



SAFE GYMNASTICS

PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

The Finnish Gymnastics Federation respects the opportunity for each individual to engage and participate in activities as themselves. Safe adults who are healthy and well, and a warm and responsible coaching culture are factors that promote children's safety.

This document serves as a handbook on how cases of inappropriate behaviour are addressed and handled in gymnastics. Safe club activities require actions at all three levels: individual, club and federation level. It is a good idea for each club to have a model for addressing inappropriate behaviour, providing information on e.g. who to contact and how the process flows in the club. The model for addressing inappropriate behaviour within a club is also included in the *Tähtiseura* process and in the responsibility steps at *tähti* and *pro* levels.

The responsibility work carried out in Finnish Gymnastics Federation has been guided by the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, the principles of fair play in sports, Non-Violent Childhoods Action Plan, the Finnish Gymnastics Federation's study on coaching culture, and the joint work of the whole field of sports to develop more responsible coaching.

The objective of the action plan on Non-Violent Childhoods (2020–2025) is to prevent violence against children aged 0–17 in different operating environments. The plan takes into account the rights of the child, factors that prevent and protect against violence as well as early identification. These themes were also highlighted in the Finnish Gymnastics Federation's own responsibility work.

The Finnish Gymnastics Federation does not tolerate any kind of harassment or inappropriate treatment in its member clubs or in Gymnastics Federation's events. Every participant, instructor, coach, actor, and official must be ensured a safe environment to engage in activities and to practise.

Inappropriate treatment is contrary to common good practice in gymnastics activities. Inappropriate treatment of any kind should not be part of training, competitions, competition trips, camps, courses, or social media activities. Every participant, instructor, coach, or other actor within gymnastics should report any shortcomings to the club or the Finnish Gymnastics Federation.



WHAT IS INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR?

All behaviour contrary to good practice is inappropriate behaviour. It can be an act or negligence and it can be intentional or unintentional. Inappropriate behaviour can be systematic, continuous or one-off, and, in an extreme case, even illegal actions.

Anyone can experience inappropriate behaviour by anyone, and all inappropriate behaviour must be addressed. Each individual experiences things differently. What does not offend one person may be hurtful to another.

INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR CAN BE, FOR EXAMPLE:

- repeated defamation of a person's qualities, characteristics, or private life
- excluding from the training community
- shouting, slandering, swearing, calling names, derogatory glances, speaking ill of or ridiculing someone
- physical violence or threats of it
- inappropriate abuse of power
- sexual harassment
- gender-based harassment
- inappropriate behaviour related to intoxicants.

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Harassment means conduct that violates a person's human dignity, and sexual harassment means, according to the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, verbal, non-verbal or physical unwanted conduct of a sexual nature by which a person's psychological or physical integrity is violated intentionally. This can be done in particular by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive atmosphere. Such atmosphere can be created with, for example, jokes or innuendos with sexual undertones and comments on a person's body.

HOW TO INTERVENE IN INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Intervening in inappropriate behaviour is based on rapid response and mediation, as well as on prevention. There are four stages to handling cases of inappropriate behaviour: **prevention, bringing up the issue, mediation, and possible further measures**. When handling these cases, the development needs within the operations as well as means of prevention will also be assessed. Each case will be followed up in order to react quickly if a problem was not resolved in the first mediation. All parties must be heard equally, and the process must be documented in a secure manner.



1. PREVENTION

Prevention is the best way to reduce inappropriate behaviour in sports. The key to prevention is to increase awareness and competence among coaches, gymnasts, and families. More information about prevention can be found in the **You are not alone service**.

