A Concept Mapping Study of Young High-Performance Athletes' Perspectives on Safe Sport.

Dr Ellie Gennings

Bournemouth University

Final report for

The IOC Olympic Studies Centre

PhD Students and Early Career Academics Research Grant Programme

2025 Award

Date: March 2026

Table of contents

Abstract

Safe sport research has been critiqued for privileging adult-centric perspectives and focusing predominantly on harm prevention, with limited attention to young athletes' own understandings of the construct. This study sought to amplify youth voice through novel participatory methodologies to develop a solution-focused model of safe sport for youth athletes and identify priorities for the sporting entourage. Drawing on a multi-phase and multi-method research design, young athletes (n = 103) and adults (n = 57) were engaged in creative methodologies that deliberately disrupted the power dynamics within the research process, as they were active contributors in asking questions, generating, and structuring data.

Findings resulted in a seven-dimensional model of safe sport for youth athletes encompassing: (1) supportive and trustworthy coaching; (2) psychological factors relating to affect, behaviours, and cognition; (3) physical readiness and access to appropriate health and training resources; (4) belonging and social support within the broader sporting environment; (5) peer support; (6) conditions that enable athlete agency, including opportunities to make choices and be heard; and (7) safeguarding structures and processes. These dimensions reflect a positively framed conceptualisation of safe sport, emphasising the presence of enabling conditions rather than solely the absence of harm. Consequently, the model offers a practical and conceptually grounded framework to guide intervention development, policy design, and future practice and research, including the evaluation of safe sport experiences.

Keywords: Safe Sport; Young Athletes; High-Performance Sport; Youth Voice

1.0 Research subject and review of literature

Safe sport is rooted in the principle that everyone involved in sport has the right to participate in safe, inclusive, and enjoyable sporting environments (Mountjoy et al., 2022) and is defined as "a physically and psychologically safe and supportive athletic environment where participants can thrive and experience the full benefits of sport participation" (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024, p.1323). These principles apply across all levels and age groups in sport. In the case of athletes classed as 'children' (under 18 years old; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC], 1989), there has been increasing attention to the need for high-performance sporting environments to recognise them as rights holders (Lang, 2022).

The concept 'safe sport' has been critiqued for its ontological, epistemological, and axiological limitations, highlighting broader conceptual, methodological, and practical inadequacies (Kerr et al., 2025). These critiques include concerns about conceptual clarity and concept creep, the need for specific research standards, and the lack of evaluative data and solution-focused approaches. The development of definitions and models of safe sport provides a valuable starting point for enhancing the field, offering conceptual clarity, creating a shared language for the sporting entourage, and guiding policy and practice. Moreover, evaluative data are difficult to obtain if the concept being measured is not clearly defined, as conceptualisation is often considered the first step in measurement literature (Boateng et al., 2018; MacKenzie et al., 2011). Research with sport administrators calls for the establishment of a universal framework, alongside other strategies, that extends beyond harm prevention to promote positive values and advance a culture of safe sport (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021).

Two influential contributions to the conceptualisation of safe sport are Tuakli-Wosornu et al's (2024) definition of safe sport and Gurgis et al's (2023) model of safe sport. Gurgis et al. (2023) provide a structured framework for understanding how safe sport can be conceptualised and operationalised. This framework of safe sport includes three dimensions: environmental and physical safety, relational safety, and optimising sport. Environmental and physical safety capture the prevention of harm through the importance of addressing issues of physical danger that may stem from issues such as faulty equipment, participating in an unsafe environment, and intentional or unintentional doping. Relational safety captures the prevention of and intervention against harmful behaviours experienced and/or witnessed in sport within interpersonal relationships (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, and emotional/psychological abuse). Finally, optimising sport refers to the participation experiences for all informed by positive development, rights of inclusion, accessibility, fairness, and safety. Such an approach relies on making sport environments more inclusive, accessible, and growth-enhancing. Gurgis et al. (2023) conceptualisation of safe sport and the definition put forward by Tuakli-Wosornu et al. (2024) highlight the importance of both eliminating harm and fostering beneficial experiences in sport (Kerr et al. 2025).

Safe sport has gained traction in response to mounting evidence of harm within community (Woessner et al., 2024) and high-performance sport settings (Willson et al., 2022), both on and offline (Ahmed et al., 2025; Pankowiak et al., 2025; Kavanagh & Mountjoy, 2024), where athletes have been exposed to abuse, exploitation and institutionalised practices that compromise their welfare and human rights (Gurgis et al., 2023; Woessner et al., 2024). Interpersonal violence against children in organised

sport across six European countries has a reported prevalence rate of 75%, with this figure reflecting at least one experience of interpersonal violence inside sport, including neglect, psychological violence, physical violence, non-contact sexual violence, and contact sexual violence (Hartill et al., 2023). This, alongside a series of recent high-profile safeguarding reviews across multiple sports and contexts, including USA Gymnastics (Daniels, 2017), Swimming Australia (2021), English Football (Sheldon, 2021) and British Gymnastics (Whyte, 2022), demonstrates persistent and systemic failures to keep athletes safe in sport and reveals a clear disconnect between safeguarding efforts and the lived experiences of athletes.

For athletes classified as children in high-performance environments such as football (Gibbs & Briggs, 2025; Adams & Carr, 2019), gymnastics (Barker-Ruchti & Varea 2024; Whyte, 2022) and competitive swimming (McMahon et al., 2012), research has shown that young athletes often endure adult-like demands, including intense training schedules, separation from families, and early exposure to public scrutiny. These pressures, coupled with practices such as relocation, hazing, and the prioritisation of sporting success over education and social development (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Gennings et al., 2025), highlight the need for specific consideration of young athletes within safe sport frameworks. Yet the persistence of harm and continued reporting of interpersonal violence among young athletes suggests that existing safeguarding efforts and conceptualisations of safe sport may not fully capture the realities of youth sport participation. While current models of safe sport provide valuable guidance for promoting safe environments, they have largely been developed with broad athlete populations in mind and may insufficiently account for what shapes young athletes' experiences in sport. This creates a potential disconnect between how safe sport is conceptualised and implemented within policy and governance, and how safety is experienced by young athletes themselves. Addressing this gap requires greater conceptual clarity around what constitutes *safe sport for youth athletes*, and a deeper engagement with the specific conditions, relationships, and power dynamics that structure young athletes participation in organised high-performance sport.

Safe sport approaches for young athletes must centre children's rights and lived experiences (Mountjoy et al., 2016). While the conceptualisations of safe sport proposed by Tuakli-Wosornu et al. (2024) and Gurgis et al. (2023) represent important contributions, they were developed within epistemological and ontological contexts that privilege adult perspectives. In practice, this means that adults have largely determined what constitutes safety in sport and how it should be achieved. Such approaches reflect an adult-centred ontology that assumes safety can be defined through adult understandings of appropriate sporting environments. However, children occupy a distinct position within sport, characterised by developmental differences, structural dependency on adults, and limited authority within sporting hierarchies. As a result, their experiences of feeling safe may differ from those assumed within adult-informed frameworks. Applying existing models to youth sport without interrogating these assumptions risks overlooking how young athletes themselves interpret and experience safe sport.

Children's participatory rights in all matters affecting them are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and apply to all individuals under the age of 18 years old. Relevant provisions include the obligation to act in the best interests of the child (Article 3), respect for the views of the child

(Article 12), and the right to freedom of expression (Article 13). Together, these establish participation not as discretionary but as a legal and democratic right. Yet, as Mayall (2000) observes, adults often find children's participation rights difficult to enact in practice. This tension is rarely addressed within existing conceptualisations of safe sport, where safeguarding approaches frequently prioritise protection *for* children rather than participation *with* them. This paper argues that safe sport for youth athletes must be reconceptualised through participatory, rights-based approaches that centre young athletes as knowledge-producers.

