

# From goal to action

A guideline for implementing the Safe Sport Allies approach to prevent harassment and abuse in youth sport

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## Introduction

As a local sport club administrator or policymaker (e.g., concerned actor), you have been tasked with the crucial role of supporting grassroots sports clubs in creating a socially safe and positive sports environment, with special emphasis on promoting positive bystander behaviour. An important and challenging task. After all, by creating a socially safe and positive sports environment, there is a high likelihood that participants will enjoy sports more and look forward to spending time at their club.

So, how do you address this? How to ensure that as many sports clubs as possible get started with this topic? What are the do's and don'ts? These are important questions when you want to use the approach developed by 'Safe Sport Allies' (SSA) aimed to prevent harassment and abuse at the sports club by promoting positive bystander behaviour. In this introductory chapter, we will provide a comprehensive overview of SSA and the content of its approach.

### Purpose of the document

We can imagine that as an involved actor you have many questions regarding the implementation of the SSA approach within grassroots sport clubs. We understand, don't worry! This document serves as a roadmap for you and other concerned actors tasked with supporting sports clubs in creating socially safe and positive sports environments. In this guide, we outline our approach step by step and explain how to implement it within sports clubs. Our primary objective is to educate bystanders and inform them how to handle harassment and abuse in youth sports.

In this guide, we present a strategy for implementing the approach, based on five steps. Before diving into the details of the five steps, we'll share our view on implementation and provide insights on the considerations needed when seeking to apply such an approach in sports clubs. Let's embark on this journey together!

### The Safe Sport Allies approach

In order to raise awareness and knowledge amongst bystanders, the European Erasmus project 'Safe Sport Allies' started in early 2021. This collaboration between sports organisations, victims, policy makers and researchers from across Europe led to the development and testing of an educational program for sport participants, coaches, and parents, as well as a policy instrument for club administrators.

For instance, conversation cards have been developed for coaches and sport participants to illustrate ambiguous situations and facilitate discussions around them. Parents are educated through a webinar and knowledge clips providing insights into how to recognize and respond to signs of harassment and abuse. In addition to these specific materials, a range of general resources, including factsheets and an educational video, have been developed. These materials can be utilized during information

sessions in sports clubs. The SSA materials can be download for free via the SSA website ([www.safesportallies.eu](http://www.safesportallies.eu)).

### Principles of implementation

Having offered some insights into the approach, its content, and the location of relevant materials, we will now delve into the topic of implementation, or more precisely, the implementation process! Implementation is a time-intensive endeavour, and truth be told, it's an ongoing process. We've used the term 'implementation' several times, but what exactly do we mean by it? Broadly speaking, implementation refers to the process of putting the developed approach into practice. This includes multiple steps necessary to introduce and organize the workshops and strategies we've tailored for sports clubs.

In essence, to guarantee the effective utilization of the various materials at sports clubs, we've developed a strategy that assists in deploying the resources of the Safe Sport Allies project. This strategy is guided by three principles that need to be considered. We'll briefly discuss these principles next.

### Introducing something new into an existing context

First and foremost, it's important to understand that the heart of implementation is 'introducing something new into an existing context'. This 'something new' often pertains to behavioural change. For example, it could be a change for board members who now prioritize sportsmanship and respect, an athlete who becomes more aware of fair play, a coach who prevents harassment and abuse or a sports club that establishes rules of conduct. In essence, change can be about many things and often involves optimization, improvement, or even introducing something completely new!

While this might not sound very exciting, research indicates that about 70 percent of changes in organizations fail (Beer & Nohria, 2000). To change our behaviour, among other things, we have to do something new and often unlearn something we have always done. This can be very challenging (Hitters, 2019). After all, it requires energy, effort, unlearning accustomed behaviour, and learning new behaviour. Within a sports club, there will always be individuals who need to unlearn old behaviour and adopt new ones - for example, a parent who interferes excessively during a game. Overcoming resistance from others is often a part of the process!

Therefore, during the implementation process, it's crucial to thoroughly understand the existing context. This enables better identification of those who can help distribute the approach, when it needs attention, and how it can be linked to existing behavioural patterns within the club.

In the following section, we will delve deeper into the importance of understanding the context in which you plan to implement the approach. For now, it suffices to emphasize the importance of staying attuned to the existing context.

### Implementation process is not a blueprint

Every sports club is unique. This means that the implementation process won't always look the same. Therefore, you should apply our steps with some degree of flexibility. Sports clubs are individual autonomous organizations, each with their own distinctive features and customs. One club may be large, with paid employees, numerous active volunteers, and a desire to compete at a high level. Another club might be small, comprised of a few volunteers and sports, with sports primarily played for enjoyment. One club might have been focusing on bystander behaviour for years, while others may have never given it any attention.

In both cases, the principles of the implementation process remain the same, but the duration and content of each step may differ from club to club. Implementation is a bespoke task and, as such, is not a precisely defined blueprint. Furthermore, customizing the process increases the likelihood of garnering substantial support at the club.

### Implementation as a transfer of ownership

Another key principle for the implementation process within a sports club is the concept of transferring ownership (Duijf, 2019). After all, you probably are not a member of all the sports clubs you're supporting. Therefore, encouraging positive bystander behaviour and a safe sports environment at sports clubs means striking a balance between two extremes: on one end, complete faith in the self-organization of sports clubs, and on the other, the scenario where external parties - like sports clubs and municipalities - are too closely involved with a club and mandate changes.

Board members often face challenging decisions to ensure a safe, fair, carefree and enjoyable sporting experience for members. Clubs with a wide and knowledgeable volunteer base are generally better equipped to undertake these 'additional' administrative tasks, but even for well-resourced clubs, it remains a challenge for board members. When volunteers feel ownership, taking on these tasks becomes more manageable and natural. The approach should become something 'of the club itself'.

At the start of the implementation process, it is important to consider the ownership of each sports club. This includes involving the right people and clarifying what they should expect. As we share our steps in this guide, you'll notice that we give significant attention to this key principle. The process of transferring ownership will need your support (as a concerned actor). A soft, process-oriented approach is generally favoured over a hard, controlling one (Nederhand, 2019). Several strategies can be identified:

#### *Connecting*

There are organizations that already have experience in creating a safe sports climate, such as municipalities, sports associations, and the National Olympic Committee (NOC). As a concerned actor, you can connect initiatives from sports clubs, potentially creating new synergies. An example of this is a local professional who supports clubs.

### *Advising*

Expert entities such as municipalities, sports associations, and the NOC can offer guidance on choices, priorities and implementation regarding a safe sports climate.

### *Setting preconditions*

External entities can assist by establishing preconditions. These preconditions provide board members with a direction for managing with integrity. However, setting preconditions comes with a caveat: they can quickly become mandatory guidelines that clubs must adhere to.

### *Tempting*

Campaigns can inspire sports associations to address themes like inclusiveness. Be sure to share these campaigns with the clubs.

### *Taking over*

In cases where a club or working group is unable to find a solution, tasks can be transferred in complex situations or when capacity is lacking. However, this should always be done in consultation with the board.

