**Safeguarding**

**Ensuring Safety**

Coaches must consider several factors to ensure a safe training environment, including pre-activity warm-ups, matching participants’ skills, adherence to rules, and keeping training areas and equipment in good working condition. Some safety recommendations include:

* Checking that training areas are level, firm, and free of obstructions;
* Keeping weights and equipment organized, avoiding clutter on the floor;
* Ensuring all boat and oar fittings are properly adjusted;
* Monitoring weather conditions to determine if it is safe to row;
* Making sure all rowers know the waterway rules;
* Cleaning ergometers after use.

**General Coaching Strategies for Creating a Safe Environment**

In sports, the safety and well-being of participants—especially children and young people—are fundamental responsibilities of coaches. To ensure a safe sports environment, it is essential that coaches adopt effective coaching practices that ensure **protection, inclusion, and respect**. This module addresses general coaching strategies and principles aimed at creating safe environments and promoting the positive development of athletes.

One of the key actions a coach can take is to teach children that they have the **right to feel safe**, and what to do if that right is ever violated. Proper communication practices, such as the use of **positive reinforcement** and **appropriate language**, are fundamental in creating an atmosphere of trust. Furthermore, developing a **calm and non-confrontational behavior management style** helps maintain a controlled and safe environment.

Physical contact should be limited to **appropriate forms of interaction**, such as a handshake or a congratulatory pat, always respecting the athlete’s boundaries. If physical contact is required during an activity, the coach must **explain the situation and obtain the athlete’s permission**.

Another important practice is to avoid situations in which a coach is **alone with an athlete**, especially in locker rooms, medical rooms, or inside vehicles. In cases of allegations or suspicions of child abuse, it is crucial to follow established procedures to ensure **justice and proper investigation**. All incidents involving physical restraint or violence must be **documented**, ensuring **transparency in incident management**.

Coaches must also be aware of their **legal and ethical obligations**, especially concerning the handling of athletes’ **medical information**. While it is essential to know participants’ medical conditions in order to provide **safe and appropriate activities**, coaches must ensure that this information is treated **confidentially**, in accordance with **Privacy Laws**. Furthermore, the **participant's or guardian’s consent** must be obtained before sharing medical information with third parties—except in emergency situations.

**Risk management** is also a vital component of coaching. The goal is to create the **safest possible environment**, minimizing risks and consequently reducing the **likelihood of legal issues**. Coaches must ensure that their actions are always aligned with **best safety practices**, including the management of the environment, weather conditions, and equipment.

For example, in cases of **extreme heat**, the coach should take precautions such as:

* Encouraging the use of **light clothing**;
* Allowing **hydration breaks**;
* Monitoring for signs of **heat stress** in athletes.

Similarly, in **cold conditions**, it is important to ensure that athletes wear **appropriate clothing** and avoid prolonged exposure to cold temperatures.

Choosing activities that are **appropriate to the physical, social, and emotional level** of participants is crucial for effective coaching. Coaches must be aware of **individual differences** within the group and adapt activities according to the **varied needs** of participants. It is essential to ensure a **gradual progression** in the **intensity, duration, or volume** of activities, monitoring any participant whose abilities do not match the activity or group level.

**Physical capabilities** can vary significantly, especially among participants with disabilities or young individuals in **growth phases**.

The use of **appropriate equipment** is essential to reduce the risk of injuries. Coaches must regularly check the condition of equipment, ensure it is suitable for the **age and ability** of participants, and carry out **routine maintenance**.

In cases of incidents during training, it is essential to follow **best practices in safety management**.

**Case Studies**

**Implementation of Safeguarding Practices in a Youth Rowing Club**

**Introduction:**

A youth rowing club located in a mid-sized city was facing challenges related to the safety and well-being of its athletes, especially children and adolescents. Incidents such as equipment-related accidents, difficulties in managing group behavior, and a lack of clear emergency protocols led the club’s management to adopt measures based on **safeguarding principles**.

The club’s goal was to create a **safe and inclusive environment** for athletes, promoting sports development without compromising their **physical and emotional integrity**.

**Initial Scenario:**

The club served around 50 athletes aged 8 to 17 and operated in an area near a river with frequent **commercial and recreational boat traffic**. The challenges included:

* Training areas with **uneven surfaces** and limited space;
* **Old equipment**, often poorly maintained;
* No formal **code of conduct** for coaches and athletes;
* Lack of knowledge about **waterway rules** among some rowers;
* Recurring situations where **coaches were alone with athletes** in locker rooms or other isolated areas.