1.1 Significance of the project

While existing safe sport frameworks provide an important foundation, they do not fully account for the social realities and lived experiences of young athletes. This highlights the importance of developing a clearer conceptualisation of safe sport for youth athletes that is informed by their perspectives. Including young athletes is therefore not simply a procedural or ethical requirement, but a means of strengthening the conceptual and empirical foundations of safe sport research. Young athletes bring different ways of knowing and different experiences to light, enriching understandings of safety in sport in ways that adult perspectives may overlook. In this sense, their participation is not merely an addition to existing approaches but a necessary step in rethinking the ontological assumptions upon which 'safe sport' is defined.

Responding to this gap and to critiques raised by Kerr et al. (2025) concerning whose knowledge counts, what constitutes expertise, research standards, evaluative data and solution-focused approaches, this study adopts a standpoint that centres young athletes in safe sport discourse. This approach both upholds their rights and advances understanding in the field, while incorporating adult stakeholder perspectives to develop a model of safe sport. The originality of this research lies in its use of a multi-phase and multi-method research design that is both rights-based and child-led, contributing to empirical insight into how young athletes themselves understand and experience safe sport. Furthermore, this is the first study to develop a model and set of priorities that have been led by young athletes, in which decision making has been shared between them, adults in the sporting entourage and researchers. This approach is grounded not only in children's rights but also in methodological strategies that intentionally support young athletes to form and express their views (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011).

2.0 Methodology applied

2.1 Research design overview

Concept mapping is a participatory multi-method research design that integrates qualitative data generation with quantitative structuring and analysis. This approach enabled both a critical interrogation of the concept 'safe sport' from a solution-focused perspective and a platform for participants to analyse the data generated themselves. All phases were trauma-informed where choice, empowerment and trust were considered throughout the research design (Vertommen et al., 2024). Data were collected using the established online concept mapping platform (GroupWisdom) and involved three sequential tasks:

1. Idea generation - Participants generated a comprehensive set of statements about what makes athletes feel safe in sport by responding to the positively framed focus prompt: *"In my sport, I feel safe when…"*
2. Sorting - Participants analysed and organised these statements based on shared meaning and subsequently constructed a conceptual model of safe sport for youth athletes.
3. Rating - Participants evaluated each statement in terms of importance, occurrence, and feasibility.

2.2 Participants

In total, 160 participants (103 Athletes and 57 adults) contributed to the study. The sampling strategy was both purposive and snowball. The inclusion criteria for the study included UK-based athletes aged 15-18 years old who were competing at national or international levels of their sport or were on a pathway to doing so. While this study focused on elevating youth voice within the safe sport discourse, adults who were members of the sporting entourage (i.e. coaches, support staff, welfare officers, and parents) that worked with, or were parents of, athletes meeting the aforementioned criteria were included. This is because they hold valuable knowledge and perspectives on safe sport in this context. Adults participated in the study by adopting the perspective of the child, focusing on what makes their child feel safe, rather than articulating their own adult-centric views. Young athletes' views remained central throughout all phases of the research and were taken seriously; however, their perspectives were considered alongside adults' (Lundy et al., 2011). Participants were not required to complete all the tasks (idea generation, sorting and rating) but this was encouraged across the sorting and rating tasks. Figure 1 illustrates participant recruitment, continuation, and data inclusion across the different phases of the study.

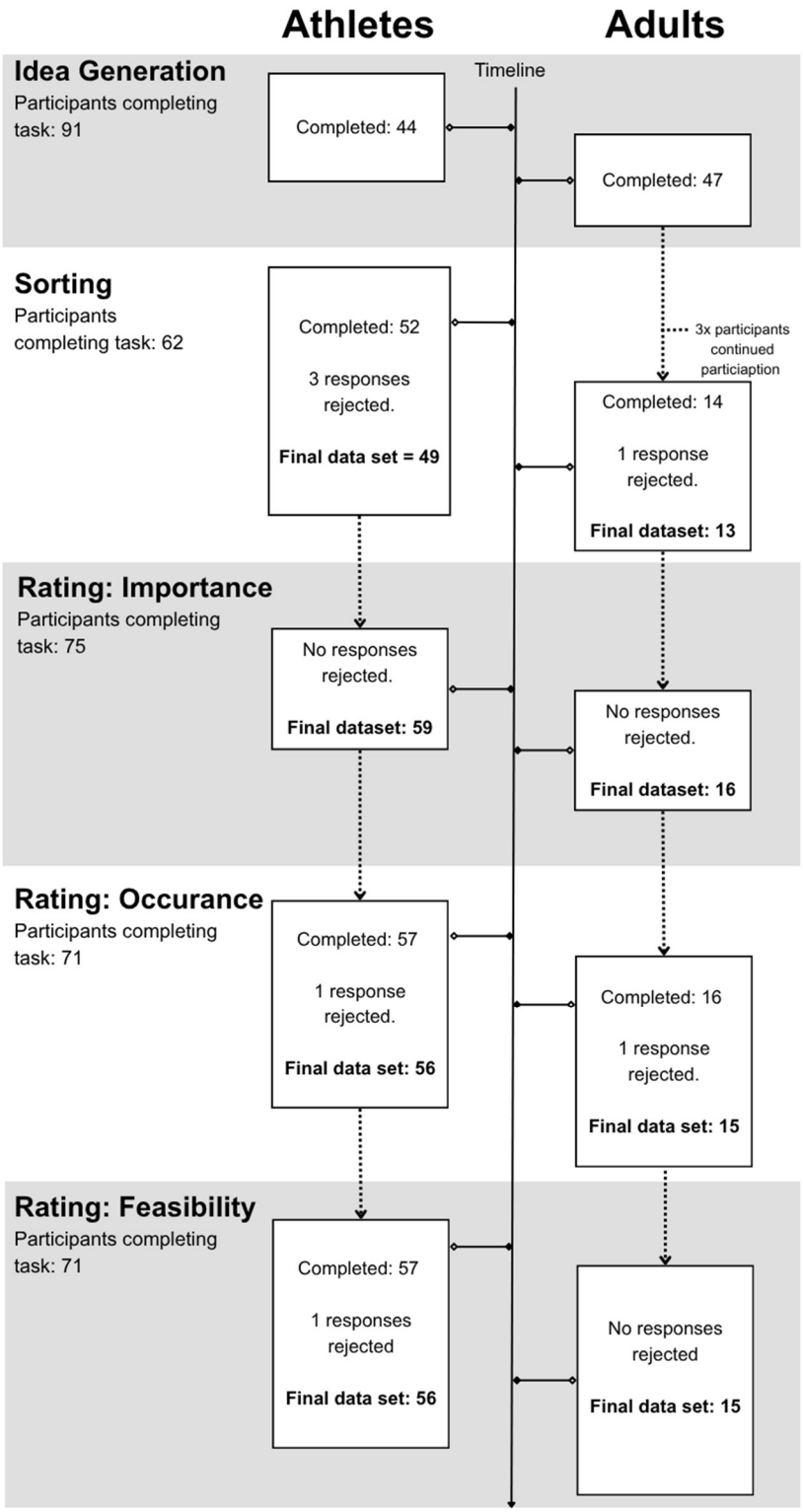


Figure 1*. Study phases and participation timeline. Dotted arrows represent participants who continued participation across subsequent phases. Responses removed refer to data excluded following screening procedures detailed later in the report.*

The sample included those from a diverse range of sports but predominantly identified as white British. Sports participated in are not disclosed to preserve participant anonymity as participants hold unique positions within high-performance teams. The sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics for concept mapping phases*

Characteristic	Athlete Idea Generation (N=44) n (%)	Adult Idea Generation (N=47) n (%)	Sorting Sample (N=62) n (%)	Rating Sample (N=75) n (%)
Gender				
Female	12 (27)	20 (43)	42 (68)	51 (68)
Male	32 (73)	26 (55)	19 (31)	23 (36)
Non-binary	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Other	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (2)	1 (1)
Ethnicity				
Asian British	5 (11)	3 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Mixed ethnicity	6 (14)	2 (4)	5 (8)	5 (7)
Black/African/Caribbean British	1 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
White British	32 (73)	41 (87)	55 (89)	68 (91)
Other	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (1)
Prefer not to say	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (2)	1 (1)
Sport				
Team	34 (77)	18 (38)	23 (37)	44 (59)
Individual	10 (23)	26 (55)	33 (53)	23 (31)
Prefer not to say	0 (0)	1 (2)	3 (5)	5 (7)
Multiple Sports	0 (0)	2 (4)	3 (5)	3 (4)

2.3 Method

This section outlines the multi-phase concept mapping design used to develop a participant-driven model of safe sport. The following sections detail the procedure, protocol, and analysis for both athlete and adult data collection during the idea generation, sorting and rating phases of concept mapping. The idea generation phase includes the application of a novel qualitative methodology in safe sport research for working with youth populations.