In summary, supporting does not equate to imposing. It's about helping to foster a positive sports culture, taking into account the needs of the clubs. The support process should not be synonymous with interference or imposition. It always starts with the intent to aid sports clubs in cultivating a positive sports culture by removing barriers, sharing knowledge, providing professional assistance, or otherwise enabling the actions and intentions of the concerned actors to thrive.

## [Our principles summarized](#)

Our three principles all hinge on the idea that, for successful implementation within a sports club, we must thoroughly understand its local context, take this into account, and then foster a sense of ownership over the approach among club members. Given the significance of this context, we're now going to delve deeper into the subject of sports clubs. If you've spent a significant amount of time working in the sports sector and possess extensive knowledge of the unique attributes of sports clubs, feel free to skip the next section and proceed directly to the implementation process steps.

## [Characteristics of grassroots sports clubs](#)

As previously stated, there can be significant differences between sports clubs. These can include demographic location, type of sport, size, culture, sporting ambitions, and whether they have their own facility. These differences imply that no two clubs are identical. However, alongside these individual differences, there are characteristics that are more universal, applying to every club (Bronkhorst et al., 2021; Stevens & Steenbergen, 2022). Some of these characteristics are outlined below.

### Sports clubs are organizations where membership is voluntary

Volunteers are the lifeblood of these organizations, their cooperation and hard work enabling the execution of competitions and social events. The quality of these services largely depends on how people within the club interact and cooperate. Member satisfaction is crucial, as dissatisfied members can readily cancel their membership. Therefore, a successful sports club is one that effectively retains its members and satisfies their needs. This is why it's crucial to communicate to members that the implementation approach contributes to enhancing everyone's enjoyment of the sport. That's the goal!

### Sports clubs are largely dependent on volunteers

Most clubs are run by a core group of highly active volunteers. This necessitates a different method of recruitment and motivation compared to conventional labour markets. As a result, there's often high turnover among volunteers, requiring frequent recruitment and training efforts. For instance, many coaches and referees in youth sports commit themselves to their roles for just one season. Consequently, each season - and quite likely several times within a season - there needs to be a concerted effort to integrate these new volunteers into the club's policies. Moreover, when necessary, these individuals should be provided with appropriate training.

### Sports clubs are relatively autonomous organizations

Sports clubs are not dependent on the government or the market, and in theory, they can navigate their own path. Although the government can impose certain requirements on sports clubs, historically, it has shown restraint in interfering with sports. To participate in regional and (inter)national competitions, sports clubs are typically affiliated with a sports association. These associations, in turn, set requirements for sports clubs to ensure fair competition (for instance, regarding field dimensions, competition rules, and divisional organization).

In case of recurring incidents at a particular sports club, an association may decide to exclude that sports club from participation in its competitions. Similarly, if incidents involving bystanders regularly occur at a sports club, it could serve as a trigger to initiate a dialogue with the club to review their approach. After all, who would want to be associated with a club where things repeatedly go wrong and where safety is compromised? Such a club often experiences the consequence of this in the form of declining membership numbers due to dissatisfied members.

### Sports clubs are established to facilitate sporting activities for their members

Unlike entities like foundations or funds, clubs are not created to chase external organizational objectives. They are not driven by profit motives, nor are they formed to achieve a social cause. It's vital to remember that sports clubs are primarily organized to facilitate sporting activities for their members.

This means that working on a safe sports climate through promoting positive bystander behaviour, where attention is paid to social safety and respectful conduct, should not be seen as an external imposition. Instead, it should be perceived as a collective endeavour and responsibility of the club members to enable and enjoy their sports activities together. Therefore, it's crucial to ensure that the implementation of measures for a positive sports environment aligns with the needs and desires of the club members. This will ensure that they feel heard and are motivated to proactively contribute to a secure and respectful sports environment.

#### Formally, decision-making processes within sports clubs are democratic

When a sports club's board intends to implement a new policy, it should first present it to the General Meeting of Members for approval. A majority of the club's present members must then concur with the proposed policy. Members may differ in their perception of the urgency concerning the topic of a positive sports culture. For instance, some may not see it as a task for the sports clubs to address, or they may simply be unaware of the issues. This necessitates additional attention towards garnering public support in the decision-making process. In practice, only a minority of the members are actively involved in the club's daily operations, indicating that a board needs to consider which members wield influence within the club.

#### In conclusion

In essence, implementation is tailored work. Each sports club has unique characteristics that necessitate an individualized approach. Given that sports clubs primarily comprise volunteers who are largely focused on sports, it's crucial to inspire them to cultivate a positive sports culture. While not every member needs to be deeply involved when discussing policy at a GMM, they must all comprehend the intrinsic value that these plans bring to the club.

The process must be made as simple and pragmatic as possible, given that volunteers often have limited time, and quick results can bolster belief in the effectiveness of the approach. Consider 'the rhythm of the association' in your planning (Bronkhorst et al., 2021). This refers to the ebb and flow of a sports club's activity, with periods of heightened activity (for big field sports, typically in the autumn and spring), and periods of rest during the summer and winter breaks. Most volunteers are hard to reach during these rest periods. In tune with this rhythm are also the scheduled moments for the GMM. These occasions allow the club to present new policies and generate support, particularly in an association with a vibrant democratic decision-making process.