- **Increasing Awareness and Training**
People who work with gymnastics recognise inappropriate behaviour and know how to intervene. The topic is discussed at all levels: in hobby groups, parents' evenings, and federation's camp activities.
- **SOPU Activities**
SOPU activities teach children and young people how to act when they encounter bullying or other inappropriate behaviour. SOPU model serves as a good basis for interaction also between other actors in cases of conflict.
 1. Say 'stop' when someone hurts your feelings.
 2. Admit your mistake, that you hurt someone's feelings, and apologise.
 3. Accept the apology, learn about what happened and do not get caught up in the past.
 4. Tell someone about what happened so the situation will be monitored and, if required, further discussed.
- **Safety Skill Education**
Safety skill education refers to strengthening gymnasts' own resources, positive body image and self-esteem. Safety skill education gives the adults, who are responsible for coaching, tools to teach children to recognise their own feelings, to respect others as well as principles of physical integrity.
- **Building a Positive Atmosphere, and Effective Interaction and Communication**
Good interaction, open communication and a safe atmosphere support an operating culture where the threshold for inappropriate behaviour is higher.
- **Ground Rules, Instructions and Policies**
Everyone involved in gymnastics knows what they are committing to, how they should act, what is allowed and what is not. Common rules and instructions prevent conflicts and misunderstandings.
- **Transparency and Openness is Evident in All Operations**
Decisions are made openly and they are justified, the rules, guidelines and instructions are available to everyone, and inappropriate behaviour is openly talked about. This ensures that everyone knows what to do and how to behave, everyone is familiar with the grounds for actions. By doing so we can reduce misunderstandings and conflicts.
- **Being Heard and Paying Attention to Different Needs**
Everyone involved in gymnastics has the opportunity to be heard and everyone's needs and perspectives are taken into account.
- **Checking Employees' and Volunteers' Criminal Records Extracts.**

2. BRINGING UP AN ISSUE

In most cases, inappropriate behaviour can be stopped by bringing it up right away. The parties involved discuss the matter with each other or, if they are minors, their guardians may also take part. Speaking to each other aims to resolving and correcting misunderstandings and conflicts, to bringing to the other person's attention that their behaviour has, for example, offended the other person, or that their behaviour has not been in line with the ground rules, and to agreeing on how to proceed in the future. Discussing and addressing the behaviour right away can help prevent cases from escalating and becoming bigger and more complicated problems, which would later be hard and difficult to solve. If the matter is not discussed, the one who is behaving inappropriately may not know that they have offended the other, and reaching a mutually satisfactory situation is therefore hard. Bringing up the issue is also the first phase in the SOPU model.

Tips for Bringing Up an Issue

Be clear about what bothers you. You can ask the person how they would feel if they were treated in such a way, how they saw the situation, or how they would feel if their child told them at home that they had encountered such behaviour. Try to tell the person how to act instead, and what is allowed.

Consider whether the moment is right for bringing up an issue (see, for example, whether there are children or other people around), focus on the facts and on the incident that happened just now.

1. Try to clearly let the person who is behaving inappropriately know that you do not approve of their actions and that you need them to stop. It is important that the person acting inappropriately becomes aware of it.
2. It is not always possible to intervene in inappropriate behaviour, due to e.g. a position of power, or shock or fear that the person who was subjected to an act is experiencing. If you do not feel able to tell the person directly about their inappropriate behaviour, tell someone else, for example, a safe adult, club management or the competition organiser.
3. Try to remember the time and the place of the incident, what happened and who were present. Write them down if necessary.
4. Even if you address the situation directly with the person, also tell someone else, e.g., club management or federation, about what has happened.
5. When a club, federation or a competition organiser is informed about inappropriate behaviour, they are obliged to intervene and take up the matter with the person who has behaved inappropriately, if the person who has been mistreated has not done so themselves.
6. You can also contact a specialist through the **You are not alone service** to get help and advice on the situation. You can also always ask for help from your club or the Finnish Gymnastics Federation.
7. You can report to the **ILMO service** if you suspect a doping, competition manipulation or spectator safety violation or other ethical violation in sports.



To Be Noted!

It is the adults' responsibility to root out inappropriate behaviour and harassment, to intervene in those situations, and to set boundaries to children's and young peoples' behaviour. Failure to react to bad behaviour is often interpreted as silent acceptance, even if it in reality is helplessness or fear. A child or a young person does not know the boundaries of what is allowed and what is not, and they may not dare to challenge the authority of an unfamiliar person. Thus, it cannot be required that a child or a young person would be able to or has the courage to tell that they find the behaviour of, for example, their coach or a fellow athlete offensive or repugnant. Nor can they be expected to intervene in inappropriate and disturbing behaviour themselves. Adults have the responsibility to intervene in inappropriate behaviour and to teach children and young people boundaries and ways to bring matters up.

3. MEDIATION

When an issue has not been resolved by bringing it up and discussing it, or cannot be resolved this way, the next step is mediation. In mediation, a neutral person or party is brought in to help resolve the matter. In an internal case within a club, mediation starts with the help of a person from the club (e.g. chairperson, executive director, or other person in charge), and if this is not enough, it is possible to ask for help from outside the club, for example from the federation or from paid professional mediators. Mediation offices offer free mediation assistance in criminal and civil cases (Mediation in civil cases is a statutory service).