2.4 Idea generation phase

Participants completed the idea generation phase through different modes. Athletes participated in a 90-minute in-person workshop and adults participated online via GroupWisdom.

2.4.1 Athlete workshop approach

During this phase of the research, traditional methods were not adopted due to their potential limitations in capturing young athletes lived experiences and their tendency to privilege adult-centric perspectives in the design, implementation, analysis, and reporting of research (Wengel et al., 2019; Gennings et al., 2026). Instead, an established pedagogical approach, Community of Philosophical Enquiry (CPE), was adopted which rejects the adult as the sole authority (Love & Randall, 2024) and

created a space for participants to develop, discuss, and refine their own questions and perspectives about safe sport. Adapted for research contexts, CPE foregrounds a democratic, ethical, and collaborative approach to data generation, enabling participants and researchers to collectively construct meaning (Love & Randall, 2024). In alignment with rights-based approaches to child participation, this methodology supported young athletes to form and express their views about safe sport within a carefully structured environment (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011).

CPE is designed to facilitate individual reflection prior to group dialogue, supporting participants to draw on their own experiences when engaging in discussion. This is important because research has shown that children respond most thoughtfully when questions connect with their prior reflection and experience (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012). Within this process, athletes were encouraged to take ownership of the discussion, formulate their own questions, and explore issues relevant to their sporting lives.

This approach was both ethically and epistemologically significant. It upheld children's rights to participate meaningfully in matters that affect them, while enhancing the richness and relevance of the data by privileging their perspectives. Although challenges associated with participatory methodologies have been discussed elsewhere (Gennings et al., 2026), the benefits of producing contextually grounded, participant-led knowledge were considered to outweigh these limitations.

2.4.2 Athlete workshop protocol

A CPE trainer was consulted and observed delivering a session to inform the design of the workshops. The workshop content was subsequently developed and pilot-tested twice with undergraduate students to ensure clarity and appropriateness. A critical friend attended both pilot-tests and provided feedback on the workshop design and flow. Following this, participants were recruited through colleges, sport clubs, and sporting organisations in line with the study's inclusion criteria.

A total of four workshops were delivered, with an average of 11 athletes per session. All workshops were facilitated in person and were conducted in familiar training or school environments to support participant comfort and engagement. Each session followed an established CPE framework (Trickey & Topping, 2004), used as a guide rather than a rigid structure. Within this framework, participants engaged in a series of stages including: warm-up activities, individual reflection on a stimulus, question generation, collective selection of a focus question, and open group discussion. This structure was adapted to create a bespoke workshop (see Appendix 1) designed to elicit athletes' perceptions of, and questions about, safe sport.

The workshop was intentionally designed to guide participants through a progression in thinking (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). From considering safe sport in hypothetical terms through the case of a fictional athlete, to reflecting on their own lived experiences, and ultimately to being given time to explore the shared perspectives within the group. The workshop was facilitated using a non-directive approach, allowing the direction of discussion to emerge from participants and enabling the generation of unanticipated insights into safe sport. This strategy supported both individuals and the collective in forming and expressing their views. Participant 'voice' was collected in a variety of formats during the workshop, including written responses to questions and prompts,

drawings, and audio-recorded discussions. Responses to the prompt *"In my sport, I feel safe when…"* were deliberately extracted for the idea generation phase of the concept mapping, while additional data were used to contextualise the concept mapping findings.

2.4.3 Adults' online submission

Adults completed the idea generation phase in an online format. Participants were invited to complete the focus prompt in GroupWisdom, "*In my child (athlete's) sport, they feel safe when…*" as many times as they wanted to. The responses shared by adults were anonymously added to a collective, running list of statements generated by all participants.

2.4.4 Idea generation analysis

Responses to the focus prompt from both athletes and adults were pooled and refined according to the following criteria.

1) Statements containing multiple ideas were divided so that each statement represented a single idea.
2) Repeated ideas were collapsed into a single statement
3) Statements that were unrelated to the research focus were discarded
4) Repetition of statements were checked with a critical friend

Prior to refinement, data collection yielded a total of 446 statements, with athletes contributing 293 and adults contributing 153. After refinement, 121 statements remained (see Table 2), forming the basis for the subsequent sorting and rating activities. A random sample of the items is presented in Table 2, with the full list presented in Appendix 2.

Table 2*. Example statements generated for concept mapping*

#	Statement Response: 'In my sport, I feel safe when…"
86.	I know my opposition
63.	I know who I am with
24.	The coach praises me
68.	I can trust my coaches when talking about areas of weakness
100.	I know who I can approach if there is a problem
113.	I have clear boundaries
54.	Parents don't shout negatively from the side-lines
74.	I am not judged

2.5 Sorting and rating phase

The sorting and rating phases were advertised to new participants and adults who had already completed the idea generation phase of the study. Athletes could complete the activities either in person, as part of a workshop, or online in their own time. Adults completed the sorting and rating activities online.

For the sorting task, participants were asked to group the 121 statements into categories based on shared meaning. The instructions specified that statements

should not be sorted according to importance or value, that a ‘miscellaneous’ or ‘other’ category should not be used, and that all statements should not be placed into a single category. The presentation order of statements was randomised for each participant. Participants were instructed (during workshops) or encouraged (online) to take breaks as needed. The rating task required participants to respond to three questions for each item, assessing its importance, frequency of occurrence, and feasibility. Responses were recorded on 5-point Likert scale ranging from not important to extremely important, never happens to always happens, and not possible to definitely possible, respectively.

Due to the volume of statements to be sorted and rated, this stage of the project was piloted with two members of the sporting entourage that met the inclusion criteria. The pilot assessed the usability of GroupWisdom and the time required for completion (approx. 60 minutes for adults). Feedback indicated that the task was cognitively demanding and time intensive. As a result, in-person participation was encouraged for athletes to enforce structured breaks, and a £15 voucher was offered to all participants to compensate for their time.

2.5.1 Data screening

GroupWisdom requires researchers to screen and approve data due to participant burden associated with successful completion of the sorting and rating activities. Upon submission of the sorting and rating data, each submission was reviewed for adherence to the instructions and completion time, enabling the research team to ensure appropriate engagement with the task. Where submissions did not adhere to the instructions or were completed in an unusually short period of time, participants were contacted via email and invited to revise their submission. If the submission was not revised, the data were removed from the analysis. In total, 4 participants data were rejected for the sorting activity, 2 rejected for rating of occurrence, 1 rejected for rating of feasibility and none rejected for rating of importance. Rejections were due to non-completion, unusually fast completion, and/or straight-lining.

2.5.2 Data analysis: sorting and rating

Descriptive statistics were calculated to describe characteristics of the participants across sorting and rating phases. For the sorting data, a similarity matrix was generated to identify which statements were strongly related to each other across the sample. This was done via two-dimensional multidimensional scaling (MDS) that resulted in a point map. The degree to which distances on the point map were discrepant from the similarity matrix were assessed via a stress index where lower values reflect better congruence between the raw data and the processed data (Rosas & Kane, 2012). Two-dimensional MDS solutions with stress values ≤ 0.39 have been found to have less than a 1% probability of having no structure or a random structure (Sturrock & Rocha, 2000). Therefore, this benchmark was used as the upper cut-off value for analysis. Next, statements were organised into clusters on the point map to reflect statements that aggregate together based on an agglomerative algorithm (Anderberg, 1973; Hair et al., 1998). The clusters were checked for thematic clarity and given a label that represented the statements within the cluster.