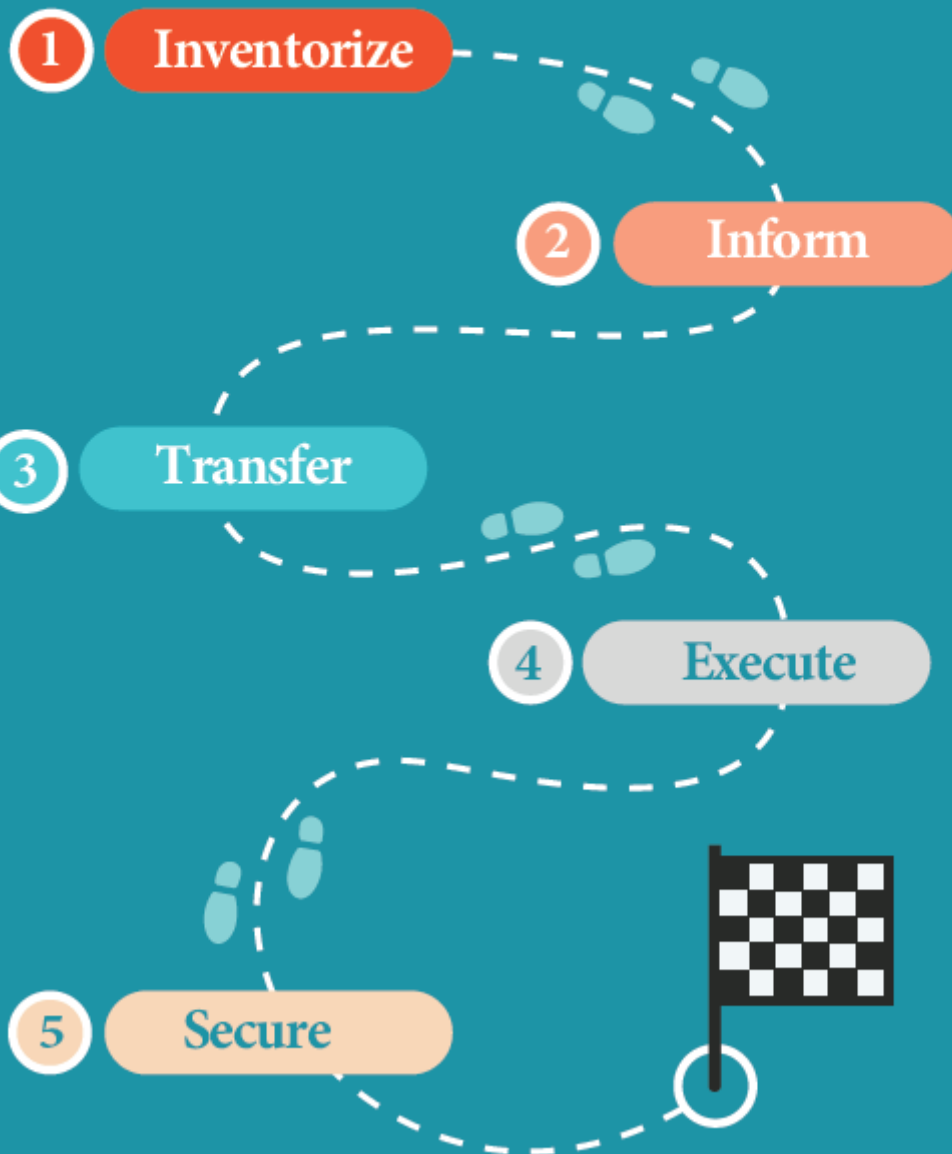
## The Road Map

A structured approach is crucial for successfully implementing the SSA materials in sports clubs. To aid this process, we have developed a handy five-step strategy.

We start with step 1: identify the key stakeholders in your area of work. In step 2, we discuss how to inform sports clubs. Then in step 3, we concretely work on disseminating the materials to everyone within the club. Step 4 involves the practical application of these materials, putting them into action. Finally, in step 5, we ensure that the results achieved are sustained in the long term and that the club continues to strive for a socially safe and positive sports environment.

We provide practical examples that are ready for you to use. Our aim is to support you and to make your task easier.

# Roadmap



## 1. Inventorize

You don't implement alone, but it requires the active involvement from others. Start close by, for example by enlisting the help of a colleague. This can support you in the first step: inventorize stakeholders.

This step is about getting a clear image of the playing field in which the SSA approach must be implemented. Of course, the most important stakeholders here are the sports clubs, but there are more stakeholders that can help you reach as many sports clubs as possible. The playing field thus forms the basis of your implementation strategy. We will map out this playing field with a so-called stakeholder analysis. Here, you identify the stakeholders, categorize and prioritize them. These stakeholders can be anyone - individual or organization - who has an interest in safe and positive sports environments. These stakeholders are, or feel, involved and responsible for pursuing such a sports climate.

We distinguish two types of stakeholders: primary and secondary stakeholders. The primary stakeholders are those who must implement the approach, so the sports clubs themselves. Without their commitment and cooperation, the approach cannot succeed. In addition, there are secondary stakeholders who can help to spread and implement the approach locally. Without their help, achieving the goal of the approach becomes much harder. Consider, for example, local sports service organizations and sports clubs. They often already have good access to sports clubs and are usually well aware of the clubs' needs.

Mapping the stakeholders can be done in several ways. We use the following three steps: identify, categorize, and prioritize. You can use the examples we provide for inspiration, or you can skip them if you just want to know the steps.

### Identify the stakeholders

You start by brainstorming about the stakeholders that you think can play a role in implementing the approach. It's crucial to not only include the sports clubs where the approach will eventually need to be implemented but also to identify implementation partners. These are organizations that can help with implementing the approach in the sports club. Consider, for example, a local sports council, a team of sports coaches and a neighbourhood newspaper. When these organizations are involved in the implementation process, it will not only increase your chances of success but also fosters support for the approach within the local community. We recommend not brainstorming alone. Ask a colleague who is familiar with the local situation to contribute. Two heads are better than one! This step ends when you have a list of all local organizations and individuals that can assist with implementation.

## Categorize the stakeholders

Now that we have a collection of organizations and individuals identified in the first step, we need to understand how each stakeholder can be of use. What value does each stakeholder bring? How can this entity assist you? Let's answer these questions by proceeding to step two, where we classify the stakeholders.

There are several ways to categorize stakeholders. You might classify them according to their strengths. One organization may excel at spreading news, while another is skilled at motivating people. Another method of categorization could be based on the organization's mission. Perhaps there are other organizations in the area that share a mission to create safe environments for children (e.g., police, schools, youth care). There are numerous possibilities. To give you an idea of how to classify, we provide an example from the SSA-project group (see section below).

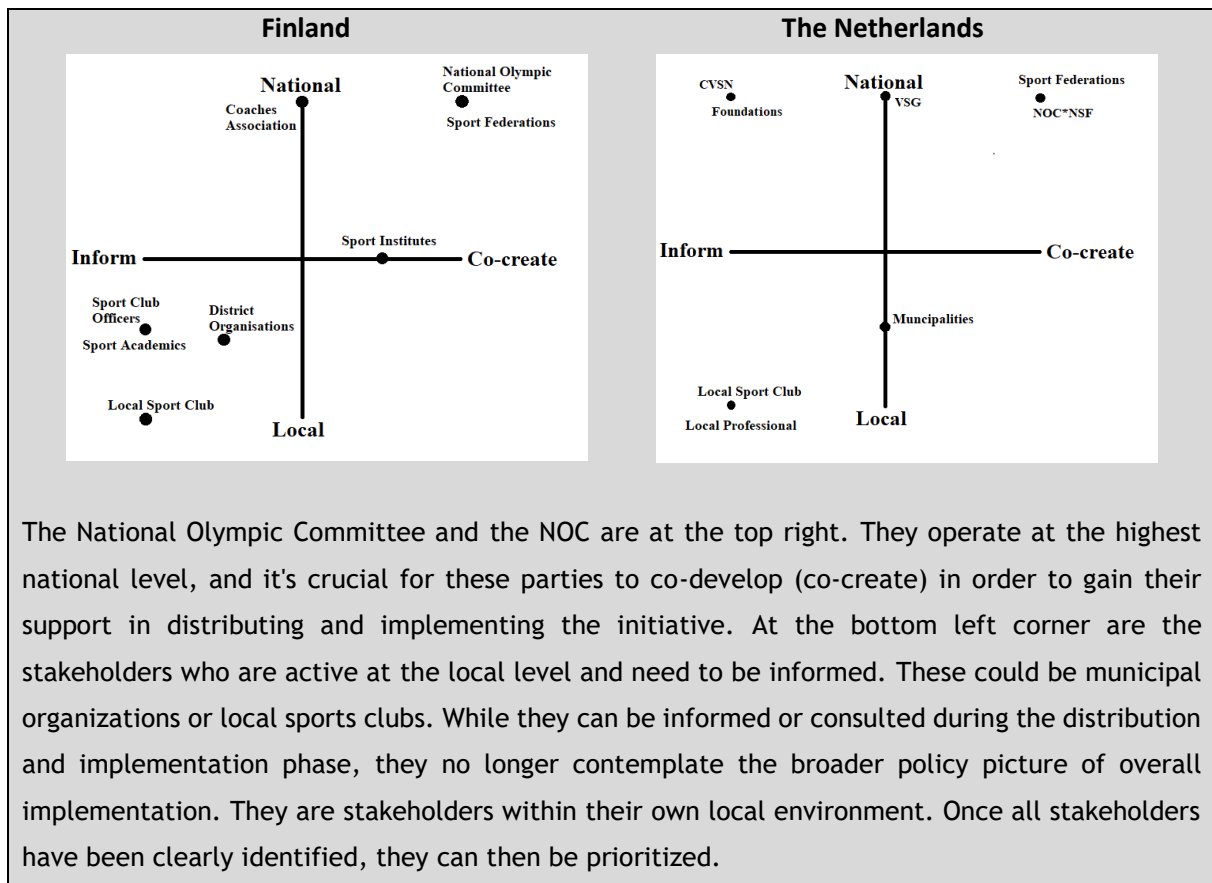
Are you unsure where to place an organization? No problem! This could indicate the need for an exploratory conversation with that organization about how you could collaborate. This helps you to create an overview of your 'implementation playing field'. The first signs of which partners are essential in spreading the approach and how and when you can involve them are starting to appear. In the next step, we'll refine this.

