

Peer-to-Peer Resource Guide

This guide is designed to assist USA Swimming clubs when peer-to-peer incidents or inappropriate sexual expression/curiosity occur. This guide will provide information to assist coaches, boards of directors and other club personnel in promoting and maintaining a safe and respectful environment for all participants. This guide may not cover every situation but it is designed to provide direction. For specific questions, contact USA Swimming Safe Sport staff at (719) 866-4578.

Peer to peer incidents can include sexual bullying situations such as: a child snapping another's suit, making sexual jokes, peeping in the locker rooms, simulating sexual acts etc. It is often difficult to know how to best handle these situations and such incidents must be addressed quickly, compassionately, and responsibly. In order to assist clubs with this challenging task, USA Swimming has created a Safety Plan Worksheet. The goal of a safety plan is to address a child's inappropriate behavior without labeling or removing the child from the activity. For a safety plan to be effective, the club's leadership and the parents/guardians of the child in question must agree to actively supervise the child according to the agreements made in the plan.

Be Prepared - Know What You'll Do if an Incident Occurs

The team should proactively determine how complaints will be handled when an issue such as peer to peer incidents comes up. Here is a sample process:

1. The inappropriate situation is reported, and all necessary members of the leadership team (i.e., Head Coach and/or Board President) are notified.
2. Depending upon the nature, severity, and ages of children involved, you may be required to report the incident to local law enforcement. USA Swimming can assist you with this.
3. The parents or guardians of the children involved are all notified of the situation.
4. The leadership team meets with the targeted child and his/her parent/guardian to understand their wishes and explain the next steps.
5. The leadership team meets with the aggressor child and his/her parent/guardian to discuss the situation and develop a safety plan.
6. Copies of the safety plan are distributed to all parties for their reference.

Respond Responsibly - How to Develop a Safety Plan

There are a number of steps that should be covered when developing a safety plan

1. Ask the child to describe the problematic behavior and the impact such behavior has on the other child and teammates.
2. Identify the child's motivation and find out what made him/her act out in this manner.
3. Explain the behavioral expectations for the child to remain on the team.
4. Identify specific risk areas and help the child control his/her behavior.
5. Demonstrate respect for both parties, and express belief in the aggressor child's ability to control his/her behavior.

It is very important throughout the development of the safety plan that the thoughts and feelings of both the aggressor child and the targeted child are considered. Responsibility and accountability are key components to supervision. Using statements of thoughts, feelings and lessons that have been learned when completing a safety plan are more effective and helps increase accountability. Expectations and consequences should be clear and realistic.

The safety plan is an accountability tool and should include consequences for behavior that violates the plan. Consequences should be discussed in conjunction with behavioral expectations and clearly articulated to the child and his/her parent/guardian during the safety planning meeting. Consider using a progressive discipline approach up to and including termination from the team.

A safety plan is made official by a statement of agreement. The statement of agreement includes all those parties involved in the development and implementation of the safety plan – club leadership, coach(es), parent/guardian, and athlete. It should also specify the duration of the safety plan and a short description of the progress review when the safety plan reaches its end date.

Safe supervision is the focus of how to work with children who have behaved inappropriately around their peers. Through a structured safety plan, the goal is to prevent future abusive situations from happening while emphasizing an educational approach that in most instances can allow the child who demonstrated inappropriate behavior to remain on the team and learn to make better choices in the future.