



CENSUS OF
ATHLETE
RIGHTS
EXPERIENCES

READY TO RESPOND

WE
CARE

A PLAYER
ASSOCIATION
GUIDE TO
SUPPORT
ATHLETES
THROUGH
ABUSE,
HARASSMENT
AND TRAUMA



CENSUS OF
ATHLETE
RIGHTS
EXPERIENCES

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The World Players Association is the leading voice of organised players in the governance of world sport. It brings together 85,000 players across professional sport through more than 100 player associations in over 60 countries.

World Players believes that players are people first and athletes second. Likewise, child athletes are children first, athletes second.

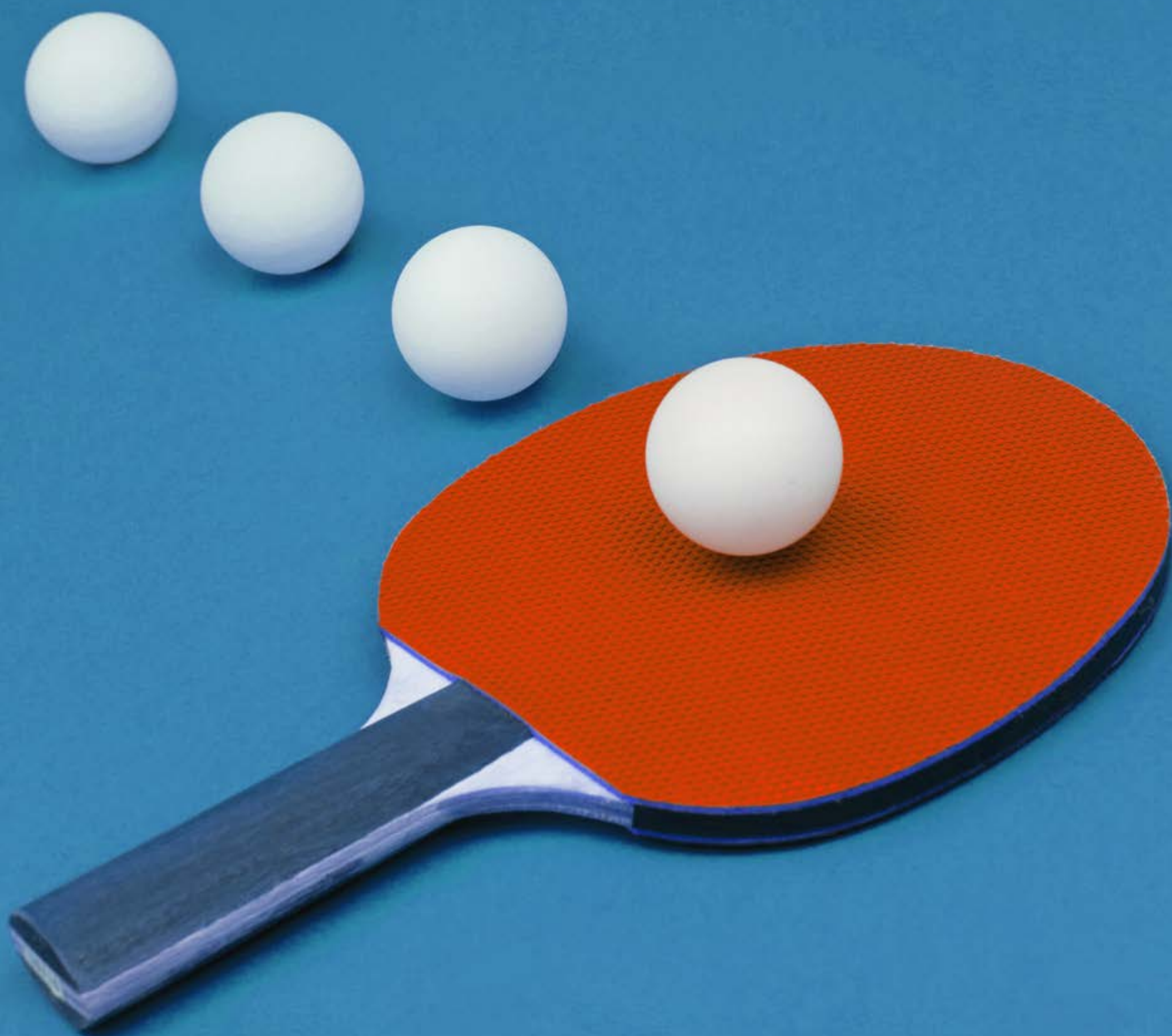
During the year 2020/2021, World Players, its affiliates and Loughborough University, have developed and implemented Project CARE (Census of Athlete Rights Experiences): the first global study to look at athletes' experiences in sport to understand whether and how their rights were protected and promoted.

