

# PLAY SAFE BC COMMUNITY SUMMITS

As part of the Play Safe BC program, viaSport partnered with the BC Regional Sport Alliance to host 11 Play Safe Community Summits from November 1-25, 2022, online and in-person. This was an opportunity for everyone in the sport community – including all roles and levels of amateur sport - to have their say on making sport safer in B.C.

These Summits were a safe space for athletes, coaches, leaders, and people who work in sport organizations to learn and share about what “safe sport” means to them, what challenges they face, how they receive or retrieve information about safe sport, and how we can all raise awareness.

Below are the themes that emerged from listening to 115 summit participants from across British Columbia. The notes from all of the Summits are compiled and themes are identified below. In an effort to keep participant contributions anonymous, themes are presented for all Summits together, rather than being split out by participant type or region.

## THEMES

### 1. AWARENESS OF SAFE SPORT

The sessions highlighted that the level of awareness about the concept of safe sport varies amongst summit participants.

- Many summit participants indicated that they received limited or no information about safe sport from their sport, and some were not aware of the term
  - this varied between sports, particularly at the club level
- Many identified a need for more outward communication/promotion to reach a broader audience, such as:
  - Instagram, TikTok, through schools (assemblies), posters, facilities, news, private and public conversations, websites, seminars, sport venues, municipalities, podcasts
  - Info for athletes shared through registration process and orientation
  - Get safe sport information into school curriculum (i.e. P.E. class)
- A theme emerged regarding the need to help people understand why safe sport should matter to them if they haven't been affected by maltreatment themselves, saying things like:
  - “You don't know what you don't know”

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- “Make it normal”, what does it look like?
- “Why should I care?” needs to be answered
- There was no common understanding of what safe sport means – what it includes and does not include. Although people tended to frame their understanding in positive terms based on their feeling of safety in a sports environment many people expressed how helpful a clear system-wide definition would be. Comments about what safe sport is included:
  - “Safe sport” is confusing – what is the definition? Want specifics
  - It's about “making great humans”
  - It's about inclusion, freedom of expression, gender identity
  - Not being afraid to make mistakes
  - Feeling safe to try new things
  - Being a good person, being responsible and supportive of teammates
  - Positive mindset, encouragement
  - Feeling comfortable in your environment, sense of belonging
  - Respecting boundaries and rules
  - Lack of injuries, physical safety
  - Not just the “big” things
  - It's a competitive advantage – conditions required for excelling at high performance
  - Empowerment and understanding to speak up
  - Understanding of potential for power imbalance to be used negatively
  - Importance of education/awareness of parents – more frequent parent-coach meetings
  - Are athletes feeling unsafe now?

## 2. UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOURS

Summit participants expressed confusion about “where the line is” between appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. Coaches in particular were looking for clear lines, stating the importance of:

- Normalizing expectations and being clear on behavioural boundaries
- Communicating what is ok and not ok? With examples/scenarios.
- Communicating who does what and who is responsible
- Communicating who is responsible to:

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- Take action?
- Provide a safe environment?
- Learn the information?
- Speak up?
- Addressing the assumption that the system only seems to look at big transgressions and not small ones, realizing intervention in the small ones prevents the big ones

### 3. SAFE SPORT EDUCATION

While some people are aware of the Coaches Association of Canada courses and other online training, many people said that they needed more information from their sport about where to look for information about safe sport, sharing that:

- People learn about safe sport from multiple areas
  - NCCP courses or the CAC Locker
  - Direct information from their sports organization
  - Direct information from their team and/or coach
  - Multisport Games – required to participate
  - viaSport
  - Some have had some information about code of conduct
- Guidance was needed for coach education/learning facilitators to create safe spaces for training sessions
- Creating peer-to-peer discussion opportunities would be helpful
- You have to work on yourself to make a change – a lot more than doing courses
- Videos and stories are helpful and can give perspective
- Non-affiliated clubs/teams not getting information/education on safe sport
- Coaches/managers don't feel like they have the tools or skillset to talk about maltreatment in an appropriate way with young athletes
- Capacity of volunteers to do multiple training courses is limited

### 4. CHALLENGES TO CREATING A SAFE SPORT ENVIRONMENT

Summit participants tended to have a good sense of what a safe sport environment would feel like, and identified factors that there may be obstacles to creating this, like:

- Addressing the *Rubix Cube* of digital media/mediums and social media
- Need to be in an environment that is safe/supportive/inclusive/positive