**Intervention:**

To address these issues, the club’s management implemented a **safeguarding program** based on good practices from national and international sport safety guidelines.

**Measures Implemented:**

**Reorganization of Training Areas:**

* Renovations to level the floor and increase circulation space;
* Reorganization of weights and equipment to eliminate floor obstacles.

**Equipment Updates and Maintenance:**

* Acquisition of new boats and adjustable oars, appropriate for the athletes’ age group;
* Creation of a **preventive maintenance schedule** for all equipment.

**Coach and Athlete Training:**

* Coaches attended workshops on **positive communication**, **behavior management**, and **first aid**;
* Athletes were instructed on **waterway rules**, safety protocols, and how to **identify risk situations**.

**Creation of Safety Protocols:**

* A **code of conduct** was established, setting clear boundaries for interactions between coaches and athletes, such as avoiding isolation in enclosed areas;
* Procedures for **incident reporting and communication** were developed.

**Adaptation to Weather Conditions:**

* Implementation of **mandatory hydration breaks** on hot days;
* Rules established regarding **appropriate clothing for cold weather**.

**Case Study: Overuse Injury in a Junior Rowing Athlete**

**Introduction:**

Overuse injuries are among the main risks in endurance sports like rowing. This case study presents the experience of a **17-year-old athlete**, a member of a junior rowing team, who suffered an injury after attempting to complete a training session that exceeded his physical capacity. The analysis focuses on the **contributing factors**, the **actions taken**, and the **preventive measures** implemented by the coaching staff.

**Initial Scenario:**

The athlete, with two years of competitive experience, was seen as **promising** due to his dedication and performance. During a training session in preparation for a regional competition, he was instructed to complete a **high-intensity ergometer workout** with a workload beyond his usual level.

Without direct supervision at a critical moment, the athlete attempted to complete the session to meet the target. During the activity, he began to feel **pain in the lower back**, but chose to continue. At the end of the session, he suffered a **severe lumbar muscle strain**, which kept him out of competitions for six weeks.

**Contributing Factors:**

* **Training Overload:** The volume and intensity of the workout were not suited to the athlete’s current physical condition.
* **Lack of Direct Supervision:** The coach was focused on another part of the group during ergometer use, making it difficult to monitor technique and signs of exhaustion.
* **Ignoring Warning Signs:** The athlete chose to continue despite discomfort, fearing he would seem less committed to the team’s goals.
* **Lack of a Progressive Protocol:** The training load plan failed to consider the athlete’s **biological individuality**, especially his growth phase and greater physical vulnerability.

**Immediate Intervention:**

Following the incident, the following actions were taken:

* The athlete was **immediately removed from training** and advised to rest;
* **Ice** was applied to the lumbar region to reduce inflammation;
* He was referred for **medical evaluation**, where the diagnosis of a **muscle strain** was confirmed, along with recommendations for **active rest and physiotherapy**;
* The coaching staff contacted the athlete’s guardians to **inform them and discuss** the next steps for recovery.

**Preventive Measures Implemented:**

To prevent similar cases, the club implemented the following actions:

* **Personalized Training Plans:** Each athlete began receiving a **training plan tailored** to their physical capacity and experience level, including **gradual progressions** and constant monitoring.
* **Closer Monitoring:** During ergometer use or other individual activities, at least one coach must **supervise each small group** directly.
* **Athlete Education:** Informative sessions were held to teach athletes how to **recognize signs of excessive fatigue or pain** and the importance of communicating these to coaches.
* **Adjustment for Physical Growth:** For athletes undergoing growth spurts, training volume was adjusted to **avoid overloading vulnerable areas**, such as the spine.
* **Warm-Up and Recovery Protocol:** Pre-training warm-ups became mandatory, including **specific exercises to protect the lower back**. Stretching and mobility exercises were also introduced as part of the **post-training recovery routine**.

**Harassment of a Junior Female Athlete in a Rowing Team**

**Introduction:**

This case study addresses a **harassment situation** involving a 15-year-old female rowing athlete and the team’s coxswain—a man of legal age who held a leadership role and had many years of experience. The case highlights the importance of implementing **safeguarding measures**, creating a **safe sports environment**, and responding appropriately to situations that compromise the **physical and emotional well-being** of athletes.

**Initial Scenario:**

The rowing team was composed of both junior and adult athletes, with regular training sessions supervised by experienced coaches. The **30-year-old coxswain** was a well-regarded figure and had earned the trust of coaches and teammates due to his long history in the sport.