Project CARE is part of the vision of the World Players Association to champion the dignity of the player and the humanity of sport.

Acknowledging the challenges in prioritising athlete welfare against medals and trophies, player associations are looking to establish policies, processes and support mechanisms to ensure survivors of abuse and harassment in sport have access to remedial justice and holistic supporting services.

The "Ready to Respond" Handbook aims at providing valuable, hands on guidance to player associations on how to exercise duty of care for athletes who are suffering effects of trauma and/or who disclose abuse or harassment in sport.

While this is ultimately for the benefit of athletes, the resource is intended to be used by those who support their wellbeing.



INDEX

INTRODUCTION	5
GETTING READY TO RESPOND	10
1. Step One: Active Listening and Awareness of Rights Abuses	12
2. Step Two: Helping Create a Safe and Supportive Environment	15
3. Step Three: Legal, Wellbeing and Safety Considerations	17
4. Step Four: The Impact of Trauma	20
5. Step Five: Self-Care for You and Those Around You	22
CONCLUSIONS	
Towards safer practice	24

→ INTRODUCTION

This Handbook's main goal is to support World Players and its affiliates on how to exercise the duty of care for athletes who disclose abuse, harassment or any type of trauma in their sports.

Information and guidance provided in this Handbook has been directly informed by the contribution of 22 respondents (survivors of abuse in sports, Player Development Managers, Player Representatives, legal representatives and child rights experts) who participated in interviews as part of a needs assessment. This process involved a wide range of stakeholders globally across a number of different sports.

The needs assessment used in-depth structured interviews to build on the findings from the CARE Report (2021) to explore experiences and practices of abuse, harassment and trauma in elite sport, resources and policies and suggestions on developing a resource hub. The hub includes this Handbook, webinars and signposts to recommended external guidance on abuse, harassment and trauma.

The interviews provided valuable, rich and experience-based insights that have guided the development of the Handbook to ensure it is responsive, evidence based and clinically sound. The honesty and openness of interviewees meant that guidance offered in the Handbook was tailored to meet the recurring requests put forward by respondents.

Below are the key themes that emerged from a comprehensive analysis of issues explored in the needs assessment and examples of comments made during the interviews:

01

EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES OF ABUSE

ABUSIVE EXPERIENCES IN SPORT

“If it is all that you know, how can you tell when something is not acceptable?”

“Am I saying and doing the right thing at the right time?”

THE UNIQUE ECOSYSTEM OF ELITE SPORT

“This is an environment like no other, where the fear of failure exceeds everything else. No one wants to jeopardise that even if something terrible has happened.”

“I was beaten continuously when I played, but this was just accepted as normal or a way to get the best out of you.”

“There is such a contradiction between what you see, which appears like the athlete is at the centre of everything and cared for when in fact it is the sport that people protect, not the athlete.”

CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

“There is such an influence on family cultural practices that impact on how a player acts and reacts, we cannot underestimate this.”

“We must remember the resources, attitudes and willingness to support athletes in this way is so different across countries.”

“There is no one way that fits all.”

