

# INTERNATIONAL FLOORBALL FEDERATION



## GUIDELINES ON DISCRIMINATION & HARASSMENT

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## Introduction

Any form of Discrimination and harassment are completely incompatible with the intrinsic values of sports. Within IFF there is Zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment irrespective of gender, ethnic background, religious faith, sexual orientation and disability.

In its role of promoting and protecting the health of the athlete, the athlete's entourage and all officials, the IFF recognises all the rights of athletes, including the right to enjoy a safe and supportive sport environment. It is in such conditions that athletes are most likely to flourish and optimise their sporting performance. Discrimination and harassment are violations of human rights, regardless of cultural setting, that damage both individual and organisational health. While it is well known that sport offers significant potential for personal and social benefits, this potential is undermined where such problems occur. Abuse of Power or Trust can occur by any individual at any level in the organization, hence it needs to be taken into account. These guidelines are directed towards sexual harassment, but can equally be used also in cases related to any form of discrimination or abuse.

Zero tolerance implies that sexual harassment and sexual abuse must not take place. Therefore all organisations within the IFF 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.

Sexual harassment and abuse occur worldwide. In sport, they give rise to suffering for athletes and others, and to legal, financial and moral liabilities for sport organisations. No sport is immune to these problems which occur at every performance level. Sport organisations, in particular, are gatekeepers to safety and should demonstrate strong leadership in identifying and eradicating these practices.

Everyone in sport shares the responsibility to identify and prevent sexual harassment and abuse and to develop a culture of dignity, respect and safety in sport.

## GUIDELINES ON DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT & ABUSE

### Defining the Problem

By **Sexual harassment** we mean unwelcome sexual attention. It refers to behaviour towards an individual or group that involves sexualised verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour, whether intended or unintended, legal or illegal, that is based upon an abuse of power and trust and that is considered by the victim or a bystander to be unwanted or coerced.

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. In sport, it often involves manipulation and entrapment of the athlete.

Sexual harassment and abuse occur within an organisational culture that facilitates such opportunities. Indeed, they are symptoms of failed leadership in sport.

Gender harassment, hazing and homophobia are also regarded as of sexual harassment and abuse. **Gender harassment** consists of derogatory treatment of one gender or another which is systematic and repeated but not necessarily sexual. **Hazing** involves abusive initiation rituals that often have sexual components and in which newcomers are targeted. **Homophobia** is a form of prejudice and discrimination ranging from passive resentment to active victimisation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people.

## Prevalence, Risks & Consequences

Research indicates that sexual harassment and abuse happen in all sports and at all levels, but prevalence appears to be higher in elite sport. Members of the athlete's entourage who are in positions of power and authority appear to be the primary perpetrators. Peer athletes have also been identified as perpetrators.

There is no evidence that the amount of clothing cover or the type of sport are risk factors: these are myths. Research identifies risk situations as the locker-room, the playing field, trips away, the coach's home or car, and social events, especially where alcohol is involved. Team initiations or end-of-season celebrations can also involve sexually abusive behaviour against individuals or groups.

Sexual harassment and abuse in sport seriously and negatively impact on athletes' physical and psychological health. It can result in impaired performance and lead to athlete drop-out.

Psychosomatic illnesses, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, self-harm and suicide are some of the serious health consequences of sexual harassment & abuse. Passive attitudes/non-intervention, denial and/or silence by people in positions of power in sport (particularly bystanders) increases the psychological harm of sexual harassment and abuse. Lack of bystander action also creates the impression for victims that sexually harassing and abusive behaviours are legally and socially acceptable and/or that those in sport are powerless to speak out against it.

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.

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. 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.

## Relationships in Sport

There is always a power difference in an athlete's relationships with members of their entourage (coaches, scientific and medical staff, administrators etc.). This power difference, if misused, can lead to sexual harassment and abuse.

These relationships require that a significant amount of time be spent together in the emotionally intense environment of competitive sport. All adults in an athlete's environment must adopt clear guidelines about their roles, responsibilities and appropriate relationship boundaries. It is essential that each member of the entourage, and any other authority figure, stays within the boundaries of a professional relationship with the athlete.

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.

## Prevention Strategies

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.

Accepted prevention strategies include policies with associated codes of practice, education and training, complaint and support mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation systems. Regardless of cultural differences, every sport organisation should have these provisions in place.