The young athlete initially reported to a teammate that the coxswain had been making **inappropriate comments** during training, excessively complimenting her appearance and making personal remarks that made her feel uncomfortable. At a team social event, he attempted to engage more closely with her, insisting on **private conversations** and sending **direct messages on social media** that she found invasive and inappropriate.

Feeling unsafe and uncomfortable, the athlete decided to report the situation to her coach, who took immediate action to protect the athlete and initiate an internal investigation.

**Immediate Intervention:**

* **Immediate Protection for the Athlete:**
The athlete was removed from any direct interaction with the coxswain and reassigned to another boat and training group.
The coach provided emotional support and **notified the athlete’s parents** of the incident.
* **Disciplinary Action:**
The club temporarily **suspended the coxswain** from all activities pending the outcome of a detailed investigation.
An **internal committee** was created to review the case, involving **external experts** to ensure impartiality.
* **Formal Report:**
Given the severity of the case, the club **contacted local authorities**, ensuring that all necessary legal actions were taken.

**Factors Identified During the Investigation:**

The investigation uncovered several environmental and organizational failures:

* **Lack of Clear Policies:** The club did not have a comprehensive **code of conduct** regulating interactions between athletes and leaders.
* **Power Hierarchy:** The coxswain’s leadership role created a power imbalance that made it difficult for the athlete to feel safe reporting the harassment.
* **Lack of Safeguarding Training:** Coaches and staff had not received adequate training to **identify and handle harassment situations**.

**Preventive Measures Implemented:**

After the incident, the club restructured its policies and practices to avoid similar situations in the future:

**Code of Conduct and Training:**
A code of conduct was established with **clear rules** on behavior and boundaries between athletes and team leaders.
All team members, including coaches and athletes, began receiving **regular training in safeguarding and sports ethics**.

**Safe Communication Channels:**
The club created **confidential channels** where athletes could report situations of discomfort or harassment **without fear of retaliation**.

**Reinforced Supervision:**
The club **increased oversight** of interactions between athletes of different age groups and hierarchical positions.

**Family Engagement:**
Parents and guardians became more involved in the club’s activities and were **educated on how to identify signs of harassment** and support their children.

**Psychological Support:**
The athlete received **psychological care** to help manage the emotional impact of the incident.
Professional support was also offered to **any other team member** who needed it.

**Evaluation**

**Easy**

**What is one safety recommendation for training areas?**
A) Keep areas level and free of obstructions ✅
B) Train on any type of terrain
C) Don’t worry about equipment organization
D) Only train on sunny days

**Why is it important for rowers to know the waterway rules?**
A) To ensure good performance in competitions
B) To improve technical skills
C) To avoid accidents and conflicts during training ✅
D) To increase stroke speed

**What should coaches do in extreme heat conditions?**
A) Reduce session duration but keep intensity
B) Allow hydration breaks and monitor for heat stress ✅
C) Train outdoors in unshaded areas
D) Encourage wearing heavy clothing to protect the skin

**What is an example of appropriate physical contact between coach and athlete?**
A) Any physical contact without prior explanation
B) A push to correct posture
C) A long hug during training
D) A handshake or congratulatory pat ✅

**Why is it important for coaches to know athletes’ medical conditions?**
A) To create more intense workouts
B) To share information regularly with third parties
C) To offer safe and appropriate activities ✅
D) To prevent athletes from missing training

**In the case study about the junior rowing club, what was one measure taken to improve safety?**
A) Replacing all coaches
B) Canceling winter training
C) Reorganizing training areas and acquiring new equipment ✅
D) Increasing the number of competitions

**In the overuse injury case, what was a contributing factor?**
A) Old and unmaintained equipment
B) Unfavorable weather on training day
C) Lack of direct supervision during training ✅
D) Use of inappropriate equipment

**Medium**

**What measure was taken to prevent injuries like the one in the overuse case?**
A) Creation of personalized training plans and constant monitoring ✅
B) Removal of ergometer training from the athletes’ routines
C) Reducing weekly training frequency
D) Increasing training intensity for all athletes

**In the harassment case involving the junior athlete, what was a failure identified at the club?**
A) Inadequate equipment for young athletes
B) Poor organization of training areas
C) Lack of supervision during international competitions
D) Absence of a code of conduct regulating interactions between athletes and leaders ✅

**Hard**

**After the harassment incident, what was one measure implemented to prevent future cases?**
A) Restricting entry of new members into the rowing team
B) Canceling social events
C) Dismissing all coaches and team leaders
D) Instituting a code of conduct and creating safe communication channels ✅