Go-Zone graphs were used to visualise patterns in the rating data, with Pearson correlation coefficient indicating the strength and direction of the relationship. In these

plots, each statement was positioned according to its score on two variables, with quadrants highlighting how scores compare to the mean values. Go-Zones were used to compare frequency of occurrence and importance ratings, and to examine within-group differences (e.g., male vs female athletes, athletes vs adults). Quadrant four includes statements above both means, quadrant one includes statements below both means, and quadrants two and three include statements above the mean for one variable but below the mean for the other.

3.0 Results and discussion

This section presents the seven dimensions of safe sport for youth athletes along with some of the statements generated within each cluster. This is presented alongside data collected during workshops that provide context, and a variety of ways in which young athletes shared their 'voice' within the project. This is followed by an analysis of priority areas identified through rating data.

3.1 What does safe sport mean for young high-performance athletes?

The sorting data produced a stress value of 0.23, suggesting the sorting was not random or without structure (Sturrock & Rocha, 2000). We can therefore conclude that there is a pattern in the way in which participants sorted the idea generation data and subsequently a shared understanding of what safe sport means to young high-performance athletes.

Multiple cluster solutions were examined from larger to smaller, collapsing the clusters into each other until the most logical cluster solution was determined. This resulted in seven clustered dimensions of safe sport for youth athletes (Figure 3). Each cluster was assigned a label summarising the statements contained within it. Each point in Figure 2 represents one of the 121 statements generated during the idea generation phase of the study. Points which are positioned closer together represent statements that were more frequently sorted together by participants and statements further away from each other were less frequently (if at all) sorted together.

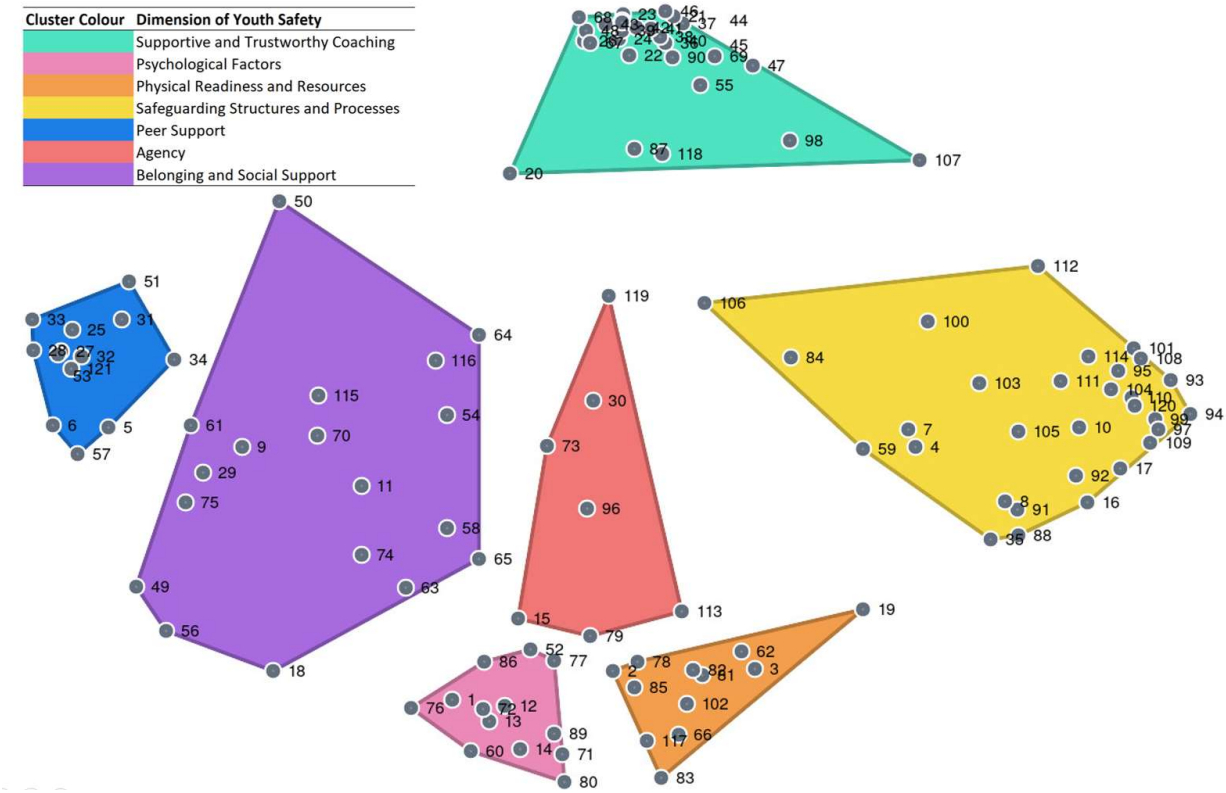


Figure 2. *Dimensions of Safe Sport for Youth Populations*

3.1.1 Overview of the seven dimensions of safe sport for youth athletes

Dimension 1: Supportive and Trustworthy Coaching

The coach-athlete relationship is regarded as one of the most critical dyads encountered by athletes in sport (Jowett, 2007, 2025; Phillips et al., 2026) and was central to the proposed model of safe sport for youth athletes. The dimension 'Supportive and Trustworthy Coaching' highlights characteristics about how coaching is done (e.g. 'The coach praises me' and 'My coach is prepared') and relational aspects (e.g. 'I am trusted by my coach' and 'My coach is honest') of the coach athlete relationship. Coach-athlete relationships are considered bi-directional, in that the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of the coach affect, and are affected by, those of the athlete (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). Participants noted the importance of coach behaviour, and the process of consistent interactions with their athletes to build outcomes such as trust and showing care for the whole person. During workshops, athletes raised critical questions about the boundaries of acceptable coaching practice, for example:

- *What is the difference between abusive practice and being pushed by our coach?*
- *Who regulates/controls coaching procedures?*
- *Who decides what is right in coaching?*
- *How involved should coaches be in an athlete's performance journey?*

During one of the workshops, athletes voted to discuss the first question, with an excerpt from their discussion shared below:

> Athlete 1: *I think that it could be based off ability of the player. So, like, say two players, you've got someone that's really good, that could make it pro, and then you've got someone that's playing for fun, and the coach sends them on like 3 laps of the whole pitch. I think like for the person that's going to make it, that could be really beneficial because they genuinely need it, and they need to push to keep working to get there.*
>
> Athlete 2: *I think abusive practise can be in multiple ways. For someone that is really keen in like a sport, the coach can still be, if they're trying to push them to the next level, they can still be verbally abusive, say things that they probably shouldn't say. But for maybe a beginner in the sport, they could maybe push them too far with it, like physically as well.*
>
> Athlete 3: *I do understand what [athlete 1] is saying but it's really up to the person how they want to do in the future. So, if they want to be coached hard, they accept criticism, they should continue the same manner. If they don't want it, then they don't need it.*

This excerpt illustrates how athletes navigate tensions around coaching practice, often framing potentially harmful practices as contingent on context, ability level, or personal ambition. In doing so, some forms of harmful practice were positioned as necessary for progression within high-performance pathways. This reflects broader concerns regarding the normalisation of harmful practices within sport, where behaviours may be legitimised in the pursuit of performance outcomes (Stirling, 2013; Gervis & Dunn, 2004). While participants identified ‘My coach does not yell at me’, ‘My coach treats me fairly’ and ‘My coach shows care and kindness’ as central to safe sport, their accounts also suggest an acceptance of practices that may undermine these principles. This tension highlights the complexity of operationalising safe sport in high-performance contexts and the need for clearer guidance, education, and dialogue around what constitutes appropriate coaching practice.