The policy is a statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to create a safe and mutually respectful environment. The policy should state what is required in relation to the promotion of rights, well-being and protection. It allows the organisation to generate prompt, impartial and fair action when a complaint or allegation is made. It further allows it to take disciplinary, penal and other measures, as appropriate.

Codes of practice describe acceptable standards of behaviour that, when followed, serve to implement the policy. Standards of behaviour set a clear benchmark for what is acceptable and unacceptable. They can help to minimise opportunities for sexual harassment and abuse and unfounded allegations. (See 1.6 IFF Recommendations)

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 or association 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 Floorball 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 the IFF guidelines.

Ethical 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 whether it concerns a club or an association, in addition to the level of performance of the athletes.

Examples of such rules could be:

- 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, is responsible for creating a safe environment for the athletes. 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. 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.

## **What is the procedure when sexual harassment & 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 IFF

### **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 organisation. 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 management, which has the formal responsibility for the organisation, 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 management. The parents should be informed immediately about the suspicion and should, in agreement with the organization, report the matter to the police. It is the police who, through questioning and examinations assess the case. The organisation



shall themselves not act as investigators. Nevertheless, it may be important to follow up such cases internally in the club/or association also during a possible court case in order to “take care of” other members both in the support network and amongst the athletes. The organisation must also decide if the case should be reported to the judicial body of the IFF.

- 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 organisation management. It is the responsibility of the management to counter and to try and prevent sexual harassment from occurring in the organisation.
- 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 organisation must also decide if the case should be reported to the judicial body of the IFF.

## **What is not considered harassment:**

- Reasonable action or conduct by a person in authority that is part of his/her normal function, even if there are possible unpleasant consequences (e.g., disciplinary action, performance management, changes to schedules or duties, implementation of policies, etc.).
- Differences of opinion or disagreements between co-participants.

Discipline in training is an indispensable part of high performance sport and should not be confused with discrimination or harassment. However, it is of vital importance that those in authority:

- set and communicate non-discriminatory performance standards, selection criteria, rules and regulations to all participants;
- ensure that training involving touching or other physical contact occur in an appropriate setting, and only after informed consent has been sought and received;
- be consistent in taking any corrective or punitive action without discrimination based on prohibited grounds or harassment; and

- use non-discriminatory terminology; address individuals by name and avoid the use of derogatory slang or offensive terms.

## **IFF Recommendations**

The IFF recommends that all Member Associations should:

1. Develop policies and procedures for the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse;
2. Monitor the implementation of these policies and procedures;
3. Evaluate the impact of these policies in identifying and reducing sexual harassment and abuse;
4. Develop an education and training program on sexual harassment and abuse;
5. Promote and exemplify equitable, respectful and ethical leadership; and
6. Foster strong partnerships with parents/carers in the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse.

The policy on sexual harassment and abuse should:

- identify and address these issues
- be clear and easily understood
- involve consultation with athletes
- be widely communicated through publication and education
- be approved by the relevant management body (e.g. Management Board or Executive Committee) and incorporated into its constitution and/or regulations
- apply to all involved in the organisation
- be supported by a comprehensive education and training strategy
- be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, particularly when there is a major change in the constitutional regulations of the organisation or in the law.

The policy should:

- state that all members have a right to respect, safety and protection
- state that the welfare of members is paramount
- identify who has responsibility for implementing and upholding it
- specify what constitutes a violation
- specify the range of consequences for such violations
- specify procedures for reporting and handling complaints
- provide details of where to seek advice and support for all parties involved in a complaint
- specify procedures for maintaining records
- provide guidance for third party reporting ('whistleblowing').



There should be codes of practice on sexual abuse and harassment for specific member roles in a sport organisation. The code of practice on sexual harassment and abuse should:

- provide guidance on appropriate/expected standards of behaviour from all members
- set out clear processes for dealing with unacceptable behaviours, including guidance on disciplinary measures and sanctions.

## **SOURCES**

**Canadian Olympic Committee** - POLICY STATEMENT AND GUIDELINES ON DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT - Adopted by the Board of Directors May 21, 2012 (Updated April 14, 2016)

**IOC ADOPTS CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON “SEXUAL HARASSMENT & ABUSE IN SPORT”** (2007)

**Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports** (Adopted by the Executive Board of the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) in 2010) - Guidelines to prevent sexual harassment and abuse in sports