02

RESOURCES & POLICIES

FORMAL POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND SYSTEMS

“We might have some form of a policy but that doesn’t mean there is a clear or fair process by which abuse will be addressed.”

“At all costs, the sport will protect itself not the athlete and the lack of policies is one way of showing this.”

“We don’t have a specific policy but this work has made us realise that there is a big gap in what we do.”

03

DEVELOPING A RESOURCE HUB

AWARENESS RAISING ABOUT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE

“We need to know how to respond if this arises.”

“The biggest issue I think is when you suspect something but don’t know how to bring it up or even if you should.”

“There needs to be a clear set of steps to follow and external expert advice as a safety net.”

UNDERSTANDING HOW A SAFE AND UNSAFE ENVIRONMENT IS CREATED

“The biggest concern is how to help someone feel you can make a difference as one person in a huge system.”

“We need to have policies that encourage transparency, give permission to have honest conversations and try to break down this enormous stigma.”

“This cannot be done alone. We need to be less isolated and work together to support each other.”

SELF-CARE OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS AND ATHLETE STAFF

“It is easy to forget we have welfare responsibilities and that the player or athlete relies on us as a positive part of their extremely demanding lives; we need to find time to look after ourselves to be as good as we can at what we do.”

“It cannot be just a token thing that is done, it needs to be genuine and helpful.”

NAVIGATING DISCLOSURES

“Even if you do feel quite comfortable in having these difficult conversations, what if there is nowhere to go with this information or the player doesn't want you to say anything, what then?”

“Is it better not to ask if you cannot do anything about it?”

RESOURCE FORMAT

“By feeling empowered ourselves, we are in a stronger position to support athletes and guide them to the help they need.”

This Handbook provides hands on information, guidance and support that aim to strengthen your knowledge, skills and confidence to respond to someone who has experienced abuse in their sport.



GETTING READY TO RESPOND

STEP ONE

Active Listening &
Awareness of Rights Abuses

STEP TWO

Helping Create a Safe &
Supportive Environment

STEP THREE

Legal, Wellbeing &
Safety Considerations

STEP FOUR

The Impact of Trauma

STEP FIVE

Self-Care for You &
Those Around You

GETTING
READY TO
RESPOND

Active Listening & Awareness of Rights Abuses



Many queries in relation to potential rights abuses arise as general, sometimes casual queries where an individual may ask a Player Development Manager or Players Union Representative for an opinion on a situation or issue, regarding themselves or someone they know. This may be a description of an event or the recalling of a situation, perhaps within a narrative of a number of concerns or grievances. Active listening, empathy and a non-judgmental stance will help ensure open and clearer communication at this stage.

It is important that you are clear that you may not be able to keep such conversations confidential if the law has been broken and/or if someone remains at risk from an alleged abuser. In this scenario and in the interest of trust built in the relationship, you should tell the athlete you need to seek guidance from the Lead Player Development Manager or Head of Player Welfare.

At an initial stage, an individual's perception of something being wrong with how they have been treated is central. In some cases, it may be the perception of other people (e.g., players, family members) that brings the issue to the fore. Your role at this stage is to listen and understand what an individual has experienced, not to pass judgement as to whether the experience constitutes abuse in some form or other.

STEP ONE

Active Listening & Awareness of Rights Abuses

USEFUL TIPS

- Make good eye contact with the athlete, breaking eye contact every five seconds or so.
- Watch for non-verbal cues, and listen out (if over the phone) for sighs or crying.
- Listen without interrupting or passing judgement.
- Be present, without distraction, nod and acknowledge you are hearing the person.
- Ask questions. At this stage open ended questions are usually better, for example: Who? Where? When? How? What? How Come?
- Summarise what the athlete has said regularly, to show you are understanding and to allow the athlete to correct any misunderstanding/miscommunication.



Active Listening & Awareness of Rights Abuses

It is also helpful to look at specific definitions to help direct your thinking about what may need to happen next. Seek clarification about what is defined as a crime in your jurisdiction, as if you believe a criminal act has happened you will need to seek legal advice and in light of this the authorities will need to be informed.