Dimension 2: Belonging and Social Support

The dimension ‘Belonging and Social Support’ emphasises young athletes desire to play and train with their age group within high-performance sport (e.g. ‘I play with people my age’ and ‘I am not playing older athletes’). While playing-up an age group to support talented athletes’ development and movement between age groups is a normalised practice that coaches employ (Kelly et al., 2026), Goldman et al. (2022) have concluded that young athletes perceive this as a balance between challenge and progress. With their findings suggesting that young athletes have difficulty with fitting in socially with older peers and coping with the increased intensity of training and games. This dimension of safe sport also focused on characteristics of relationships (e.g. ‘I am a valued member of the team’, ‘I am around people I trust’ and ‘I am not judged’). During workshops, athletes had the option to share their ‘voice’ in written format, with one participant sharing their experience of belonging (Figure 3) in high-performance sport:

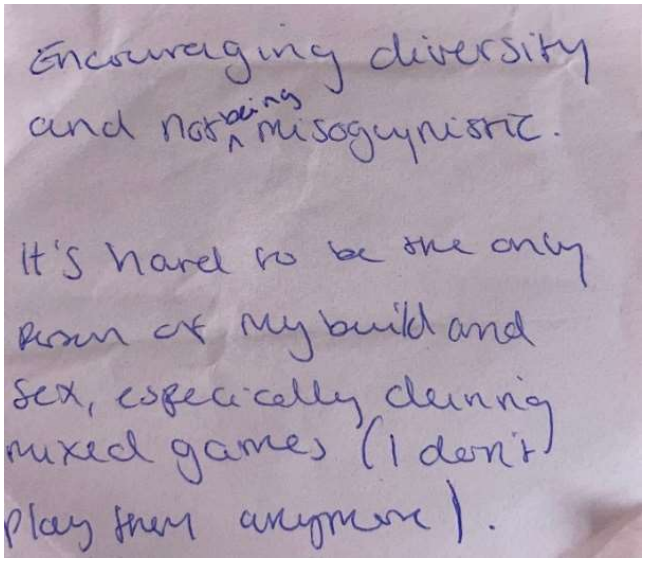


Figure 3. *Written submission from workshop reading: Encouraging diversity and not being misogynistic. It's hard to be the only person of my build and sex, especially during mixed games (I don't play them anymore).*

While effective relationships rely upon mutual trust, support, shared knowledge of goals, co-operation and the ability to communicate (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett, 2007), future work must also focus on representation within sport environments so that young athletes feel they belong.

Dimension 3: Peer Support

Within this broader relational context, peer interactions emerged as a particularly salient component of safe sport. The Peer Support dimension outlined the relationship athletes have with their peers (e.g. 'My teammates celebrate achievements with me', 'I am not teased or picked on by my peers' and 'I am playing with friends'). Peer support has been identified as a significant influence on well-being (Gennings et al., 2021), with young people placing strong value on friendships to fulfil needs for belonging (Foley et al., 2012). However, research in sport and exercise has often prioritised structural and functional aspects of relationships over athletes' lived, subjective experiences (Brady et al., 2017). Greater attention to concepts such as friendship, socialising, gratitude and dyadic well-being highlights the centrality of peer relationships in shaping safe sport. At a broader level, team environments characterised by positive interpersonal relationships and inclusive norms are thought to foster belonging and psychological availability, key mechanisms underpinning psychological safety (Vella et al., 2024; Walton et al., 2024).

Dimension 4: Agency

Agency was a central dimension to safe sport for youth athletes. Agency relates to the ability for an individual to make realistic and free choices (Adams & Kavanagh, 2020). The statements in this dimension reflect conditions for agency that are central to athletes' experiences within talent development environments (e.g. 'I am given the tools to tackle a problem by myself', 'I can play freely' and 'I understand the talent pathway I am on'). Kavanagh and Brady (2014) assert how having agency means that individuals do not experience themselves as passive or predetermined; instead, having agency captures the potential and possibility of freedom, which allows them to

be and act within their own limits. This is amplified by statements relating to being heard (e.g. ‘I am listened to’) which align with existing understandings of feeling safe in sport (Gurgis et al., 2023). From a human rights perspective, this is significant, as young athletes have the right to express their views in matters that affect them, with those views given due weight (UNCRC 1989). Questions posed during workshops also reflected a clear desire for athlete agency, with one group asking:

- *How can we put ourselves in control in order to create a safe sport environment individually?*

This highlights that young athletes do not view themselves solely as recipients of safe sport provision, but as active agents in shaping their environments. However, the capacity to exercise such agency is inherently constrained by power relations within sport, particularly in coach-led, high-performance contexts. Future research should explore how athlete agency can be meaningfully supported.

Dimension 5: Psychological Factors

Athletic performance is shaped by complex interplay of various factors (Soares et al., 2020) which was clearly depicted in the statements surrounding safe sport. Statements within the Psychological Factors dimension represent factors often associated with positive performance and coping within high-performance environments. These included statements linked to affect (e.g. ‘I am having fun’), behaviours (e.g. ‘I am focused on improving performance’) and cognition (e.g. I’m not thinking about life outside of sport at games). Sport psychology is a major area of interest with various psychological factors impacting performance which have long been a topic of discussion in the sporting literature (Ayranci & Aydin, 2025).

Dimension 6: Physical Readiness and Resources

The dimension Physical Readiness and Resources reflects some of the widely accepted practices in sport relating to warming-up and being injury free (e.g. ‘I have no injuries’ and ‘I can warm up before a game’). During one workshop, athletes discussed sport injuries through the following question, *‘Can you ever fully recover mentally and physically from an injury?’*, with an excerpt from the discussion below:

> *Athlete 1: Because we will train in so many different clubs, like we play [team 1], we play [team 2], we play [team 3], like so many different clubs. The environments are different everywhere. So, like, how you come back from that injury depends on what club you look at, like, when I'm coming back from my injury, I don't know where I'll be…I don't think that [coach name] is the most compassionate coach in terms of injury, considering they dropped me off squad and just kind of didn't speak to me about my injury at all. And then coaches like [coach name]. Yeah, they are a really, really good coach, but they struggle with the emotional connection between players. So I just, I really think it depends on what environment you're looking at when you come in, back from injury.*
>
> *Athlete 2: I think our injuries are too normalised. I think they are really overlooked quite... We don't have a qualified physio. We are so overlooked, it's just... I don't know, I feel like it's too normalised and accepted.*

This excerpt illustrates that while athletes have identified 'I have no injuries' during the concept mapping, their perception of reality is that they *will* get injured in sport and the aftercare is not consistent between contexts.

Athletes also identified issues relating to body image (e.g. 'I am not worried about my weight' and 'I am wearing my own kit') within this dimension. In various sports, body weight and body composition are crucial performance variables (Sundgot-Borgen et al., 2013). Yet it is purported that in unsafe sporting environments athletes can be at risk of developing maladaptive eating behaviours and/or eating disorders if not managed and supported appropriately. The inclusion of these statements speaks of the importance of body image that should be carefully nurtured to ensure athlete safety. An additional consideration to compliment this, is the kit that athletes are required to wear as athletes identified 'I am wearing my own kit' and 'I am wearing full kit' as factors relating to feeling safe in sport. Mills and Cooling (2019) identified that ill-fitting and uncomfortable sportswear can impact how adolescent girls participate in sport and physical activity and that offering autonomy over sports kit was beneficial for participants in their study.

Dimension 7: Safeguarding Structures and Processes

Organisational policies and safeguarding culture also shape athletes' sense of safety which the dimension Safeguarding Structures and Processes focused on. Here, more formal structures and processes that are designed to keep athletes safe in sport were grouped together (e.g. 'I know who my welfare/safeguarding officer is', 'I am aware of how to report a concern' and 'There is accountability for bad behaviour in adults'). Kerr et al. (2019) found that consistently enforced and transparent safeguarding procedures increased athletes' reported willingness to report maltreatment, while Tuakli-Wosornu et al. (2024) highlighted that clear policies foster a sense of value and protection among participants.

3.2 What are the priorities for keeping high-performance youth athletes safe in sport?

The highest mean importance scores across clusters were observed for Supportive and Trustworthy Coaching (4.2 ± 0.2), followed by Agency (4.1 ± 0.1) and Physical Readiness and Resources (4.1 ± 0.2). The lowest mean importance score was observed for Safeguarding Structures and Procedures (3.7 ± 0.2). Across the dataset, there was a positive relationship between participants' ratings of importance and occurrence across statements (r_p = 0.73), indicating that statements perceived as more important tended also to be reported as occurring more frequently. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 4.