### **Example of categorizing stakeholders within the SSA project**

As described earlier, the SSA-project group consists of representatives of sports organizations from different European countries. Good to know is that each country more or less has its own sports infrastructure. The ambition of the SSA-project group is to spread the approach in every European country. That is why we started with a stakeholder analysis. How could we create an overview at a national level? Who are the parties in our country that could help propagate and successfully implement the SSA approach?

To create an overview, we chose in step 2 to create a quadrant. The horizontal axis shows the level at which the party operates (from local to national) and the horizontal axis shows how the partner should be involved (from informing to co-creating). You don't have an active role in informing, you develop along with co-creation.

We then placed the stakeholders in this quadrant. We did this in consultation with the partners. The stakeholder distribution for Finland and the Netherlands appears as follows:



### Prioritize the stakeholders

We now move on to prioritizing the stakeholders. This means determining which stakeholders are most important to the success of your project and when to approach them. You can't, and don't need to, focus your attention on all stakeholders simultaneously. You determine which stakeholder to concentrate on based on two criteria: the interest that that party has in your task of enabling positive bystander behaviour and the influence they wield in either assisting or obstructing your task.

Stakeholders with a high degree of influence and interest are your key stakeholders. They have a significant impact on the project and a strong interest in the outcome. You must involve them quickly and let them contribute ideas. Examples include the sports clubs themselves, the municipality, or sports association. There are also stakeholders who have a lot of influence but have little interest in the results, such as the local press or associations not in your working area. These stakeholders can influence the success of implementation at the sports club, but don't benefit from it. You can inform and consult them but don't expect too much. A third group of stakeholders are those who (usually) have little influence on the sports club but are greatly interested in the results. Think of the police or a local school. You can inform them but can't influence them too much. The last group has little influence and interest. Perhaps you can inform them (via the local press).

Excellent! You have now identified the most important stakeholders. Not only have you visualized them, but you also have an initial impression of what they can do for you and an idea of their importance and influence. You have outlined the implementation playing field. We can now further develop our implementation strategy.

#### **Checklist step 1: inventorize**

1. Do you have a clear image of all stakeholders?
2. Do you have an idea how they can assist you?
3. Do you comprehend their importance and influence?
4. Do you foresee any facilitating and hindering factors in rolling out the approach?

## 2. Inform

In the previous step, we focused on all stakeholders in our implementation playing field. For the secondary stakeholders (your implementation partners), you will need to inform or consult them based on whether they have a low or high priority. In this step, we shift our focus to the primary stakeholder: the sports club. Now, it's time to inform them about the approach and its implementation.

### Organize an information session!

An information session, where key figures from the sports club are invited, is a useful tool and is frequently utilized in this context. Think of individuals from the board or from a relevant committee. This session is about informing the members of the sports clubs. Materials such as the videoclip or factsheets developed in the SSA project can be useful. These present a clear overview of the scale and necessity of action. The aim of this step should be creating awareness about the theme of harassment and abuse in sports. But how do you do that? How do you ensure that those present understand the importance of creating a safe and positive sports environment? How do you make it clear to them how the approach can contribute to this goal?

### There's something about...

Before we delve into the importance of creating a positive sports environment through promoting positive bystander behaviour, let's revisit one of our principles of implementation that we shared with you earlier: introducing something new into an existing context. It is important to understand why those present accepted your invitation. Not everyone will have shown up. However, the group that is present is there for a reason. They have certain expectations and interests.

It's important to uncover what the various expectations and interest of the attendees are. Let's look into the mindsets and backgrounds of four hypothetical individuals attending this information session. Let's consider what the 'context' of those present might be.

### *A recent incident*

Someone might be in attendance because an urgent situation has recently arisen at their sports club due to an incident involving bystanders. There might have been a fight with spectators and police had to intervene. The incident even made it to the Monday newspaper with a photo! The club's board and members are extremely shocked and disappointed that their club is being portrayed in such a negative light.

### *Internal pressure*

Thankfully, there was no recent incident at another club, but an increasing number of parents of young members are urging the board to focus on maintaining a safe sports environment. Some parents are even threatening to enrol their child in a different sport that, in their opinion, 'does it better' and 'pays more attention to sportsmanship.' The board takes these concerns very seriously and sees this approach as an opportunity to address the parents' concerns.

### *External pressure*

Another attendee is a member of a sports club with many youth members. The board has recently been contacted by the municipality or another organization, which emphasizes the importance of a socially safe sports environment as a key pillar of their policy. The municipality even suggests that sports clubs that don't focus on this issue may not be eligible for subsidies in the future. The board is eager to contribute in order to qualify for a subsidy.

### *The oblivious sports club*

Lastly, there is someone from a sports club who is curious, but doesn't believe that the issue applies to their club: "Nothing ever happens with us". This might mean that this person isn't aware of the potential risks and dangers of harassment and abuse, or they are unaware of any incidents. However, since they are present, treat them seriously and include them in all conversations!

The crux of the matter is that these four types of people, each with different backgrounds, are present, and it's important to consider how to inform them appropriately. Although it's terrible when an incident occurs at a club, this can suddenly place the desire to address negative bystander behaviour at the top of the agenda. You don't need to convince these individuals of the importance. They would like clarity about the approach, what effort is required, and when they can start. If there's no immediate urgency among those present, it's crucial to focus more on raising awareness.

