

Alberta Gymnastics Federation (AGF) Safe Sport Guidelines* **(Living Document of Best Practices)**

Foreword:

First and foremost, AGF would like to acknowledge the incredibly thoughtful, heart driven, and technically sound work that so many coaches, judges and administrators do every day to ensure the happiness, safety and well-being of their colleagues and participants. As Richard Crepin, Chair of the Board of Gymnastics Canada Gymnastique (GCG), so aptly said regarding recent happenings in our sport, "...these allegations are not reflective of the great work and tireless commitment of the hundreds of coaches, staff, and volunteers in our sport, they do serve as a reminder of our obligation to be vigilant in ensuring a safe environment for all of our participants."

GCG and AGF are committed to promoting a safe environment for all members; including but not limited to gymnasts, club owners, coaches, judges, volunteers and staff in all gymnastics disciplines. GCG is actively working with newly aligned provincial and territorial partners (PTOs), as well as the Respect Group, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC), and the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) to develop tools and resources that will assist the gymnastics community in enhancing their member safety and protection practices.

As Peter Nicol, President/CEO of GCG has said, "We have heard the concerns from our community and we understand that they need to receive support and see action. We are committed to working together at the provincial and national levels to make that happen." AGF acknowledges both the uniquely personal circumstances and common concerns of our members. Our membership base varies greatly in terms of age, years of experience, job function, etc. **All guidelines and policies forthcoming are intended to build up, provide security and offer support to all, while improving the culture and public image of our sport. We are stronger and more successful when we all work together to promote a safe, enjoyable and misconduct-free environment.**

AGF is actively integrating Safe Sport policies initiated by GCG. Given that AGF and GCG are in the early stages of Safe Sport policy development, the document to follow was informed by USA Gymnastics Safe Sport Policy with permission from the USAG Safe Sport Director.

For their part, The AGF Board of Directors will provide oversight on policy development and support best practices in coaching, team travel, athlete development and equipment safety. Their aim is to support our community in adopting measures necessary to ensure that gymnastics is a safe, fun and healthy sport.

Best Practices

AGF believes that it is **mission critical** for each club to have established standards of behaviour that offer employees and participants NO opportunity and ZERO tolerance for abuse or maltreatment. AGF recognizes that many member clubs have spent considerable time and effort developing standards for conduct and policies. However, evolving societal expectations may require consideration of the information below, to ensure it is reflected in each club's policies.

The wholistic well-being of ALL AGF members is at the heart of the "Best Practices" outlined below. Best practices can be defined as a set of guidelines that have, with research and experience, been proven to reliably lead to a desired result. Practices may evolve over time as improvements and adjustments are made.

These best practices, largely adapted from USAG Safe Sport documents, were developed as a resource and a risk mitigation strategy for AGF members. The main 2 objectives of this document are:

1. To prevent and discourage any behaviour that puts a participant at risk of physical, emotional or psychological maltreatment.
2. To prevent coaches, staff members or volunteers from being falsely accused of inappropriate behaviour.

Some members of our community, namely gymnasts, are particularly vulnerable to individuals in positions of power. Due to the long hours, at a young age, that gymnasts spend away from their families training, the unquestioned authority of the coach and traveling under the direction of unrelated Adults, these athletes are not socialized in the same way that most young people are. With increased acknowledgement worldwide, of the sport's culture of compliance and silence, everyone involved must make a concerted effort to change some long-standing practices and behaviours in order to keep ALL members safe. Athlete maltreatment will not be tolerated.

AGF member clubs should have policies and procedures that, at a minimum, describe conduct that will not be tolerated; standards of behaviour that coaches, parents, staff and volunteers must follow to ensure participant well-being and a process for receiving and handling conduct complaints. Many clubs have existed for decades without such policies. However, in today's changing climate, AGF strongly recommends re-evaluating this stance. AGF, is also undertaking a review of its policies. Creating a legacy of safe sport practices rests with current coaches, club owners, administrators and the Federation. It is our collective responsibility.

Best Practices for Clubs & New Guidelines for Team Alberta Conduct**

1. One-on-One interactions:

- An unrelated adult may NOT be alone with a minor (a) in a private setting, and (b) in any place that is inappropriate to the professional relationship (i.e., a social setting outside the training or competition environment). A gymnastics activity conducted within the view and/or earshot of another adult is not considered a one-on-one interaction if there is reasonable opportunity for interruption.
- AGF deems an appropriate Athlete to Manager/Coach ratio to be 1 Adult : 2+ athletes (3+ Athletes for children under age 12).
- Gymnasts may not reside with an unrelated Coach, nor may an unrelated Coach reside with a gymnast's family.

2. Travel:

- When traveling, regardless of distance, an unrelated adult shall not be alone with a minor.
- Educate young or first-time travelers on appropriate boundaries and conduct between chaperones/coaches and athletes. Provide multiple suggestions for how children can get help/support as needed.
- Review safety protocols such as always using the "buddy" system, rather than being alone (in hotel rooms, using restrooms, etc.).
- For overnight travel, assign gymnasts to hotel rooms with age-appropriate (within 2yrs of age), same-sex teammates.
- Do not allow an unrelated adult to share or be alone in a hotel/dorm/sleeping room with gymnasts.