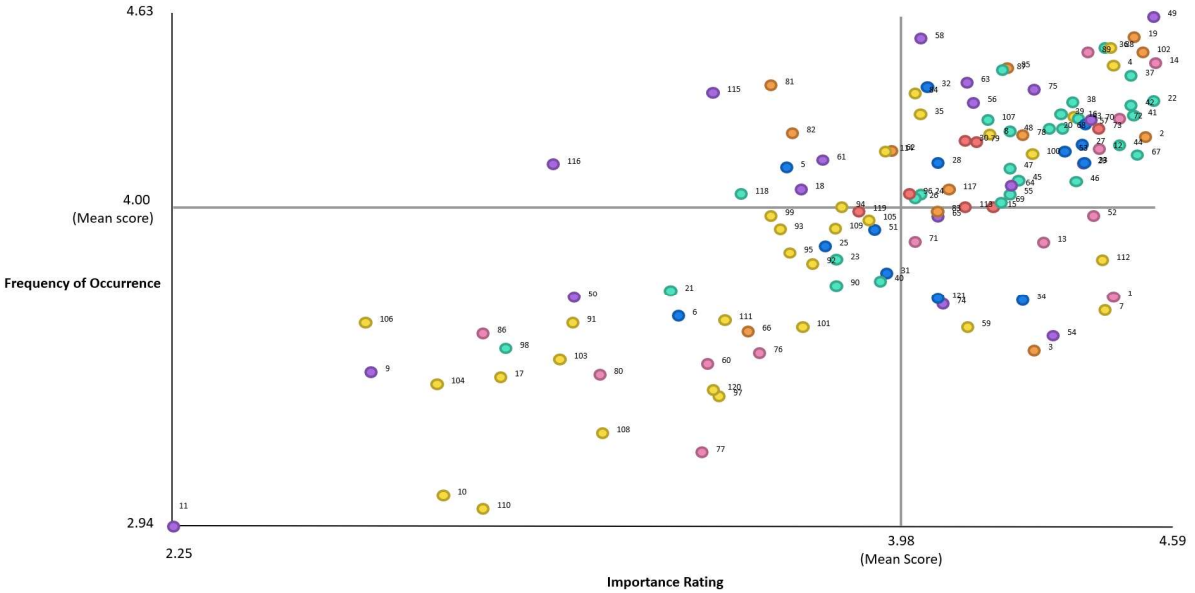


Figure 4. *Statements mapped to rating of importance (x axis) and frequency of occurrence (y axis). Colours indicate the cluster each statement belongs to.*

Quadrant two represents statements rated as above average for importance but below average for frequency of occurrence, relative to other statements in the dataset. This suggests that they are potential priority areas requiring attention. Table 3 summarises these statements, presenting their mean importance and occurrence scores, the mean difference between these ratings, and their perceived feasibility.

Table 3. *Potential priority areas for safe sport for youth athletes.*

Statement	Importance M (SD)	Occurrence M (SD)	Mean Difference	Feasibility M (SD)
52. It is okay to make mistakes	4.30 (0.87)	3.51 (0.90)	0.79	3.77 (0.99)
3. I have no injuries	4.45 (0.73)	3.67 (0.81)	0.78	4.01 (0.88)
1. I play confidently	4.47 (0.62)	3.75 (0.78)	0.72	4.31 (0.66)
34. I am not teased or picked on by my peers	4.30 (0.91)	3.61 (1.23)	0.69	4.11 (0.98)
7. Umpires/referee are fair	4.41 (0.74)	3.82 (0.89)	0.59	4.12 (0.92)
59. Competitors' behaviour and language is not abusive	4.21 (0.97)	3.66 (1.06)	0.55	4.17 (0.98)
71. I am organised	4.08 (1.12)	3.62 (0.97)	0.46	3.96 (0.98)
13. I am playing well	4.39 (0.77)	3.95 (0.85)	0.44	4.22 (0.85)
65. There is a healthy amount of pressure	4.09 (1.00)	3.67 (1.00)	0.42	3.82 (1.02)
54. Parents don't shout negatively from the side lines	4.29 (0.90)	3.92 (0.64)	0.37	4.24 (0.69)
83. I have a healthy nutritional diet	4.05 (1.03)	3.69 (0.87)	0.36	3.92 (0.94)
74. I am not judged	4.05 (0.81)	3.94 (0.85)	0.11	4.33 (0.72)
112. There is accountability for bad behaviour in adults (e.g. coaches and parents)	4.04 (0.84)	3.96 (0.74)	0.08	4.21 (0.77)
121. My teammates do not judge me	4.01 (0.89)	3.93 (0.84)	0.08	4.30 (0.80)

The largest mean differences were observed for statements within the psychological factors and physical readiness clusters. The statement ‘It is okay to make mistakes’ demonstrated the largest discrepancy between perceived importance and occurrence, while also being rated as the least feasible within this quadrant. This combination suggests not simply an absence of error-tolerant environments, but a perceived infeasibility of enacting such an ethos within the current structures of elite youth sport. This aligns with Taylor et al (2026) conceptualisation of performance safety as a “temporally dynamic perception of the consequences of error, contextualized by interactions between individual and contextual factors” (p. 7). The low perception of performance safety identified here suggests that normative expectations around performance may condition athletes to anticipate negative consequences of error, embedding a sense of insecurity within everyday performance environments. Overall, the relatively high feasibility ratings for many other statements indicate that interventions in these areas may represent achievable opportunities to enhance young athletes’ experiences of sport.

A positive correlation (r_p = 0.88) was also observed for importance ratings between male and female athletes (Figure 5). Female athletes tended to rate higher than males on items reflecting social support, clear expectations, and trust in adults. These included knowing what behaviours are acceptable from peers and adults, experiencing minimal teasing, receiving support from captains, and trusting coaches with personal

matters. In contrast, male athletes rated higher items associated with parental contact, coach and teammate feedback and physical preparedness.

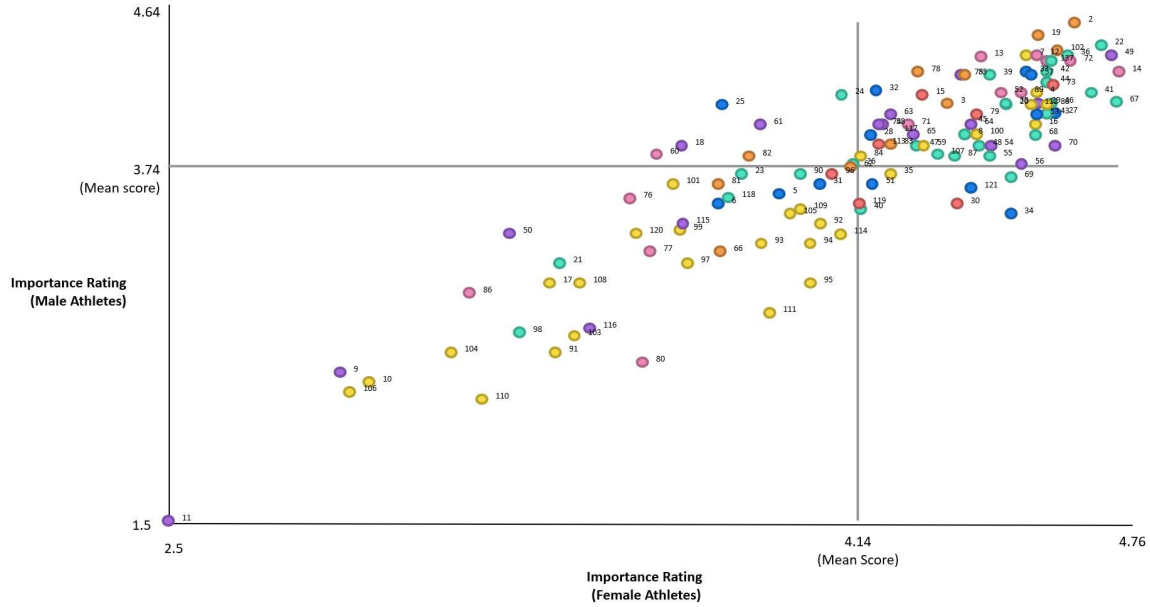


Figure 5. *Statements mapped for importance split between female (x axis) and male (y axis) athletes. Colours indicate the cluster each statement belongs to.*

A positive correlation was also observed between adult and athlete importance ratings (r_p = 0.83; Figure 6), indicating alignment in perceived priorities. Items rated above average for importance by adults but not by athletes generally reflected a focus on safety, structured support, and safeguarding procedures. This included having coaches who do not yell, awareness of one's location, clear organisational safeguarding policies, staff background checks, and adherence to safety and conduct guidelines. In contrast, items rated above average by athletes for importance but not adults emphasised performance, personal development, and social connection, including following rules and competition structure, playing well and freely, receiving praise from coaches, knowing teammates, understanding the talent pathway, pre-game preparation, life planning, and non-judgmental teammates. Together, these patterns suggest that while adults prioritise structural safety and procedural clarity, athletes place more importance on their own development, enjoyment, and relational experiences within sport.

