

## 1. How Can Sport Organisations Create Safeguarding Response Mechanisms That Are Trauma-Informed?

Sport has the power to transform lives. But for too many, it has also been the backdrop to harm and trauma. As organisations tasked with safeguarding, it's our duty to not only respond effectively but to ensure our response mechanisms support healing and do no further harm.

As safeguarding professionals, we must remember that every interaction with a survivor is an opportunity to support their healing. Creating trauma-informed safeguarding mechanisms requires courage and a commitment to change. It's not always easy, but it is necessary. Survivors of abuse in sport deserve a system that respects their dignity, supports their healing, and ensures their voices are heard.

At the heart of this work are people—individuals who trusted their sport, who loved it, and who deserve safety and dignity. For them, and for future generations, we must get this right.

Trauma-informed safeguarding isn't just a framework or a set of actions; it must be a commitment to safe sport. It's about seeing survivors, believing the survivor and supporting them to access the right remedy.

We must create a safeguarding system that doesn't just prevent harm but also promotes healing when the harm unfortunately occurs.

### *We must Avoid Re-Traumatisation*

Every time a survivor is asked to retell their story, it can feel like reliving the trauma. For some, it can even feel like proving their pain over and over again. To prevent this, we must:

- Design systems that allow survivors to share their story once and ensure it is handled respectfully and securely.
- Safeguarding professionals must be trained in what it means to be trauma informed, they need to know what appropriate recording, case management and information sharing processes looks like so that what the survivor does not have to recall their abuse over and over again. From my experience of working with survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation, seeing a child having to relive their abuse over and over again was heartbreaking. Their pain was present in their mind and in their body. Social care support has now improved their practices to ensure a child does not have to retell their story and we must do the same in sport. We must learn from other sectors and ensure our practice is the best it can be.
- Another important part of the safeguarding response are investigations. Investigations at times focus disproportionately on "proving" harm rather than creating a space for survivors to feel heard. I have heard too many times about the criticism of a survivor being inconsistent, but this, is part of their trauma response. Our brains are not programmed to re-call traumatic events. The brain copes in different ways and may compartmentalise pain, we may compartmentalise memories. Sometimes we want those memories to be shut away but we are asked to get them out of that locked draw in our brain, and the way they come out may not be the same each time. Once they are out, it may take some time to put them back in. That's why we need caring professionals, that understand what trauma looks like, that are not trauma inducing but trauma responsive. They are there to support and truly listen to survivors.
- Survivor-centred practices must be part of the investigation process: like flexible interview settings and the option to bring a support person, or alternatives to in-person testimony.
- Investigators should be trained in active listening and equipped to understand the psychological impacts of trauma so that they can understand if and why a survivor may need to reschedule or unable to continue, or when they may need a break or further support.
- There is a need to have clear and transparent processes, so that the survivor knows what to expect at every stage

- Providing a single, consistent point of contact who is there to support survivors and builds trust, coordinating the process and delivers information is key. Sometime even saying there are no information is an information so we must ensure that there is continuous communication.

## 2. How can sport organisation show they are TI?

### Embedding a Trauma-Informed Culture

Being trauma-informed isn't just about writing good policies—it's about living them.

Survivors will trust our systems only if they see and feel that organisations are truly committed to being trauma-informed and survivor centred.

In our safeguarding systems:

1. **We must prioritise implementation:** Policies are just the starting point. True implementation requires ongoing training, monitoring, and adapting processes based on learning, review and feedback; they need to be truly survivor centred and embed their voices.
2. **We must invest in training:** everyone involved in sport—coaches, staff, volunteers, and leaders—needs to understand trauma and how they can contribute to a safer environment. Regular training, the desire to be the best practitioner you can be, reflective practice, and ongoing support are essential. Let's not forget the support safeguarding professionals need, this goes beyond financial commitments (that at times is not even there) but it must also be in the form of external clinical supervision, counselling and peer support and continuous professional development opportunities.
3. **We must create trusted systems:** Survivors are more likely to come forward when they trust the system. This trust is built through accountability, consistency, independence and a visible commitment to prioritising wellbeing.

#### Decision-Making Bodies must be trauma-informed:

The individuals responsible for making decisions—whether disciplinary panels, safeguarding teams, or boards—must also embrace a trauma-informed approach which includes:

- Ensuring decision-makers understand trauma's effects and how to interpret information through that lens.
  - Ensuring decisions reflect an understanding of the survivor's experience and communicate them in a trauma informed and sensitive way.
  - Avoiding language or actions that could be perceived as judgmental or dismissive.
  - Including trauma experts or experienced safeguarding professionals in these processes.
  - Communicating decisions in a way that is respectful, and supportive.
4. **We must engage survivors:** Survivors are the true experts in their own experiences. Their voices should guide the design and improvement of safeguarding systems. Engaging them meaningfully demonstrates respect and ensures our systems address their real needs.