ABUSE

An action that intentionally harms or injures another person. This can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse (including coercion) and neglect.

HARASSMENT

Offensive, belittling, bullying, threatening or otherwise unwelcome behaviour directed toward an individual or group.

GROOMING

The targeting and manipulation of a child or less powerful person, with the intention of taking sexual advantage of them.

TRAUMA

A deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

STEP TWO

Helping Create a Safe & Supportive Environment



Abuse and harassment will result in an experience of trauma. While no two individuals are alike, and one can never really predict how someone will respond to experiencing trauma, some responses are more likely than others, and it is important be aware of these in creating a safe and supportive environment.

It is important at this point that you emphasise that your role is to be supportive, a reliable listening ear for the athlete. Ensuring that you do not over-promise what you can do, and being dependable are very important. For example, as much as possible, do what you say you are going to do. If you arrange a call at 10.00, make the call at 10.00, and try not to make changes to your contact arrangements unless absolutely unavoidable. Reliability, predictably and consistency really help anxious and/or traumatized people connect and feel safe with others who can help them.

Helping Create a Safe & Supportive Environment

USEFUL TIPS

- Once you have understood what the athlete has said, it is important to re-affirm safety and support within the context of your relationship.
- Consider scheduling a further conversation in order to be supportive, including a face-to-face meeting if your initial conversation was by phone or online.
- Thank the athlete for sharing what they have, and ask how they now feel.
- Be clear that your role is to support, not to challenge nor apportion blame.
- The athlete may well be confused and upset at this stage, or be unsure what to do next, as you may be too.
- It is very understandable that you may not know what to do next, and tell the athlete that you will need to seek advice from within or without your organization.
- Think about concerns the athlete may have about who you are going to speak to especially if they are worried this is going to make them more vulnerable to harassment and abuse. Be transparent about who you will speak to, why and when.



STEP THREE

Legal, Wellbeing & Safety Considerations



Whatever the athlete tells you, it is crucial at this stage that you seek immediate further consultation from your manager and organization so you can appropriately advise the athlete on the next steps with clear and accurate information. If after in-house consultation it is unclear how to proceed, seek urgent advice externally.

Depending on the jurisdiction you are in, and the policy and procedures of the organization you belong to, you may need to pass the case on to others within, contracted to or outside of your organization.

This can be an upsetting and stressful time for a Player Development Manager, and you will require ongoing support with close monitoring, clear procedural advice and the space to de-brief and discuss. If this is not available within your organization, it needs to be sourced externally, as no one person should be left to manage disclosures of abuse or harassment alone.

STEP THREE

Legal, Wellbeing & Safety Considerations

The factors you need to consider include following any pre-existing protocol or policy in place for such instances. If such a protocol or policy does not exist, then it is important that one is drawn up for future reference.

Following your organizational policy will give you clarity, in case you have one, as will seeking a legal opinion on what needs to happen next. Consider conducting an assessment on what psychological support the athlete needs at this time, possibly in consultation with external independent consultant, and/or referral to a psychologist or similar for athlete.

Your duty of care to an athlete also extends to their safety and security as a consequence of their making disclosures about their trauma, especially if the athlete needs to go public to protect themselves and others. Holistic security includes ensuring the athlete is safe physically (with no threat to bodily integrity), psych-socially (with no threat to their livelihood or place in society) and digitally (with no threat from online trolling, stalking or malicious sharing of misinformation).

