



VOLLEYBALLBC

# SAFE SPORT ACTION PLAN INFORMATION FOR REFEREES

Learn more about our  
work to promote safe sport  
practices & foster a safe  
environment



## Introduction to Safe Sport

Sport has the power to positively change lives and build communities - but it can only do this when the experience places physical, social, and emotional well-being at the very core.

Safety is of utmost importance to Volleyball BC and we strive to ensure that all players receive a safe and positive volleyball experience in British Columbia. Abuse, maltreatment, and unsafe practices have no place in our volleyball community.

Our dedication to safety is embedded in our **2021-2024 Strategic Plan** where our mission is to lead enjoyable and safe volleyball experiences. The importance of safety is reflected throughout our Vision, Mission, Goals, Values, and Key Initiatives.

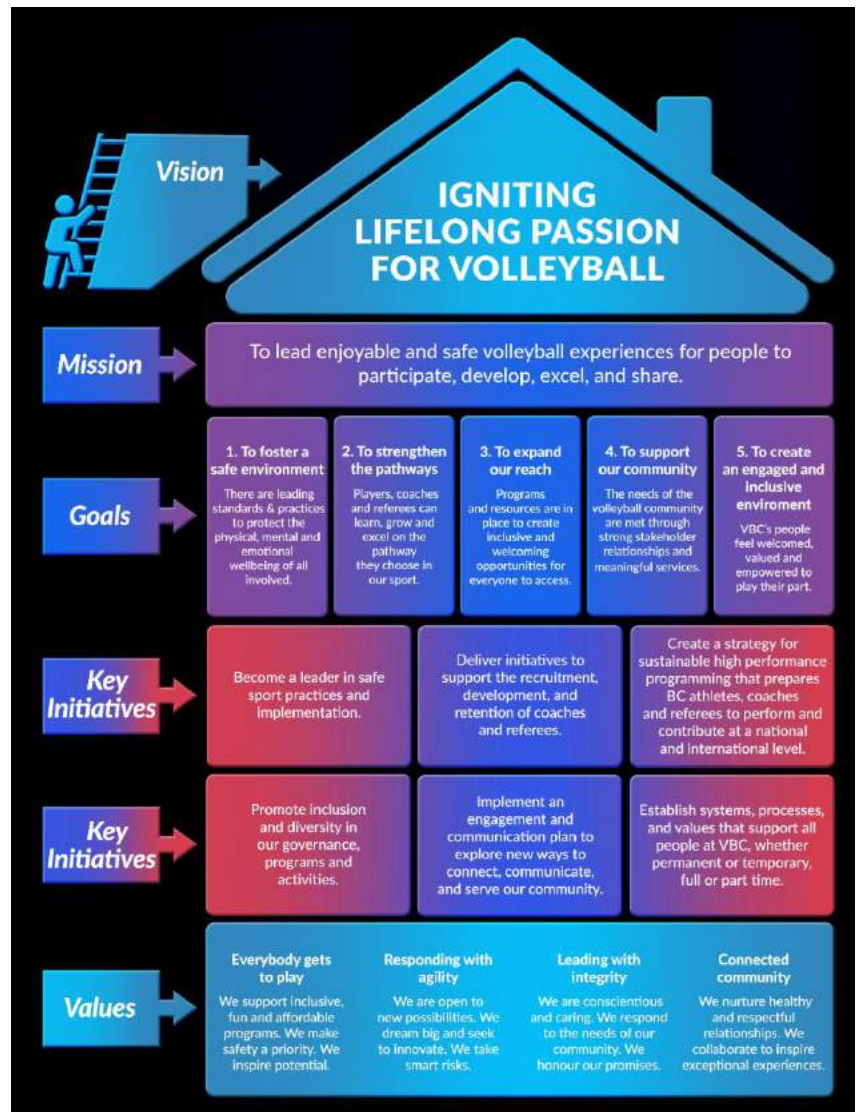
### What is Safe Sport?

“Safe Sport” is a term that used a lot in sport and in the media but what does it actually mean?

