

Fact Sheet

Sexual Harassment in Sport and Recreation

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is unwanted or uninvited sexual remarks, gestures, sounds, jokes or actions that make a person feel unsafe, degraded or uncomfortable.

Sport and recreation context

Power dynamics

Sexual harassment is not unique to sport and recreation, but there are power dynamics in these contexts that create an environment more susceptible to sexual harassment. Coaches, trainers and leaders/mentors spend a large amount of time with athletes and participants and have a great influence over the opportunities they might have. Sometimes this power imbalance is abused.

Abusive coaching

There is a difference between motivating and bullying.

Coaching should never violate someone's right to be safe – even in a physical sport. Abusive coaching may include: insulting athletes; controlling parts of athlete's personal life, like dating; intrusive texts or calls; working athletes excessively to punish them; "breaking" an athlete to "build them up"; walking out on the athletes during competition when they are losing; and many other behaviours.

Inappropriate physical contact

To help athletes improve, coaches may adjust an athlete's form or massage an athlete's muscles during performance to break up lactic acids (a.k.a. "flushing"). Any excessive touching, unwanted touching or touching and massaging out of these contexts is inappropriate.

Hazing

Hazing is any activity that humiliates or abuses a teammate at risk of emotional, physical or sexual violence. It can be directed at new teammates or could take place at events, like birthdays. It is sometimes supported by coaches.

Sexism

Some coaches may favour athletes of a certain gender by unfairly giving them more opportunities, resources and attention.

Call 911 if you or someone you know is in immediate danger.

For non-emergency support and reporting options, call or text the Alberta One-Line at 1-866-403-8000

Reporting

Sexual activity between adults is criminal when the victim does not consent to the activity. It is the survivor's decision to report; there is no time limit to reporting. For supports and reporting options, connect with the Alberta One-Line (call or text 1-866-403-8000). They may refer you to:

- Police
- Local sexual assault centre
- [Sexual Assault Response Team](#)
- Your sports organization. They are responsible for keeping athletes safe.

The *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act* requires all organizations, including sports organizations, to investigate incidents of violence and harassment and take corrective action.

There is a legal obligation to report if a child is involved in sexual assault

If you or the child is in danger, call 911

To report, call the Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-387-5437

For information on the age of consent, visit the [Department of Justice Canada](#)

Everyone can play a part

Coaches, leaders, parents and teammates can intervene by:

- Believing survivors if they share their experience with you
- If it is safe, speak up and come to a victim's defence if you witness sexual harassment
- Offering support if the survivor wishes to report/seek services
- Calling the police if you witness sexual assault
- Refusing to join in degrading conversations that keep sexism and sexual violence alive (and voicing your disapproval)

Coaches, leaders, parents and teammates can be allies by:

- Never blaming the survivor
- Attending practices and games. If practices are considered private, ask for an explanation
- Talking to your children about consent and healthy relationships
- Participating in public awareness programs
- Getting your team, club or league to promote training programs for coaches

Resources

Alberta One-Line | 1-866-403-8000

Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services offer supports for survivors of sexual assault/harassment.

Bullying Helpline | 1-888-456-2323

Toll-free, 24/7 telephone service, which offers help for bullying concerns for Albertans.

alberta.ca/BullyingChat available 8 am-8 pm daily.

Child Abuse Hotline | 1-800-287-543742

Get help if you, or children you know, are being neglected, abused or sexually exploited.

OHS Contact Centre | 1-866-415-8690

If an employer does not respond to the situation, [file a complaint](#) with OHS. [Learn more.](#)

Mental Health Help Line | 1-877-303-2642

Toll-free, 24/7 telephone service, which offers help for mental health concerns for Albertans.

Canadian Sport Helpline | 1-888-83SPORT

Offers advice, guidance and resources on how to proceed/intervene appropriately in harassment/abuse circumstances.

Alberta Human Rights Commission

albertahumanrights.ab.ca

Alberta Sport Connection

albertasport.ca

Sport Canada

canada.ca/en/services/culture/sport.html