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- Reducing the “scary” environment that exists around discussion of safe sport
- Need to learn to address issues within a group/team when they arise to increase understanding of process and consequences
- Importance for people to point out when they hear/see something they know is maltreatment – everyone looking out for one another (stewardship & community)
- Impact of other teams/spectators on feeling of safety
- Creating a better understanding of the Rule of Two
  - There was a feeling that it was harming the development of an appropriate relationship between coaches and athletes
  - General lack of understanding or confusion of how to implement
  - People feel it's a barrier but a good concept
  - Athletes can find it “frustrating and annoying”
  - Coaches find it limits their ability to build a trusting relationship with their athletes, reducing their ability to have a positive influence on performance and well-being
  - Dynamic between athletes and coaches has been altered, for the worse
- People reported being unclear on how to apply principles of consent in sport
  - They tended to associate it only with consent to touch, rather than consent to try a new, difficult skill for instance.
  - “Cup of tea” consent video – excellent  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGoWLS4-kU>
  - People do not fully understand consent and how it applies
  - Blurriness of needs – do coaches need to ask every time they touch an athlete?
  - Youth athlete consent to receive info? Maltreatment education opens up touchy subjects
  - Consent to return to practice or competition after injury or illness? How else can consent be applied in coaching?
- Summit participants expressed concerns about recognizing unsafe behaviours and how to address situations that involve communication and conflict
  - Addressing negative communication

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- How do you find the line between verbal motivation and harassment?
- If there are athlete-athlete behaviours, is it ok to involve the coach?
- Identifying behaviours that aren't ok
- Addressing favouritism
- How can an athlete approach a coach about favouritism/neglect/negative communication given the power imbalance?
- Cultural differences may contribute to conflict

## 5. REPORTING

There were concerns expressed about the safety of reporting incidents and the repercussions. Summit participants were confused about who to complain to, and what the process would be. We also heard concerns about the potential impact of malicious false reports, and a real fear of what would happen if a complaint was filed against you. Comments included:

- There is a need for independent process in B.C.
- Fear of retaliation exists
  - People still feel repercussions in their sport for standing up for themselves
  - There's a need to change this to create safety
- They are unclear on whether to report and how, if something happens
- They don't want to ruin relationships
- They wonder what protections are there for coaches/other participants if someone makes a report against them?
- Organizations need the ability to track and report incidents (injury, maltreatment, etc.)

## 6. SYSTEM ALIGNMENT

Summit participants recommended that the system should work towards consistency in safe sport requirements – across sports, across provinces/territories, and from grassroots up to national team – stating that:

- This needs to be the same for everyone (all sports, all roles)
- There could be universal standard prerequisite training
- Compliance could be incentivized

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## 7. ACTIONS EVERYONE CAN TAKE

Discussions were fruitful about how awareness can be raised of safe sport to help create positive sport environments. People shared ideas about what they and others could do to amplify safe sport, including:

- Connecting, sharing, and talking with teammates
- Athletes can bring up safe sport with coaches and ask questions
- Leading by example
- Speaking up against maltreatment
- Encouraging inclusion
- All participants can post to social media about how they create safe sport
- Having open conversations around safe sport at home and in sport environments
- Leading culture change

## 8. SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- There is a wide range of awareness and understanding in the amateur sport sector. Athletes and parents are receiving the least information, as well as clubs that aren't affiliated with provincial organizations
- There is value in framing safe sport in the positive, as that is what most participants think of when they hear the term "safe sport". Encouraging the positive is a valuable strategy because "Safe sport" does not equal "maltreatment"
- People would like consistent, standardized tools, education, and language from a central source
- Promotion of existing online training modules to a wider audience could be a quick and valuable "lift" for the system
- There is confusion around practical implementation of the Rule of Two
- There is a lot of confusion about reporting processes
- There is a need for behavioural expectations to be clear and mistakes/breaches need to be addressed quickly
- Everyone has a responsibility to create a safe sport environment

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## CONCLUSION

The Play Safe BC Community Summits provided a valuable opportunity to hear from all types of participants at all levels of sport from across the province, as well as to connect with our partners in the Regional Sport Alliance.

The information from these sessions will be shared within the sport system to help address the points raised, and will inform strategy development for the future. In the short-term, the Play Safe BC tools that are in development are likely to address some of the key issues raised above. These tools will launch in March 2023, and will be announced through our newsletter as well as through a promotional campaign.

To subscribe to the viaSport newsletter, click [here](#).