For more details on Holistic Security Analysis, please see <https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/introduction.html>

To access list of support services available free of charge in different localities around the world see: www.worldplayerscare.co

STEP THREE

Legal, Wellbeing & Safety Considerations

USEFUL TIPS

At this stage it is important to take a trauma informed approach to athlete wellbeing, especially having a recognition of the “Four R’s” of supporting traumatized people. While the experience of each individual athlete will be different, awareness of trauma issues will be helpful to you in your response. Specifically these involve:

- REALISING** how trauma impacts people, teams and groups
- RECOGNIZING** the signs of trauma
- RESPONDING** to trauma appropriately
- RESISTING** re-traumatization, where disclosing may exacerbate the athlete’s distress



The Impact of Trauma



While trauma is to some degree a universal concept, how any person experiences a traumatic event or series of events, is dependent on several factors. Trauma includes individual events (e.g., serious injury, road traffic collision, assault) and multiple events (abuse, harassment, neglect).

Inter-personal trauma, occurring in the context of individual and ongoing relationships, can have a devastating impact on the victim. This is especially the case if there is a power imbalance (one party has influence over the other in terms of selection/opportunities), and/or a duty of care expectation (one party is supposed to look out for the other in a parental/coaching/medical/service provision role) within the relationship.

The aim of psychological therapy in the aftermath of experiencing trauma is to help the person find safety within themselves and with others, be better able to deal with upsetting trauma reminders and to be able to face the world with confidence and determination.

STEP FOUR

The Impact of Trauma

USEFUL TIPS

- The signs of trauma in adults are multiple and may include anger, withdrawal, sadness, emotional unpredictability and dysregulated behaviour. Each person is different, for example for some a “trigger” incident may prompt disclosure.
- The quandary of whether to disclose abuse or not will only add to an athlete’s agitation, and you and others may well notice a difference in the athlete’s demeanor generally (e.g., reports that the athlete “does not seem like themselves”).
- It is important to be aware that being impacted by trauma does not just mean recalling bad memories, it means experiencing physical and emotional reactions.
- The more intrusive and invasive the trauma previously suffered, the more intense the re-experiencing will be.



Self-Care for You & Those Around You



There is no doubt that supporting athletes through these issues is very difficult and can have a significant impact on a Player Development Manager due to the upsetting nature of what you hear, worry about making a mistake and the sometimes daunting world of interfacing with legal and psychological professionals. This can also re-trigger past experiences from your own life, which can be especially distressing.

The personal impact of this experience can be part of what is known as Vicarious Trauma, in that bearing witness to the trauma of others has a significant impact on you and your functioning, potentially leaving you feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, pessimistic, helpless and even hopeless. This can become a vicious cycle, leading to compassion (or battle) fatigue, and ultimately burnout, where you can feel unable to do your job.

However, with good support for you, a reasonable balance in your work and life and specific strategies to address Vicarious Trauma, you can learn to deal more effectively with this. How you model your own day to day coping is important for your colleagues, family and friends as well as the athletes you support.

STEP FIVE

Self-Care for You & Those Around You

USEFUL TIPS

- Try your best to keep some balance between work time and non-work time.
- With more stressful situations, including supporting athletes reporting trauma, monitor the hours you are working and leave spaces in your schedule if possible.
- Arrange and seek support for yourself, including the opportunity to de-brief after difficult sessions and days.
- Don't always expect to know what to do, trauma manifests in many different ways.
- While you may feel overwhelmed in the face of a painful trauma history, doing your job well in providing timely support is priceless in an athlete's journey.
- If you feel triggered yourself, or have very powerful reactions (for example, anger or anxiety), look for additional support, including psychological input.



CONCLUSIONS

WE
CARE

TOWARDS SAFER PRACTICE

We would like to thank all who contributed to the development of this Handbook. We hope it enables you to feel “Ready to Respond” to athletes disclosing trauma, abuse or harassment in sports with clarity and confidence.

Being “Ready to Respond” appropriately is a five-step process which can be understood and summarized below as SAFER practice:

S

Support the athlete & **Seek** consultation on due process, legal and mental health issues.

A

Affirm the athlete in coming forward to seek help.

F

Find out what practical and psychological assistance the athlete requires.

E

Encourage the athlete to make use of all available support.

R

Reach out for your own support.

The World Players Association stands ready to support you and the important work that you do.

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