### [Create space for interaction](#)

We present an example (see section below) of what an information session could look like. During such an event it is, of course, important to provide those present with insight into the extent, causes

and effects of harassment and abuse in youth sports. However, it might be even more important to provide room for questions and discussion during the information session.

If facilitating this correctly, attendees who initially perceive less urgency in addressing harassment and abuse might start reflecting upon their club's circumstances and the extent to which their club promotes a socially safe and positive sports environment at the club.

Often, the initial behaviour change commences during this session. Engaging in conversation with people creates momentum. Through debating, presenting thought-provoking statements and visuals, individuals are encouraged to ponder. When perceptions and opinions shift, the likelihood of attendees wanting to implement the approach at their clubs increases.

### **Example of an information session for sports clubs**

Below is an example of what an information session dedicated to addressing harassment and abuse for bystanders in sports could look like:

#### **1. Welcome and introduction**

The session starts with a word of welcome and a brief introduction of those present, the organizers and the objective of the session.

#### **2. Harassment and abuse in sport**

A presentation is given on what exactly constitutes harassment and abuse in sport, its different forms, and the impact this can have on victims and sport in general. Materials on our website ([www.safesportallies.eu](http://www.safesportallies.eu)) can be utilized for this part. Tip: create a quiz to test the knowledge of the attendees.

#### **3. Policy and legislation**

An explanation of the national developments in the field of a socially safe sports environment and the legislation regarding harassment and abuse in sports. Outline the local sports policy and the responsibilities of sports clubs.

#### **4. Share experiences**

Create the opportunity for attendees to share their own experiences and learn from each other. For example, split them into small groups and stimulate a discussion on negative bystander behaviour and strategies to address it.

#### **5. Explanation of SSA approach**

Give a presentation on the approach to prevent and tackle harassment and abuse in sport. Showcase the website and the materials. Share the experiences of clubs that have already started to implement the approach.



## 6. Closure

The session concludes with a recap of the key points and a call to action for the sports clubs to get started with tackling harassment and abuse. Establish concrete agreements with the clubs, especially with the contact person(s) from the clubs.

### [Additional actions you can take during or after an information session](#)

By organizing an information session, you're already fostering awareness, and sometimes even a sense of urgency. This awareness is crucial because it encourages people to think about the true meaning of a safe sports climate, harassment and abuse and what you can do as an actor within the club to counter this. After such a session you'll often hear comments along the lines of 'Okay... that's what we mean by a safe sports climate and the role of bystanders!' or 'I thought our sports club had a safe sports climate, but now that we discussed this subject, there is still room for improvement'. This awareness is the first step in initiating change.

For a follow-up to such an information session, or as part of the event itself, you might also consider the following:

- Inviting a speaker who's well-versed in creating a pedagogical sports climate.
- Offering inspiration through a presentation, film, or article.
- Organizing a separate debate session focus on harassment and abuse in sport.

After the information session (or several sessions), and once the wheels of awareness have been set in motion, not all those present will immediately want to get started with the approach at their club. Undoubtedly, there will be sceptics among them. However, there will always be people present who want to take immediate action. These individuals recognize the importance, want to put their energy into it, and want to get started today rather than tomorrow. As a concerned actor, it's important that you make a follow-up appointment with one or a few of those enthusiasts. As already indicated, change starts with awareness, but to take the theme to the next step, energy is needed from people within the club who embrace the approach or parts of aspects of it.

### **Checklist step 2: inform**

1. Did you organize an information session?
2. Were key stakeholders invited?
3. Was there sufficient time for interaction during the session?
4. Did you set follow-up appointments with contact(s) from the club?
5. Is there a contact person from the sports club(s) who is your direct 'point of contact'?
6. Have you arranged a follow-up meeting at the club with the contact person (or with a group of enthusiasts)?

## 1. Transfer

While informing is a start, it's unrealistic to expect an information session to immediately result in everyone taking action. This process requires more. Alongside informing and creating awareness and urgency, as a concerned actor, you must ensure that the topic of safe sports environments is truly embraced within the club. When transferring the approach to the sports clubs, it's important to clarify to whom the approach is being handed over, what the current situation at the club is, and how to involve the club's members. During the 'inform' phase, the focus was on identifying who within the club wants to advance this topic further - be it a contact person or a group of enthusiasts. We will continue with this in the transferring phase. There are three crucial aspects to consider in this phase of transfer:

1. Forming a vital coalition within the sports club
2. Visualizing the current situation within the sports club
3. Creating ownership within the sports club

### Forming a vital coalition

Initiating and implementing change requires a sense of urgency, a feeling of necessity that the sports club must address the concept of a 'safe sports climate'. Without this necessity, it can be difficult to get started with the theme within the sports clubs. If this is the case, attention to the theme may quickly fade after the information session, and there may be little enthusiasm to draft or implement plans. To start and implement a change, there must be 'pioneers'.

Research shows that with every change there must be a kind of leading coalition that takes responsibility for concrete action. This leading or vital coalition should consist of members who have support within the sports club and who also represent various sections. These could include parents, a board member, someone from the youth committee and coaches. This vital coalition or working group is your direct point of contact as a concerned actor.

It could very well be, as we'll discuss in the next section, that a working group already exists, perhaps focusing on 'fair play' or 'sportsmanship and respect'. Searching for a connection with existing structures within the sports club is important. The working group will focus on lasting change within the club. As a concerned actor, we want you to take something into account. A short intermezzo about what you can think about when implementing a change and how you can support the working group!

#### **Intermezzo - keep in mind what a sports club can handle**

Change is extremely difficult! As an involved party, don't let this discourage you, but be well-prepared and take certain factors into account. Here are some points that will help you assess the change capacity of a sports club. First a quote that immediately makes it clear what we mean by making an assessment to change something (Ten Have et al., 2013, p.10):

“Permanent change revolves around the link between idea and realization, or plan and execution: what should it be and how should it be accomplished. Sometimes the plan is too big and overwhelming, that the organization does not have the capacity to facilitate the change. The required change capacity is lacking. In other cases, there is plenty of energy and willingness to change, but there is no common goal, vision or direction. Often there is the necessary ambition or necessity, but there is a lack of coordination and cohesion. The result is a stream of fragmented and often conflicting and wasteful change initiatives.” [Translated from Dutch]

This quote clearly emphasizes the importance of two categories that are essential for every change. These are ‘the vision on change’ and ‘the change capacity’. We will elaborate both a bit more and indicate what is important to consider. This can be used, for example, at a first meeting of the working group that will drive and advance the change.

#### *The vision on change*

The vision on change is about both the ‘why’ of the change and the ‘effect’ that is intended. The ‘why’ is about the idea behind the intended change. It’s the motive or cause of the change. Consider the following:

- ‘We stand for a sports club in which everyone can exercise in a safe and enjoyable manner.’
- ‘As a club, we think it’s important that children can develop themselves in a safe environment.’
- ‘We want to be a club in which we collectively take responsibility for a safe sports climate.’