The Coaching Association of Canada defines Safe Sport as **“Our collective responsibility to create, foster and preserve sport environments that ensure positive, healthy and fulfilling experiences for all individuals. A safe sport environment is one in which all sport stakeholders recognize and report acts of maltreatment and prioritize the welfare, safety and rights of every person at all times.”** (2020).

In our Safe Sport Action Plan, we address issues and actions to promote safe sport in volleyball across 4 different aspects:

1. Concussion
2. Physical Injury
3. Abuse & Maltreatment
4. Mental Health



From May to December 2021, we embarked on a series of steps to assess best practice, identify issues and prioritise actions for change. These included:

- Creating a Safe Sport Working Group
- Surveying our membership about their experiences
- Conducting focus groups with Team BC athletes
- Reviewing best practice and assessing priorities in our sport

This Safe Sport Action Plan is a culmination of all of these steps and was adopted by the VBC Board in March 2022.



## What did you tell us about safety?

### The good news is that you generally feel (very) safe participating in volleyball

Across all respondent groups, there was positive agreement to the statement “I feel safe participating in volleyball” with a ranking of 4 or 5. Referees answered positively with 89% agreeing/strongly agreeing with the statement (ranking 4 or 5).

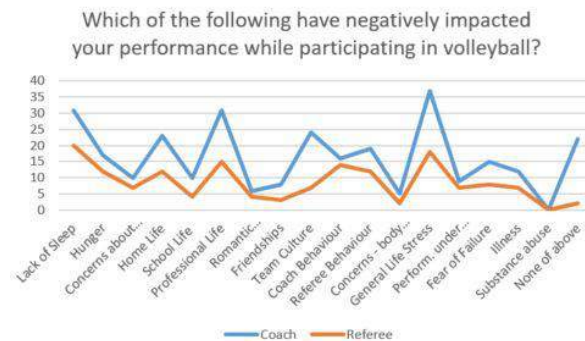
### There is a strong relationship between well-being and safety that we need to protect in order to preserve what our members enjoy about playing volleyball.

You listed the top 3 reasons that you participate in volleyball as:

1. **Having fun**
2. **Social connection**
3. **Achieving my goals for personal development**

However, it is clear from our research that stressors for physical and mental well-being often impact your performance and well-being when you are participating in volleyball.

The top factors affecting referees’ performances in volleyball were **general life stress, lack of sleep** and **professional life**. **Coach behaviour** was another factor that negatively impacts you. In addition, over 75% of respondents said that they had experienced at least one of the well-being “stressors” that we listed in the survey. The top factors listed by Referees were **mental exhaustion, physical fatigue, irritability, and increased anxiety**. A question for us to ask is whether we can do anything to address these stressors and to ensure that the experience of playing volleyball is not contributing.



### Physical injury was generally not perceived as a risk by referees.

Only **25% Referees** in the survey have experienced an injury during participation in volleyball.

The most common injuries listed were to the **shoulder/arm or back**.

Encouragingly Referees felt that they had the most amount of **resources, support and knowledge** around physical injury, closely followed by concussion / brain injury.

### Concussion was also a concern, particularly among male participants.

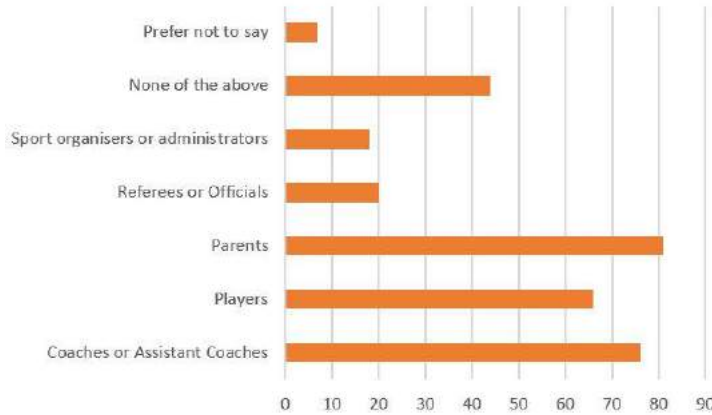
Only **4-6%** of respondents said they had received a concussion or head injury.

**26%** of referees identified physical injury and concussion/ brain injury as the biggest risk in our sport. This compared with the top response - **33%** said verbal abuse, bullying or harassment was the biggest risk.