Restorative mediation is based on being heard, discussion and cooperation, and aims to increase understanding between the parties and to find a solution that satisfies all parties. The role of the mediator is to promote discussion and the process, without making decisions or defining the matters to be agreed upon. The parties themselves determine the matters to be resolved and how it will be done.

The role of the mediator is to ensure that all parties have a voice at the table. During the process there will be discussions both separately and together with the parties, and at the end of the process, the parties will go through the achieved outcome together with the mediator and agree on the follow-up. During mediation the important questions are; what has happened, what kind of feelings and consequences it has caused, what do you need to make things well again, what are the matters that will be agreed upon, and how to act in the future.

More information about mediation can be found, for example, on The Finnish Forum for Mediation website and more information about operating models can be found in the material bank of the You are not alone service. The Finnish Olympic Committee is preparing a common model for mediation for the sports community, which the clubs can use in mediation situations. If a crime is suspected, further measures will be taken directly and the case is reported to the police or child welfare services, and the case is transferred to the authorities.



AN EXAMPLE OF MEDIATION – A SITUATION BETWEEN A GROUP'S GYMNASTS

1. An incident comes to the attention when a gymnast tells a coach/instructor or other adult who will tell the coach/instructor about it. Or an adult notices the situation and intervenes directly.
2. The coach/instructor acts as a mediator and handles the matter directly with the gymnasts involved.
3. The coach listens to everyone involved, the events are discussed together, and a common solution found.
4. If the matter is prolonged or repeated, the gymnast's guardians and, if necessary, support from the club management will be included in the next mediation. The club supports and helps the employees and other actors.

4. FURTHER MEASURES

If the problem cannot be solved by mediation or no solution can be found in mediation, or there are clear violations of rules or laws, further measures will be taken.

1. In cases of crime and child welfare, you can seek advice directly from the police, the child welfare services of your municipality or the Victim Support Finland, as well as from the You are not alone service. In criminal cases, the case is transferred to the authorities.
2. Employment or service relationship contracts and rules, and the penalties related to them; reprimand, advisory, warning, dismissal. Cases are handled by the employer.
3. Breaches of contract and related penalties specified in the contracts. Cases are handled between the parties to the agreement.
4. Breaches of club rules and related penalties specified in the rules. Cases are handled within the club.
5. Breaches of federation's rules and related penalties specified in the rules. Cases are handled within the federation.
6. Other serious ethical violations are brought to the federation's disciplinary committee. More information available in the General Competition and Disciplinary Rules.



EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility in gymnastics means that everyone involved in gymnastics enjoys a safe and positive environment that supports learning. An environment in which to accomplish, succeed and experience together. All persons involved in gymnastics commit to follow the common ethical guidelines for gymnastics – the Ethical Principles of Gymnastics



FOR THE GYMNAST

Every athlete is responsible for their own behaviour; for not offending or otherwise hurting other athletes or actors. We respect ourselves and each other and express ourselves to the best of our ability when we feel hurt, uncomfortable, or clearly mistreated. We talk to a reliable adult whenever a situation evokes uncomfortable feelings or questions. We also defend our fellow athletes, and we will not be bystanders if we see bullying or name-calling, for example. We set an example with our behaviour, especially for younger athletes.

FOR THE PARENT OR GUARDIAN

Every gymnast's family has a great responsibility for their underage athletes. Parents have the responsibility of setting children's boundaries, teaching them to identify inappropriate behaviour and to know their own physical boundaries, and being a reliable adult to whom the child can confide and open up. It is the parent's job to intervene when a child has been subjected to



inappropriate behaviour, and to take up the matter directly with the person involved, or to take the case e.g. to the club management. The parent supports and assists a child in difficult situations.

Parents are also responsible for their own behaviour and for not offending, hurting, or otherwise treating other actors, e.g. other parents, gymnasts, coaches, or judges, inappropriately. Parents must set the standard for acting appropriately when encountering inappropriate behaviour or resolving conflict situations. As adults, parents are able to discuss matters calmly and to consider the needs and perspectives of others.

