



# START TO TALK

”...Sport is great for children.  
It brings joy and develops healthy habits.  
It boosts self-esteem and creates  
a sense of belonging.  
Through sport, children abide by key values  
and learn important life skills.  
But sexual abuse does happen in sport.  
And children find it hard to speak up.



[start to talk.org](http://starttotalk.org)

Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport  
  
Accord partiel élargi sur le sport

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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## What is starttotalk.org?

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■ “Start to talk” is a Council of Europe call for action to public authorities and the sport movement to stop child sexual abuse. By joining this call, governments, sport clubs, associations and federations, as well as athletes and coaches, pledge to take concrete measures to prevent and respond to abuse.

## What are the specific risk factors in sport?

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- ▶ There is a higher tolerance level for physical violence and injuries.
- ▶ Authoritarian leadership can lead to unequal power relationships between coaches and athletes.
- ▶ Scandal avoidance means that incidents are silenced.
- ▶ Despite some progress, sport still has a male-dominated gender ratio.
- ▶ Physical contact is often required.
- ▶ It has reward structures.
- ▶ Inappropriate sexual behaviour is often tolerated, discrimination and gender inequality accepted.
- ▶ High potential risk situations: changing rooms, showers, carpooling, overnight stays.

## Why is it hard for children to talk about abuse?

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■ There are many reasons why child victims of abuse do not speak up. About one third of abused children never tell anyone because they:

- ▶ are afraid of not being believed or of consequences (such as reprisals or possible impact on family, their sport career, their reputation);
- ▶ feel shame and guilt;
- ▶ are confused: some children believe they are in a true “relationship”;
- ▶ do not understand: some children are not able to recognise the abuse (very young children, children with disabilities);
- ▶ do not know whom to tell;
- ▶ are athletes, and are therefore supposed to be strong (vulnerability is considered a weakness).

## How can adults make a difference?

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■ Governments are expected to improve laws and policies.

The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse aims at preventing abuse, protecting children and fighting impunity. It contains very detailed measures that, if implemented, can considerably reduce the number of victims.

The convention is currently in force in 42 states across Europe and applies in the field of sport, too.

■ **Sport organisations** should adopt strategies and measures to keep children safe. These include:

- ▶ promoting a culture of respect and of zero-tolerance towards violence;



**“Start to talk” is about adults breaking the silence and lending children a voice.**



- ▶ adopting policies to safeguard children;
- ▶ designating a person for child protection whom everyone knows how to contact;
- ▶ screening professionals working in contact with children;
- ▶ training coaches to prevent, detect and report abuse;
- ▶ developing codes of conduct for adults and children;
- ▶ raising awareness on risks and how to minimise them;
- ▶ aiming for high-quality standards for infrastructures.

■ **Coaches** ought to know how to protect children and detect, prevent and react to abuse. They should:

- ▶ promote a culture of respect and of zero-tolerance towards violence, leading by example;
- ▶ attend/request child-protection training;
- ▶ be aware of applicable legislation and procedures, the conduct expected of them, child-protection services and reporting mechanisms;
- ▶ make sure children feel that they can talk to them;
- ▶ always take children seriously and act upon disclosures.

■ **Athletes** need to influence the sport environment so that it is safe and empowering. They should:

- ▶ adhere to a culture of respect and of zero-tolerance towards violence;
- ▶ seek to influence the functioning of sport organisations so that child protection becomes a priority;
- ▶ request protection measures and be aware of the conduct expected of them, of child-protection services and reporting mechanisms;
- ▶ support awareness-raising efforts and use their experience to shape future action.

■ **Parents and guardians** can help protect their child by:

- ▶ seeking information about child sexual abuse, to be better acquainted with the risks and how to minimise them;

- ▶ making sure that their child knows about boundaries and whom to ask for help if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable or harms them;
- ▶ talking to their child and making sure she or he will talk to them;
- ▶ seeking guidance on how to talk to younger children;
- ▶ asking the sport club or organisation their child belongs to what their policies, strategies and protection measures are;
- ▶ asking for help and advice when worried or unsure.

## How can the Council of Europe help?

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■ The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse details the measures that must be taken by states to prevent and respond to sexual violence, to protect children and to fight impunity. States ratifying the convention commit to implementing those measures.

The implementation of the convention is monitored by the Lanzarote Committee. The findings and recommendations of the committee are extremely useful in assessing and improving the situation at national and international levels.

■ To stop child abuse in sport, the Council of Europe, through its children's rights programme and its Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS), offers a platform for co-operation between public authorities, the sport movement, academia, child-protection agencies, the European Union and other international organisations. It also helps to:

- ▶ improve legislation and policies;
- ▶ set up strategies and codes of conduct in sport to safeguard children;
- ▶ train sport professionals (coaches, managers and policy makers);
- ▶ raise awareness to empower parents and children through targeted resources (TV spots, videos, leaflets, etc.);
- ▶ disseminate knowledge and expertise by providing access to research and a network of experts.

■ The Council of Europe, through EPAS, also facilitates the production of its awareness-raising materials in a variety of languages.

**Give children a voice.  
Be a silence breaker.  
Start to talk.**

**[www.starttotalk.org](http://www.starttotalk.org)  
[www.coe.int/sport](http://www.coe.int/sport)  
[www.coe.int/children](http://www.coe.int/children)**



Training Kit for sport professionals



TV spot and videos



Printed materials

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**ENG**

**[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)**

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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