**Alarming, many of you felt that 5 behaviours linked to Abuse and Maltreatment were an issue in volleyball.**



*If you personally experienced one of the behaviours listed above, who was responsible?*



Referees overwhelmingly indicated that they are most likely to have experienced one of these behaviours from a parent, a coach/assistant coach or a player.

**Mental health and well-being is a rising area of attention that you identified.**

**mental exhaustion, physical fatigue, irritability, and increased anxiety** were top factors identified by Referees as affecting their participation.

Referees ranked mental health as one of the areas where they had the least amount of resources, support and knowledge required to create a safe environment. The complexity of mental health considerations and concerns was illustrated in the responses that you gave us:

*“More needs to be done with responding and managing active safety issues related to abuse and bullying towards officials. A notable amount of officials leave refereeing due to the lack of support and in-game mentorship. Refereeing is high stress job to which if respected, supported, and resourced well, can be a sustainable career or past-time for all ages and addressing perceived safety concerns”.*

*“Coaches, in particular, should be taking a long, serious look at their behaviour. Most coaches are fine, but there do exist a far too high number of abusive and selfish (“I only accept calls that are good for my team or bad for my opponent”) coaches.”*

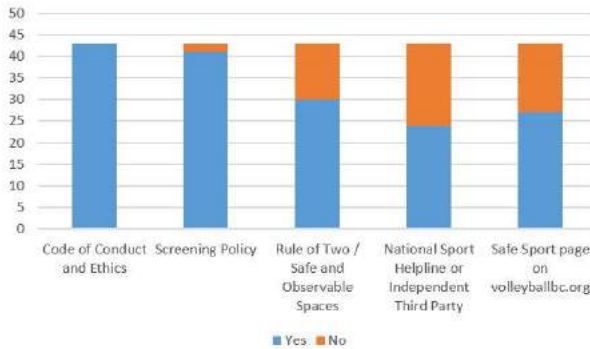
*“Define to all coaches, players, referees, parents what is bullying and harassment and what is not bullying and harassment with respect to all volleyball functions”*

*“Volleyball should be a welcoming sport for all people, with skills or not...I've heard from newcomers that they have a hard time getting involve unless they already establish connections. I think most important is to establish rules for sportsmanship. To hear that people have been bullied off courts and choose to do the same to others because it's an unspoken rule is wrong.”*

## There are gaps in support and inconsistent awareness of safety resources.

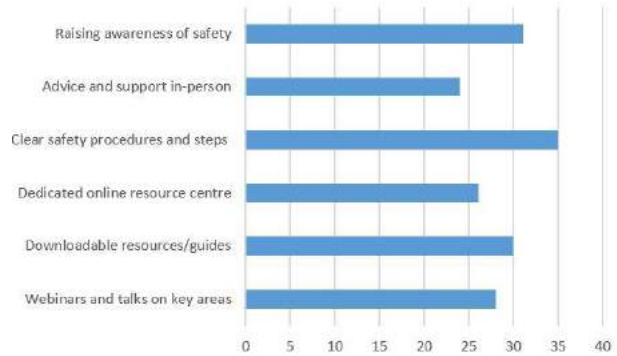
Even though Volleyball BC has a number of resources and mechanisms in place to protect and promote player safety, it is clear that there is low awareness and that we are not currently meeting our members need for support:

### Are you aware that Volleyball BC has...?



Most of you are aware that we have a **Code of Conduct and Ethics** and a **Screening Policy** for positions of authority. Less of you were aware that there is a **Rule of Two**, or a **National Sport Helpline** or **Independent Third Party** for reporting safe sport incidences. Our job moving forward is to do a better job of promoting these.