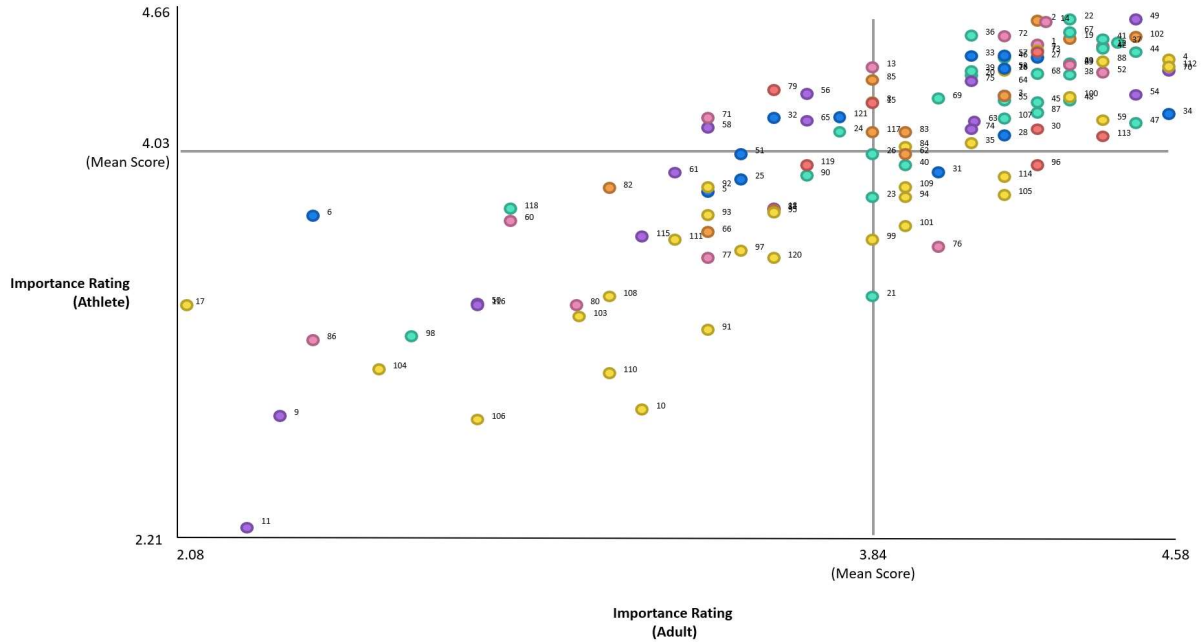


Figure 6. *Statements mapped for adult (x axis) and athlete (y axis) scores for importance. Colours indicate the cluster each statement belongs to.*

4.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to amplify youth voice in safe sport research through participatory methodologies, and to develop both a model of safe sport for youth athletes and a set of priorities for the sporting entourage. The study contributes to the field in several important ways, addressing epistemological, ontological, and axiological gaps identified in safe sport literature (Kerr et al., 2025). It offers a youth-initiated and youth-directed model of safe sport, developed through novel participatory, multi-method approaches that move beyond developmentalist assumptions about children's capacities and position them as active contributors and decision-makers in the research process (Lang, 2022).

The findings contribute a positively framed seven-dimensional model of safe sport, comprising: (1) characteristics and relational aspects of supportive and trustworthy coaching; (2) psychological factors relating to athletes' affect, behaviours, and cognition; (3) physical readiness and resources relating to health and preparedness for competition and training; (4) a sense of belonging and social support within the wider sporting environment; (5) peer support from teammates and friends; (6) conditions that enable athlete agency, including opportunities to make choices and be heard; and (7) safeguarding structures and processes. These dimensions were generated and organised through participant-led processes, with youth athletes and members of the sporting entourage shaping their development. Previous research has critiqued the safe sport discipline for focusing predominantly on harm prevention and 'what not to do', often at the expense of identifying the conditions that actively promote safety (Kerr et al., 2025). In contrast, this study deliberately centred athletes' experiences of when they do feel safe and why. As a result, the generated model (Figure 7) primarily reflects behaviours, actions, and conditions that enable safe sport, offering a more solution-focused and practically applicable framework for organisations, policymakers, and the sporting entourage.

Figure 7. *A Participant-Led Model of Safe Sport for Youth Athletes*

The application of the model lies in its capacity to inform policy, practice, research, and education across the sporting system. As a youth-informed and positively framed model, it supports a shift from harm prevention towards the proactive promotion of safe environments. Priority areas highlighted through this project relate to supportive and trustworthy coaching, athlete agency and physical readiness and resources. Further efforts are needed to address sporting cultures that have low performance safety (Taylor et al., 2026) as our findings indicate that while athletes think it should be ok to make mistakes, this is not feasible in practice.

5.0 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the participants involved in this project, and for the members of the sporting entourage that supported the organisation of workshops. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr Emma Kavanagh and Dr Rhiannon Love for their support during this project – their guidance has been invaluable.

6.0 References

Adams, A., & Carr, S. (2019). Football friends: adolescent boys' friendships inside an English professional football (soccer) academy. *Soccer & Society*, *20*(3), 471-493. https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2017.1331164

Adams, A., & Kavanagh, E. (2020). The capabilities and human rights of high performance athletes. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *55*(2), 147-168. https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690218791139

Ahmed, W., Hardey, M., Boardman, R., Kavanagh, E., & Fenton, A. (2025). Misogyny, misogynoir and violent online rhetoric against women and girls in sport: the case of Joey Barton. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 1-23.

Ayranci, M., & Aydin, M. K. (2025). The complex interplay between psychological factors and sports performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLOS ONE*, *20*(8), e0330862. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0330862

Barker-Ruchti, N., & Varea, V. (2024). Surviving child sexual abuse in women's artistic gymnastics:'It's beautiful, because had I stayed in the past, I wouldn't have evolved as a person'. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *59*(5), 660-678.

Boateng, G. O., Neilands, T. B., Frongillo, E. A., Melgar-Quiñonez, H. R., & Young, S. L. (2018). Best Practices for Developing and Validating Scales for Health, Social, and Behavioral Research: A Primer [Review]. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *Volume 6 - 2018*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2018.00149

Foley, K. R., Blackmore, A. M., Girdler, S., O'Donnell, M., Glauert, R., Llewellyn, G., & Leonard, H. (2012). To Feel Belonged: The Voices of Children and Youth with Disabilities on the Meaning of Wellbeing. *Child Indicators Research*, *5*(2), 375-391. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-011-9134-2

Gennings, E., Brown, H. J., & Hewlett, D. (2021). Constructing a definition: Adolescent wellbeing from the perspective of the child and expert. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, *11*(1). https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v11i1.1461

Gennings, E., Kavanagh, E., Hunter, A., & Jones, I. (2025). A critical examination of children's well-being and well-becoming in a professional youth football academy. *Sport in Society*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2025.2543805

Gennings, E., Pankowiak, A., Kavanagh, E., & Woessner, M. (2026, in press). Bringing the Child's Voice into Safe Sport Research in O'Keeffe, P., Willing, I., Pringle, R., & Phillips, E. (Eds.) Research Handbook on Young People, Sport and Society. Edward Elgar Publishing

Gervis, M., & Dunn, N. (2004). The emotional abuse of elite child athletes by their coaches. *Child Abuse Review*, *13*(3), 215-223. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/car.843

Gibbs, N., & Briggs, D. (2025). The school of hard knocks: Systemic violence and the motivation to harm in boys' youth academy football. *Frontiers in Sociology*, *10*, 1631118.

