

Relentless Pursuit of Safety: Template for a Club Program to Protect Athletes

By Trish McGonnell, Co-Founder & CEO, National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI)

By this time, we all know the importance of conducting criminal background checks on anyone working with our kids or other vulnerable populations. Background checks are a critical tool and an important indicator of past behavior that could be indicative of future problems. It may surprise you to know that convictions for criterion offenses* are uncovered each year for about 5% of volunteer coaches and caregivers who willingly submitted to screening. But, what about the rest: Does a lack of conviction for a serious offense imply that a person is fit to be a coach or to be working with children?

The answer: No, certainly not. A “clean” criminal history check does NOT imply a person is fit for duty, nor should it ever be the “be-all-end-all” as it relates to due diligence in the onboarding process. While background screening is an effective tool that should be part of your risk management process, a truly comprehensive onboarding process will include a multi-faceted approach.

What does this mean, a “multi-faceted approach?” According to the National Council of Youth Sports’ *Recommended Guidelines, Second Edition*, a comprehensive approach includes the following:

- **“Gold Standard” Background Screening** which establishes who will be screened, the criteria for evaluation, the methodology and sources for gaining information and the related legal/compliance process.
- **Athlete Protection Policies** that “provide specific, mandatory policies that must be followed at all levels of the organization” and are enforceable with clear consequences. Organizations need procedures to ensure that these policies are delivered to and acknowledged by their members and staff, and should be enforceable with clear consequences.

Policies should address topics of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors with athletes, the definition of harassment, how to report an incident and more.

- **Child Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Training** is an important tool for organizations. Education goes a long way to preventing abuse in organizations.

- **All organizations should have Abuse/Incident Reporting Systems** in place and ensure that all (1) how and to whom incidents are reported, (2) investigation protocol relating to a report of abuse or inappropriate behavior, (3) reporting responsibilities internally and to authorities, if appropriate, (4) follow up actions, (5) responsibility and accountability for the implementation and management.

- **Check References!** Knowing as much as possible about the people working in and representing your organization is important to deciding which roles may be appropriate for them. Talk with people familiar with the person, including athletes, parents and administrators who may have past experience and information, including information regarding their association with past organizations. Think about the bottom line, what is it you MUST KNOW about this person? Powerful questions like: Would you trust your own child in the care of this person? Have you ever witnessed or have knowledge of this person behaving in an inappropriate manner with any child or staff member? Do you have any hesitation recommending this person for a trusted position in our organization?



Creating and maintaining cultures of **Zero Opportunity/Zero Tolerance** is important in the fight against harm. Communication and stakeholder engagement are powerful tools to foster involvement, awareness and care throughout your organization. Implementing and maintaining comprehensive, multi-approached systems to prevention and response are critical to protecting your valuable people, brand, reputation and assets.

* *Background screening criteria published in the National Council of Youth Sports’ Recommended Guidelines, Second Edition,*

**Interested in hearing about how you can better protect your athletes?
Join Trish McGonnell at the AVCA Professional Development Seminar,
December 15th at 11 a.m.**

**Contact: NCSI— 866-833-7100
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