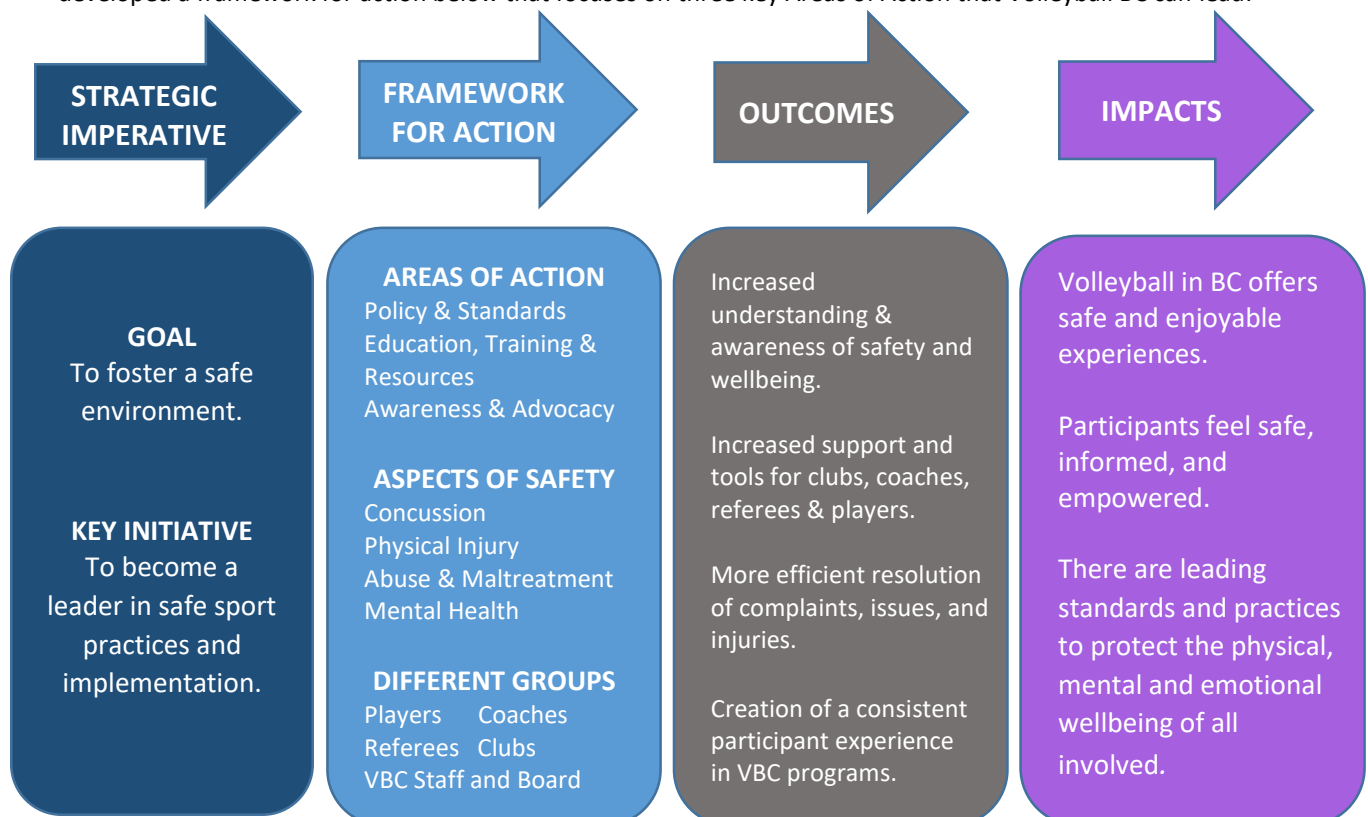
### How can VBC help and support you in creating a safe environment?



For Referees, Volleyball BC could best support by creating **clear safety procedures and steps** followed by **raising awareness of safety**. This was also reflected in many of the comments from referees that talked about the need for education and awareness around respect for referees.

## Our Framework for Action

From what we heard from you, there is clearly room for improvement in safety and well-being in volleyball in BC. Improving safety in volleyball requires everyone – players, coaches, referees, clubs – to be committed and accountable. Volleyball BC can play an important role because of our unique province-wide position. We have developed a framework for action below that focuses on three key Areas of Action that Volleyball BC can lead:



# ACTION PLAN

## CONCUSSION

- ✓ Promote a definition and symptoms of concussion
- ✓ Clarify roles and responsibilities for recognizing and reporting concussion symptoms during volleyball activities.
- ✓ Integrate concussion policies, procedures and practices into VBC programs and activities.
- ✓ Concussion training for VBC coaches.
- ✓ Develop a Club Guide to policies, procedures and best practice.
- ✓ Develop a Concussion Guide and Education for players, coaches, and referees
- ✓ Identify opportunities and promote "training" and education for our players and parents.
- ✓ Create a designated area on VBC website for concussion education, awareness and resources.
- ✓ Ensure consistent signage and visuals in place at all VBC events.