This is therefore a kind of mission or ambition(s) that justify changes.

*Effect* is concerned with the question of what concrete desired consequences the realization of such a mission or change ambition. In short, what do we actually observe when we have brought the formulated ambitions closer? What are the effects and consequences of the efforts we undertake to achieve these ambitions? For example, if making a safe sports environment more central within sports clubs is our aim, and we strive for youth to be able to participate in sports in a pleasant and secure environment, it may follow that coaches are appointed to guide the youth based on pedagogical principles, children experience more enjoyment, and the principles of a safe sports climate are communicated during parent-oriented events at the beginning of the season.

Effect relates to a further refinement of the ambitions and what we see if the desired change is implemented. Therefore, it is also important to make these effects visible through simple polls conducted within the club. Not an extensive scientific experiment, but rather through observation

and showcasing the positive changes that occur, as well as celebrating successes. Celebrating achievements often acts as a catalyst for change!

### *The change capacity*

Big plans, sky-high ambitions, visions that seems like pipe dreams, that's the danger a working group faces when solely focusing on their vision on change. But, as the English say, 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'. In other words, the success and celebratory nature of an endeavour can only be determined based on what has actually been achieved. A good recipe alone does not guarantee a good pudding! When considering change capacity, it is important to keep certain factors in mind: "Is it feasible?" "Are we not thinking too big?" "Is there sufficient implementation capacity?" This involves assessing the feasibility of the ambitions or intended changes. Two crucial aspects come into play here: focus and energy.

Focus refers to whether there is clear direction in the plans and adherence to that direction. It involves specifying precisely what needs to change and how to accomplish it. This is where concrete change plans and defined goals come into play, along with the necessary priorities. For example, if the mission is 'safe sports for our youth', a primary focus could be to appoint a confidential contact person, organize sessions for coaches on a safe sports climate. In essence, it is about clearly indicating what actions need to be taken to realize the ambitions (we will revisit this in the implementation phase).

In addition to focus, it is crucial to assess whether there is enough fuel in the engine to set things in motion. Are there enough members willing to roll up their sleeves ("want")? Are they equipped with the necessary skills ("can")? Do they have enough time ("capacity")? And do they feel comfortable taking risks ("feel safe")? Sometimes it is a combination of these factors, while other times members may have enough time but disagree with the initiated changes, leading to resistance (as discussed further under implementation).

What we are trying to convey as concerned stakeholders is that the success or failure of a change process hinges on the change capability of the sports club. This becomes relevant when discussing the four components within the working group: the why, the effect, the focus, and the energy. By posing questions for each component, such as "Is there sufficient clarity about the purpose of the change?" "Do we have a vision of what we will observe once the change is implemented?" "Is there enough focus?" and "Have we properly assessed whether the members or individuals involved within the sports club can actively participate in the change?" Asking these questions increases the likelihood of success in implementing an approach aimed at fostering a safe sports climate.

### Visualize the current situation within the sports club and making choices

The working group plays an important role within the sports club. Determining what needs to happen, where to begin, and what to prioritize cannot be formulated from a generic approach behind a desk. Instead, it must be specifically tailored to the current situation within the sports club. To get a clear image of the current situation of the club, a self-assessment can be a useful instrument. This helps identify the positive measures already in place and areas where improvement is still needed. It serves as a foundation for taking action. The activities of the working group should follow these steps:

1. *Mapping out the needs of the sports club:* by conducting the self-assessment it is easy to see which steps still need to be taken. Consider, for example, appointing a confidential contact person or drawing up a code of conduct for the club.
2. *Making choices which action to take:* once the necessary steps have been determined, it is important to decide which one should be initiated first. Implementing everything at once is not feasible, and it is better to focus on executing one task effectively rather than attempting everything simultaneously.
3. *Carry out the chosen action:* reach an agreement within the working group on who will be responsible for carrying out the task. Consider the resources required and whether support from other sports club entities, such as the board or other volunteers, would be beneficial. Lastly, set a timeline for implementing the chosen change.
4. *Iteration:* repeat this process as a working group. Not everything can be resolved overnight, and creating a safe sports climate is a long-term project. It is therefore important to ensure that the chosen initiatives are properly implemented and sustained.

### Creating ownership

The (working) group gives impetus, formulates the change vision, estimates the change capacity, and, where possible, meets the needs of the sports club. However, the success of the working group ultimately depends on the willingness of its members, or at least some of them. The entire club, including its key stakeholders, must feel a sense of co-ownership for the initiated change. Alongside developing the intended changes (the change vision) and making a realistic assessment of feasibility (change capacity), the working group should prioritize the establishment of ownership within the club.

In essence, what is crucial is what we refer to as 'ownership.' What do we mean by this? Can you recall instances when you experienced a sense of ownership? We are not referring to the legal ownership of something, but rather the emotional connection. Perhaps it was a party at the club that you co-organized, a sports day you participated in, or a youth team you coached. What matters is that you felt a responsibility and desired the event to be a success. It was your party, your sports day, and your team. This feeling is what we call a sense of ownership.

The aforementioned examples represent forms of individual ownership, where you personally feel accountable. There is also collective ownership, whereby several individuals experience a sense of

belonging to a group (Van Boxtel & Van Walstijn, 2008). It is the feeling of "this is our club" and "this is how we treat each other within our sports club." To tap into this collective sense of ownership, external approaches like the SSA approach must become an integral part of the club's approach.

An important task of the working group is to create and organize involvement, leading to ownership. There are several success factors in realizing ownership in the club. Here are a few, that you as a concerned actor, can utilize to help the working group:

- Listen attentively to the desires and needs of those involved within the club and strive to support them through the working group. Consider organizing a debate session, where you can discuss together: "How are we currently doing as a collective and where do we want to go?"
- Engage members in the process of formulating plans to create a socially safe and positive sports environment. Actively involving members during the plan development phase (the vision on change) increases the likelihood of their participation during implementation.
- Allow those involved to decide for themselves how they wish to contribute. Imposing tasks and activities generally prove ineffective.
- Delegate responsibilities by determining, in collaboration with those involved, what areas they would like to take responsibility for.
- Encourage individual initiatives. Even if these initiatives do not precisely align with the plans, it is better to embrace and promote them rather than dismissing them as incompatible.
- Highlight the accomplishments achieved by the club. Sharing small successes and making members part of them generates energy to do 'something'.
- Sending the message can be good in the first phase ('informing'), but should quickly transition to communication methods that are participatory (with an emphasis on doing something together and co-creating)

Creating ownership assumes that there is ample potential within a sports club to actively engage members. Encouraging active participation often releases a significant amount of energy because those involved feel a sense of responsibility and ownership. Particularly in a sports club where the norm is "by members, for members," an inclusive and participatory approach proves to be the most effective in fostering ownership.

#### **Checklist step 3: transfer**

1. Has a working group been formed - the vital coalition - that will take this subject further within the sports club?
2. Does this working group consist of a broad representation within the club?
3. Has the current situation within the club been mapped out?
4. Is there a start in formulating ambitions and a dot on the horizon (the vision on change)?
5. Has an evaluation been conducted to determine the club's capacity for implementing the proposed changes?

