work safely and effectively with children.

Girls Rugby requires:

- All staff and volunteers who have access to children to undergo a criminal background check.
- All employees, volunteers, coaches, and referees to undertake relevant child protection training (Safe Sport Course), to ensure their practice is exemplary and to facilitate the development of a positive culture towards good practice and child protection.
- All staff and volunteers to receive advisory information outlining good/bad practice and informing them what to do if they have concerns about the behavior of an adult towards a young person.
- All staff and volunteers are provided with first aid kits for all activities and events.

Declaration

On behalf of Girls Rugby, we, the undersigned, will oversee the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and take all necessary steps to ensure it is adhered to.

Name (Printed & Signed)

**Position and Location within Girls Rugby
(e.g. Coach – Boulder, CO)**

Date