3. Locker Rooms/Changing Areas:

- Interactions (i.e. conversation) between adults and gymnasts should not occur in any room where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy such as the locker room, restroom or changing area. A second adult should be present for any necessary interaction between an adult and a gymnast in any such room.
- The use of recording devices of any kind in rooms where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy is strictly prohibited.

4. Social Media and Communication:

- All emails, texts, messaging and posts must be transparent, professional and related solely to gymnastics activities or events. It is recommended that all one-on-one correspondence between coaches/volunteers/staff and minors be eliminated. Predominantly, this recommendation is for the protection of adult members from misunderstandings, but also for adolescent athletes who may intuit a false sense of intimacy based on correspondence.
- All club and/or coach email correspondence should be directed to parents/guardians.
- Adults may only distribute electronic communications to minor gymnasts openly and publicly; for example, with a copy to the parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or to the entire team transmitted simultaneously. Direct emails or texts from Coach to athlete or unrelated adult to athlete are not permitted.
- Coach and/or staff member's personal contact information, should only be provided to parents/guardians and done so in accordance with club policy.
- Comments or conversations that contain adult themes or information not intended for public disclosure, should be discussed out of earshot of athletes/participants.
- Phone calls between Coach and minor athletes are prohibited unless athlete is accompanied by a parent or guardian.
- Social media connections between coaches and athletes should be limited to team or group settings. Adults may not have out-of-program contact with gymnasts on social media. Communication regarding a gymnastics activity or event via a club's social media account is acceptable, but private communication between a coach and an athlete's personal social media accounts is not.
- Adult coaches, staff and volunteers should not be individually "friended" or similar on social media by a minor athlete.
- Parents and guardians have the right to request that (a) their child not be contacted using any form of electronic communication, or (b) certain information about their child that they designate not be distributed in any form of electronic communications. All such requests will be honoured.

5. Gifts and Privileges:

- Gift-giving or providing special favours or privileges to individual gymnasts is prohibited. Gifts distributed to the entire team or group is at the Coach or Club's discretion.

6. Photography/Videography:

- Photographs and video may only be taken in public view, must observe generally accepted standards of decency and be both appropriate for and in the best interest of the gymnast.
- Examples of photos that should be edited or deleted include:
 - Any image where the genital area is prominent
 - Open straddle positions
 - Images with misplaced apparel or where undergarments are showing
 - Suggestive or provocative poses
- Without parent or legal guardian's consent, in the case of a Minor gymnast, or an adult gymnast's consent (a) gymnasts may not be photographed or filmed; and (b) no images of gymnasts may be posted publicly or privately. If consent is given, it may be revoked at any time.

7. Massage/Icing/Taping:

- Any rubdown or massage performed on a gymnast by any unrelated adult must be conducted in open/public locations, with the athlete's consent (or parent's consent in the case minors) and must never be done with only a gymnast and unrelated adult in the room. Preference is for a medical professional to be utilized whenever possible, following the same best practices.
- Icing and taping must be conducted in open/public locations and must never be done with only a gymnast and unrelated adult in the room.
- Icing and taping near the intimate areas of the body is not permitted by any unrelated adult - unless it is done by a licensed medical professional – and must NEVER be done with only a gymnast and unrelated adult in the room.

8. Stretching and Other Physical Contact:

- Adults should take care to prevent any compromising positions while stretching or closely interacting with gymnasts and must avoid:
 - Laying, standing or sitting on top of the gymnast
 - Facing the gymnast while he/she is in a static straddle position
 - Frontal lap sitting
 - Pats on the bottom

* Physical contact that is reasonably intended to coach, teach or demonstrate a gymnastics skill or to prevent or lessen injury (e.g., spotting, catching) is not only permissible, but a necessary part of the sport. **Spotting (as taught in NCCP technical courses) is absolutely ENCOURAGED as a teaching tool.**

* Permission for appropriate physical contact can be incorporated into communication between athlete and coach. For instance, “Are you okay if I spot you on your next attempt to show you the correct shape?”.

* Infrequent, non-intentional physical contact, particularly contact that arises out of an error or a misjudgment on the part of the gymnast, **does not** violate this policy.

* Making amends, such as an apology or explanation, is encouraged to further help educate gymnasts on the difference between appropriate and inappropriate contact.

9. Members Club Viewing Policies:

- AGF recommends that all member clubs maintain an open viewing policy, for parents and guardians of its athletes, to demonstrate transparency and thereby ensuring coach and athlete safety. Inappropriate behaviour and sexual misconduct thrive on privacy. Shared community oversight and eliminating the opportunity for inappropriate behaviour is necessary to keep children safe. Creating this safe environment also minimizes the clubs’ exposure to risk and therefore protects coaches and older athletes from being falsely accused. Simply stated, in today’s environment it is the RIGHT thing to do.
- Parent education advising what constitutes safe and reasonable viewing practices may be necessary. Clear communication regarding positive parental involvement (behaviour that does not interfere with the athlete’s skill development or safety) can be incorporated into the member handbook, verbally shared at the Club’s AGM or reviewed during parent meetings at the start of each year.

*Disclaimer:

- This document is a reference guide sharing best practices that are recommended for AGF member clubs.
- Responsibility for risk management remains with individual clubs and gymnastic professionals.
- This document does not provide legal advice.

** Adapted, with permission, from USAG Safe Sport Policy document. Until more is available from GCG, AGF will follow the lead of the US Center for Safe Sport, recommendations of the Daniels’ Report and practices adopted by USAG.