6. Are the right actors involved and is there attention for ownership?
7. Are members or actors within the club actively involved from the idea of creating ownership?

## 2. Execute

The stakeholders have been identified and informed, a working group has been formed, an initial vision plan has been drawn up, an estimate has been made of what is realistic to achieve and ownership has been ensured to be the guiding principle for the working group. The main principle here is that results can only be achieved collectively, and thus, with the contribution of various actors within the club, particularly to implement changes. This phase includes:

1. Draw up and implement a simple action plan.
2. Evaluate the action plan and adjust it if necessary.
3. Overcome and respond to potential resistance.

### Draw up and implement a simple action plan

In the previous phase, an analysis of the current situation was carried out. This serves as a basis and can be used to determine which changes are useful or even necessary. You can compile a list of aspects that need extra attention and set priorities, including tasks to be undertaken in the short term and those that are more long term. It is often also useful to look for what is called 'low-hanging fruit'.

The low-hanging fruit signifies gaining a positive outcome with relatively little effort. For instance, if the analysis shows that there is a need to establish certain rules of conduct, this can be rapidly actioned by formulating them with those involved. There needs to be a balance between tasks that can be picked up quickly and those that can be done later or require more time. If short-term actions leading to success are overlooked, energy may wane over time as it may seem like nothing visible is happening. An action plan is simply setting objectives and outlining the actions that help reach these objectives. Under the leadership of the working group, goals can be set and actions can be planned during, for example, a drop-in session (again, fostering the notion of creating ownership).

#### *Set goals*

Goals are in fact positively formulated targets. For instance: 'we want more teams within our club to work with behaviour rules', 'we want every coach working with youth to have a Certificate of Good Conduct', 'we want our members to be satisfied with the social safety at the club'. These goals can then be made measurable, for example: 'when do we want to achieve the goals?' and 'are the goals shared by everyone?'

#### *Formulate concrete activities that bring the goals closer*

Goals often do not come closer automatically. For this, you need to perform activities. Achieving goals simply requires concrete actions/activities. To determine the activities, the following steps can be taken:

1. Brainstorm in the working group and come up with as many activities as possible that you can use to achieve the set goals. For example: organizing an information session for parents about a socially safe and positive sports environment, a workshop for coaches, drawing up qualification requirements for new coaches, appointing a confidential contact person and drawing up a sanctions policy. It is therefore about concrete actions that also require the involvement of members.
2. Choose from different activities. Choose activities that are easy to carry out and produce quick results ("low-hanging fruit"). Also determine the order of the activities. Don't do too much at once and try to do the things you do well. Draw up an action plan and ask members in addition to formulating the activities also what they can do ('what - who - when').

#### *Execute the action plan*

The action plan is being set up within the sports clubs. Its implementation must be monitored. This might seem a bit directive, but it's good to periodically review which actions have been executed and which have not, for whatever reason. Sometimes it's about certain bottlenecks that cause certain activities not to have been implemented yet. For example, because people don't have time, the resources are not available, or the actions still encounter resistance. There must be discipline in execution, otherwise, the action plan is more or less a ritual dance.

#### [Evaluate the action plan and adjust it if necessary](#)

Results may not always be immediately evident. Regardless, it is worthwhile to evaluate the effects of the action plan's implementation on a regular basis. Have the previously established goals been approached? For instance, has there been an increased focus on a pedagogical sports climate? Do parents on the sidelines exhibit less coaching and more encouragement? Does the coach avoid always selecting the same players? Are there fewer instances of harassment and abuse?

Setting clear goals, as mentioned above, is vital to accurately assess this. The evaluation should mainly examine the degree to which objectives have been reached. It might not be feasible to perform extensive measurements of an excessively academic or scientific nature.

During such an evaluation, it's crucial to collect relevant information to quickly ascertain whether the implemented actions are having an impact. It's beneficial to consider different perspectives when gathering this information, such as those of the sport participants, coaches, board members, and referees.



Suppose you're curious whether there's been a reduction in bullying within the club. In that case, you can anonymously inquire with various individuals within the club. Plans can be adjusted as needed. It's important that the set goals and the activities being performed are tracked in a user-friendly manner.

Not only to adjust plans, where necessary, but also to celebrate successes! After all, celebrating successes is an important driver of (ongoing) change.

### Overcome and respond to potential resistance

As a working group, you sometimes encounter resistance during implementation. When forming plans, things often go smoothly, but when it comes to jointly implementing these plans, conflicts can arise, which can vary in nature. It's often said: no change without hassle. On the other hand, hassle, resistance, and obstruction are all part of change. Do not immediately assume that this resistance stems from a lack of involvement (it can, but it doesn't have to). It often arises from a strong commitment to the club. How often do we hear: 'why change, it's good this way?' Or: 'this is how we've always done it!'

Also, do not assume there is no resistance when you don't hear anything. There may be silent resistance: 'I say yes, but I do no.' Or indifference towards the change (or the theme): 'this is not an issue for us, so I won't contribute!'

The most visible signs of resistance (or hassle) are complaining, whining, gossiping, bullying, leaking information, talking past each other, not listening, speaking for each other, saying 'no' to everything or 'we've tried that before, it doesn't work here', and scapegoating. This form of resistance is extremely counterproductive when working together on a change. Resistance can be prevented or at least minimized by:

- Listening to what is going on instead of determining as a working group what is going on within the sports club.
- Drawing up and implementing plans together, and giving credit where it's due - in short, chest-thumping generates resistance.
- Not being too controlling on the implementation: too much control and too little trust ultimately leaves no room for personal input.
- Not taking decisions as a working group but ensuring that decisions are made that the people involved can identify with.
- Providing clarity about the course taken and keeping focus on it.

#### Checklist step 4: execute

1. Do we have a simple action plan outlining the approach in concrete terms?
2. Is this plan of action based on input from members?
3. Is there sufficient attention for creating ownership?
4. Is there sufficient implementation capacity to implement the plan and are the tasks and activities well distributed?
5. Is it clear who is responsible for what?
6. Are there occasional checks carried out to see whether the goals have progressed and whether the activities are bearing fruit?
7. Did we set specific moments to evaluate and adjust if necessary?
8. Are successes celebrated?
9. Is there any resistance and is it clear where it comes from?

### 3. Secure

The last and extremely important step is to secure the approach sustainably. If all the work is not secured, there is a risk that it will remain a short-lived intervention that will soon be forgotten. There was then a brief, and often intense, focus on a safe sports environment, only for it to fade away after a certain period. The approach slowly dies off and quickly returns to being the usual routine. It is precisely a theme such as 'creating a safe sports climate' that takes time, is a long-term process and must therefore be actively maintained. Continuing to maintain this, so that it actually remains a part of the sports club, is what we call sustainable securing.

In order to secure the working group and the resulting policy, it is crucial to seek commitment, stimulate learning and create synergy. Therefore, a learning network must be set up in which coaches, coaches and volunteers learn from each other. In this way, the policy changes at sports clubs are actually sustainable secured.