## PHYSICAL INJURY

- ✓ Establish clear explanations of physical injury.
- ✓ Develop VBC policies, protocols and procedures for physical injury prevention and management.
- ✓ Physical injury procedures provided to VBC coaches.
- ✓ Support clubs in establishing protocols for injury prevention and management.
- ✓ Develop pre-season preparedness guide for players.
- ✓ Create a designated area on website which features physical injury awareness
- ✓ Facilitate access to training courses for our members and staff.
- ✓ Develop a Physical Injury Guides for players, coaches, and referees.
- ✓ Share specific injury information for players at different ages and genders.
- ✓ Place visual reminders at VBC events

## ABUSE & MALTREATMENT

- ✓ Establish clear definitions of abuse, maltreatment and appropriate versus inappropriate behaviour.
- ✓ Promote the roles of all participants in eliminating abuse and maltreatment.
- ✓ Increase awareness and understanding of the Volleyball BC Code of Conduct and Ethics.
- ✓ Maintain clear, effective, and confidential issue reporting and resolution mechanisms.
- ✓ Identify specific training and resources for referees.
- ✓ Embed training into VBC programs and activities.
- ✓ Develop and launch a Safe Sport Handbook.
- ✓ Support and monitor completion of safe sport requirements by adults working in sport.
- ✓ Promote and support positive and appropriate coaching standards and behaviour.
- ✓ Develop club-specific toolkit to support safe sport.
- ✓ Deliver focused campaigns for awareness and education around abuse and maltreatment.
- ✓ Create an online resource hub.

## MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

- ✓ Establish clear definitions of mental health and well-being in volleyball.
- ✓ Research mental health and well-being issues and needs of participants, particularly for males.
- ✓ Create tailored standards, policies, and resources for players, coaches and referees.
- ✓ Identify specific training and resources for referees to recognise and address mental health and well-being.
- ✓ Produce a Guide to Mental Health and Well-being.
- ✓ Embed awareness and resources about mental health and well-being into all VBC programs and activities.
- ✓ Create and deliver a targeted campaign for positive body image and acceptance.
- ✓ Create specific resources for parents to promote positive mental health and well-being.
- ✓ Develop a club-specific toolkit to support positive mental health.
- ✓ Create an online resource hub with information, support and resources.
- ✓ Deliver a youth-focused campaign on mental health and well-being in volleyball.

## What happens now?

The Safe Sport Action Plan outlines some ambitious initiatives that will be rolled out from 2022-2024. How will we measure the impact of this work and know whether we have been successful in achieving the changes we want to see? Safety and well-being are complex and difficult to measure. Here are our commitments to monitoring and evaluation:

- We have identified Key Performance Indicators that we will monitor annually to track our progress.
- We are committed to sharing and listening to your feedback.
- The Safe Sport Working Group will continue to provide leadership and oversight of the Plan.
- The Volleyball BC Board will receive regular staff reports to ensure that we are on track.
- We will share our progress annually with you.

Safety and well-being in volleyball is a journey and not a destination. We will continually work to ensure that all of you have an experience that is positive for your physical, emotional, and mental well-being. This Action Plan marks the start of a new phase of our journey!

### Useful Resources

- [Volleyball BC's Safe Sport webpage](#) – up-to-date information about our work on safe sport.
- [Volleyball BC's Code of Conduct and Ethics](#) – every player, coach, referee and staff involved in VBC programs must abide by these rules of conduct.
- [Making a Complaint](#) – a flowchart showing the process to address issues, complaints, and concerning behaviours in our sport.
- [Canadian Sport Helpline](#) – a free helpline to provide assistance, advice and resources for abuse, harassment or discrimination in Canadian sport.
- [B.C. Helpline for Children](#) – a confidential toll-free phone line for children and youth wanting to talk to someone – is 310-1234 (no area code required).