FOR THE COACH AND INSTRUCTOR

A coach is responsible for their own behaviour and for not offending, hurting, or otherwise treating other actors, e.g. gymnasts, other coaches, or parents, inappropriately. When required, the coach will act as a mediator in disputes between gymnasts or, for example, in bullying situations, and sets the limits for the gymnasts in their training group to ensure a safe training environment. A coach sets the example to gymnasts and other coaches in acting appropriately when encountering inappropriate behaviour and resolving conflict situations.

A coach recognises inappropriate behaviour and knows how to intervene in it, and, if required, takes the case forward, e.g., to the attention of the club management. An employed coach is able to ask for help and support from the employer if they need it, and they remember that with their behaviour they represent also the club and gymnastics as a sport.

IN COMPETITIONS

In competitions, everyone is responsible for their own behaviour, and adults have the responsibility to intervene in any inappropriate behaviour they notice. Adults, e.g. parents, coaches, and judges, should set the example and handle even the inappropriate situations appropriately.

If you encounter inappropriate behaviour in judging, you can inform the competition's Head Judge about it. The situation will be handled during the competition event or the Head Judge will contact the discipline's Technical Director (*lajipäällikkö*) after the competition. If the Head Judge has been involved in the incident, you can contact the Technical Director (*lajipäällikkö*) after the competition. If the Technical Director cannot be reached, you can contact the Sports Director (*voimistelutoimen johtaja*) or the Secretary General (*toiminnanjohtaja*).

Spectators behave encouragingly in competitions, focusing on the positive. Negative, discriminatory, and racist comments are prohibited, and must be addressed or brought to the attention of the competition organisers. Spectators must also let the judges, coaches and athletes work in peace. Violations in spectator safety can be reported to the ILMO service.

FOR THE CLUB

The club is made up of its members, and the club's actors, especially the board elected by the club members, the club's employees and key volunteers are responsible for their actions. The club is



responsible for ensuring a secure operating environment to all members and employees. The club has instructions for inappropriate situations and zero tolerance for bullying, discrimination, and other inappropriate behaviour. The club is responsible for its employees and must intervene in case of inappropriate behaviour. The club must also provide support and assistance for their employees. The club sets rules for its members and monitors that the rules are followed. It is important that the club appoints a reliable, unbiased person among its members as the contact person for inappropriate matters. The club members should be informed about this and the contact information put on the website.

HANDLING CASES OF INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR IN CLUBS

The club must have a path for problem-solving that explains how to proceed when problems arise. This ensures that the club's enthusiasts, their parents, coaches, and other actors are aware of how to act and whom to contact when encountering inappropriate behaviour. Below is a summary of how to handle cases of inappropriate behaviour within a club. A more comprehensive guide can be found in the material bank of the You are not alone service.

1. The person who records the complaint listens without haste and takes the expressed concern seriously.
2. The listener records the matter or requests the person reporting a concern to file a complaint in writing.
3. The response provides information on how the process moves forward and when the next contact will be.
4. The club will decide who will continue handling the case. The club has appointed, in advance, the persons who primarily handle complaints (e.g. member of the board, head of coaching, executive director). If the club does not have the means to handle the case on its own, they can contact the Finnish Gymnastics Federation, the You are not alone service or other actors, such as a mediation office.
5. The case will be assessed together with the relevant parties: Can the club solve the case on its own or should it be reported to the police or child welfare authorities?
6. The inappropriate behaviour must be stopped immediately.
7. All parties will be heard. If there are minors involved, the guardians' consent is required for hearing, and, when relevant, the guardians should also be heard. Guardians must always be informed afterwards of what was discussed and which measures have been taken.
8. The primary aim is to resolve the matter by mediation between the parties involved, but if this is not sufficient or possible, a decision on further measures will be made. The solution takes into account labour law measures, disciplinary rules as well as the club's and federation's rules. If the case involves harassment or violence, the club's board must be informed.



9. Examples of penalties include advisory, warning, termination of employment, dismissal from a position of trust, criminal sanction, suspension from participating in activities/competitions, and expulsion from the club.
10. A written summary of the process is drawn up and the place where it is stored will be decided. All relevant persons are informed. Follow-up measures for the case are planned to ensure that inappropriate behaviour is not repeated.

The Finnish Gymnastics Federation provides advice and consultation on cases of inappropriate behaviour. Contact: www.voimistelu.fi.