#### Commitment, learning, and synergy

There are three critical mechanisms that determine the effective implementation and sustainability of policies relating to harassment and abuse. These mechanisms are social processes within the sports club, which aid in ensuring the robust anchoring of policies and actions. These three mechanisms are: commitment, learning, and synergy.

##### *Seek commitment*

This is the mechanism by which coaches, administrators and other volunteers within the sports clubs collectively reaching consensus on a solution or vision for issues within the theme of a 'positive sports culture' (Ansell & Torfing, 2014; Gray & Ren, 2014). A clear 'why' must serve as a foundation for change.

Success is closely linked to commitment, too much top-down work does not work. The process of securing will not be successful if no effort is put into fostering commitment, learning from each other, and if the club lacks the necessary support for the plan (synergy).

#### *Encourage learning*

Creating commitment cannot be viewed separately from a learning process in which different views, interests and insights of those involved in an association are discussed. This is what is meant by the “learning” mechanism. By having this conversation, there is more understanding and knowledge about points of view and differences in views. If this is the case, we speak of a sports club that is 'learning'

#### *Foster synergy*

The ultimate goal is that the choices and decisions lead to a joint approach. Collaborations arise between coaches, administrators, volunteers and other stakeholders. We call this synergy. Within a sports club there must be sufficient 'fuel' for a change. By this we mean: are there enough volunteers and members willing to roll up their sleeves ('want') and are they sufficiently equipped to get started with the change ('can')? If there is too little fuel, the ambitions of sports club directors can logically be too great.

These three mechanisms are interdependent. When performed properly and thoughtfully, they reinforce each other. If there's commitment within a sports club, creating synergy becomes easier. These three mechanisms serve as focal points in ensuring sustainability, not checklists.

#### [Don't wait until tomorrow to think about sustainable securing](#)

Change takes time, especially when dealing with an issue that may not already be at the top of every sports club's agenda. Taking your time is important. Time that must be used for planning, supervision of coaches and board members and handover. Ideally, the coaches, board members and other volunteers within the club can take over the work from the moment the concerned actor leaves.

- The board must be willing to assign a central role in policy to 'good coaches and a pedagogical sports climate.' Starting with this too late entails the risk that something happened within the club at the time the club coach was there, but there is no continuity after the club coach leaves. Therefore, it's important to:
- Actively involve the board and members from the start, i.e., the very first meetings, and make agreements about the handover.
- Make a timely decision on whether the support at the club is temporary or structural. The profile includes that the concerned actor is temporarily at the club and a successor is trained at the club. In practice, we see consideration being given to the possibility of keeping it as a paid position in the club, or for example, remaining involved with the club in an adjusted (lighter) form.

- Stay involved with the club after completing the course. For example, visit twice a year, keep in touch with the successors and volunteer supervisors, and keep hours available for this.
- Create a learning network at the local level and let the club support officer coordinate this.

### Local learning network

To facilitate change and learn from it, a learning network can be set up at a local level. Coaches, administrators, other volunteers or the working group can be involved in this. In this way, they can learn from each other, and new learning needs will come into view. This does not take much time, but it does provide support for an association.

In this way, a network of clubs is created at the local level that can learn from each other and can keep growing. By building a network in this way, a lot of impact can be generated relatively inexpensively with the use of club coaches. A similar 'learning network' can be organized nationally and regionally. When doing this, consider the following:

- As a club or municipality, involve the relevant association. The club and municipality that are involved in the local situation and support should always be involved. Associations have a lot of sport-technical knowledge.
- Maintain recurring contact between the association and the municipality about the clubs you support. The knowledge of the local setting and the sport-technical knowledge from the association can reinforce each other. This also prevents clubs from being approached twice about the same subject.
- Make it clear to the association who they can be for what.

#### Checklist step 5: secure

1. Is the theme sufficiently addressed in the sports club throughout the season?
2. Are meetings organized in which experiences are shared about 'positive sports climate'?
3. Is progress monitored and communicated to members?
4. Does the club promote peer-to-peer coaching and a culture of learning?
5. Has a local-level learning network been formed?

## In conclusion

Well done! You have reached the end of our SSA guide. We hope that you now have insight into the challenges and possibilities involved in creating a socially safe and positive sports environment in your area of work.

But it doesn't end with reading - it's about the action you are going to take now. In this guide, we have explained what the SSA approach entails and its purpose. We have also shared our implementation principles with you. For instance, we mentioned that implementation is a process that requires knowledge of the existing context, some flexibility, and focuses on creating ownership within the sports club. Additionally, you have gain insight in our five implementation steps: inventorize, inform, transfer, carry out and secure.

These steps are meant to give you guidance but be flexible enough to deviate from this route if the context demands it. Just like learning any sport, the more you practice implementation, the better you become at it!

Now is the time to put the insights from this guide into action. Don't wait until tomorrow, start today. Use the tools we have provided and make a difference within your sports club. Together, we can create a positive and safe sports environment, where all young sport participants can engage in sports safely and with pleasure. Let's get started!

## Overview checklists

### Checklist step 1: inventorize

1. Do you have a clear image of all stakeholders?
2. Do you have an idea how they can assist you?
3. Do you comprehend their importance and influence?
4. Do you foresee any facilitating and hindering factors in rolling out the approach?

### Checklist step 2: inform

1. Did you organize an information session?
2. Were key stakeholders invited?
3. Was there sufficient time for interaction during the session?
4. Did you set follow-up appointments with contact(s) from the club?
5. Is there a contact person from the sports club(s) who is your direct 'point of contact'?
6. Have you arranged a follow-up meeting at the club with the contact person (or with a group of enthusiasts)?

### Checklist step 3: transfer

1. Has a working group been formed - the vital coalition - that will take this subject further within the sports club?
2. Does this working group consist of a broad representation within the club?
3. Has the current situation within the club been mapped out?
4. Is there a start in formulating ambitions and a dot on the horizon (the vision on change)?
5. Has an evaluation been conducted to determine the club's capacity for implementing the proposed changes?
6. Are the right actors involved and is there attention for ownership?
7. Are members or actors within the club actively involved from the idea of creating ownership?

### Checklist step 4: execute

1. Has a simple action plan been drawn up outlining the approach in concrete terms?
2. Was this plan of action based on input from members?
3. Has sufficient attention been given to creating ownership?
4. Is there sufficient implementation capacity to implement the plan and are the tasks and activities well distributed?
5. Is it clear who is responsible for what?
6. Are there occasional checks carried out to see whether the goals have progressed and whether the activities are bearing fruit?
7. Have moments been determined when adjustments need to be made?
8. Are successes celebrated?
9. Is there any resistance and is it clear where it originates?

**Checklist step 5: secure**

1. Is the theme sufficiently addressed in the sports club throughout the season?
2. Are meetings organized in which experiences are shared about 'positive sports climate'?
3. Is progress monitored and communicated to members?
4. Does the club promote peer-to-peer coaching and a culture of learning?
5. Has a local-level learning network been formed?

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