Goldman, D. E., Turnnidge, J., Kelly, A. L., deVos, J., & Côté, J. (2022). Athlete perceptions of playing-up in youth soccer. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *34*(4), 862-885. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2021.1875518

Gurgis, J. J., Kerr, G., & Battaglia, A. (2023). Exploring Stakeholders' Interpretations of Safe Sport. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *47*(1), 019372352211346. https://doi.org/10.1177/01937235221134610

Gurgis, J. J., & Kerr, G. A. (2021). Sport Administrators' Perspectives on Advancing Safe Sport. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, *Volume 3 - 2021*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2021.630071

Jowett, S. (2007). Interdependence analysis and the 3+ 1Cs in the coach-athlete relationship.

Jowett, S. (2025). 25 years of relationship research in sport: The quality of the coach-athlete relationship as defined by Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity and Co-orientation

(3+1Cs Model). *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *80*, 102909. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.102909
Jowett, S., & Cockerill, I. M. (2003). Olympic medallists' perspective of the althlete–coach relationship. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *4*(4), 313-331. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S1469-0292(02)00011-0
Kane, M., & Trochim, W. (2007). Concept Mapping Analysis. In *Concept Mapping for Planning and Evaluation*. Sage. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.4135/9781412983730.n5
Kavanagh, E., & Mountjoy, M. (2024). CyberAbuse in sport: beware and be aware! *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, *58*(22), 1313-1315. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2023-107885
Kelly, A. L., Shanmugaratnam, A., Davies, L., Reeves, M., Andrew, M., Dugdale, J. H., & McAuley, A. B. T. (2026). Coach perceptions of "playing-up" in youth football. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2026.2645490
Kerr, G., Battaglia, A., & Stirling, A. (2019). Maltreatment in Youth Sport: A Systemic Issue. *Kinesiology Review*, *8*(3), 237-243. https://doi.org/10.1123/kr.2019-0016
Kerr, G., Gurgis, J., Wensel, S., Willson, E., Schwender, J., & Porter, J. (2025). Is sport safe with safe sport? A critical examination. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 102964.
Lang, M. (2022). Advancing children's rights in sport: coaching, childhood agency and the participatory agenda. *Sports Coaching Review*, *11*(1), 41-63. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2021.1990655
Love, R., & Randall, V. (2024). Enabling dialogic, democratic research: using a community of philosophical enquiry as a qualitative research method. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *37*(8), 2186-2202. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2023.2267027
Lundy, L., & McEvoy, L. (2011). Children's rights and research processes: Assisting children to (in) formed views. *Childhood*, *19*(1), 129-144.
MacKenzie, S. B., Podsakoff, P. M., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2011). Construct Measurement and Validation Procedures in MIS and Behavioral Research: Integrating New and Existing Techniques1. *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, *35*(2), 293-A295. https://doi.org/10.2307/23044045
Mayall, B. (2000). The sociology of childhood in relation to children's rights. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, *8*(3), 243-259. https://doi.org/10.1163/15718180020494640
McMahon, J., Penney, D., & Dinan-Thompson, M. (2012). 'Body practices—exposure and effect of a sporting culture?'Stories from three Australian swimmers. *Sport, Education and Society*, *17*(2), 181-206. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.607949
Mills, C. D., & Cooling, K. E. (2019). The 'ideal'PE Kit to help reduce Body Image concerns within Adolescent Girls. *Obesity Weight Management and Therapy*, *2*(1), 1-8.
Mountjoy, M., Brackenridge, C., Arrington, M., Blauwet, C., Carska-Sheppard, A., Fasting, K., Kirby, S., Leahy, T., Marks, S., Martin, K., Starr, K., Tiivas, A., & Budgett, R. (2016). International Olympic Committee consensus statement: harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport. *Br J Sports Med*, *50*(17), 1019-1029. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2016-096121
Mountjoy, M., Vertommen, T., Greinig, S., Burrows, K., & Tercier, S. (2022). "Nothing About Us, Without Us": Empowering the Youth Athlete Voice in #SafeSport. *Clin J Sport Med*, *32*(2), 79-81. https://doi.org/10.1097/JSM.0000000000000980
Pankowiak, A., Kavanagh, E., & Woessner, M. (2025). Violence Against Children in Sport: The Role of Digital Technology in a Connected World. *Organizational Communication and Sport: Connections, Applications, and Opportunities*, 51.
Phillips, K., Jowett, S., Krukowska-Burke, A., & Rhind, D. J. (2026). Building strong partnerships: Understanding the mechanisms by which quality coach-athlete relationships affect objective performance in professional cricket. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *21*(1), 19-29. https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541251371558
Rhind, D. J. A., & Jowett, S. (2010). Relationship Maintenance Strategies in the Coach-Athlete Relationship: The Development of the COMPASS Model. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *22*(1), 106-121. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200903474472
Rosas, S. R., & Kane, M. (2012). Quality and rigor of the concept mapping methodology: A pooled study analysis. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *35*(2), 236-245. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2011.10.003
Soares, A. L. A., Leonardi, T. J., Silva, J., Nascimento, J. V., Paes, R. R., Gonçalves, C. E., & Carvalho, H. M. (2020). Performance, motivation, and enjoyment in young female basketball players: An interdisciplinary approach. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, *38*(8), 873-885. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2020.1736247

Stirling, A. E. (2013). Understanding the Use of Emotionally Abusive Coaching Practices. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *8*(4), 625-639. https://doi.org/10.1260/1747-9541.8.4.625

Sturrock, K. A., & Rocha, J. M. (2000). A Multidimensional Scaling Stress Evaluation Table. *Field Methods*, *12*, 49 - 60.

Sundgot-Borgen, J., Meyer, N. L., Lohman, T. G., Ackland, T. R., Maughan, R. J., Stewart, A. D., & Müller, W. (2013). How to minimise the health risks to athletes who compete in weight-sensitive sports review and position statement on behalf of the Ad Hoc Research Working Group on Body Composition, Health and Performance, under the auspices of the IOC Medical Commission. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, *47*(16), 1012-1022. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2013-092966

Trickey, S., & Topping, K. J. (2004). 'Philosophy for children': a systematic review. *Research Papers in Education*, *19*(3), 365-380. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267152042000248016

Tuakli-Wosornu, Y. A., Burrows, K., Fasting, K., Hartill, M., Hodge, K., Kaufman, K., Kavanagh, E., Kirby, S. L., MacLeod, J. G., Mountjoy, M., Parent, S., Tak, M., Vertommen, T., & Rhind, D. J. A. (2024). IOC consensus statement: interpersonal violence and safeguarding in sport. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, bjsports-2024-108766. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2024-108766

Vella, S. A., Mayland, E., Schweickle, M. J., Sutcliffe, J. T., McEwan, D., & Swann, C. (2024). Psychological safety in sport: a systematic review and concept analysis. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *17*(1), 516-539. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2022.2028306

Vertommen, T., Woessner, M., Kavanagh, E., Parent, S., Pankowiak, A., Haerens, L., Schyvinck, C., Constandt, B., Spaaij, R., Stevens, V., Willem, A., & Mountjoy, M. (2024). 'First, do no harm': conducting research on interpersonal violence in sport. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, *58*(22), 1315-1318. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2024-108767

Walton, C. C., Purcell, R., Pilkington, V., Hall, K., Kenttä, G., Vella, S., & Rice, S. M. (2024). Psychological Safety for Mental Health in Elite Sport: A Theoretically Informed Model. *Sports Medicine*, *54*(3), 557-564. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-023-01912-2

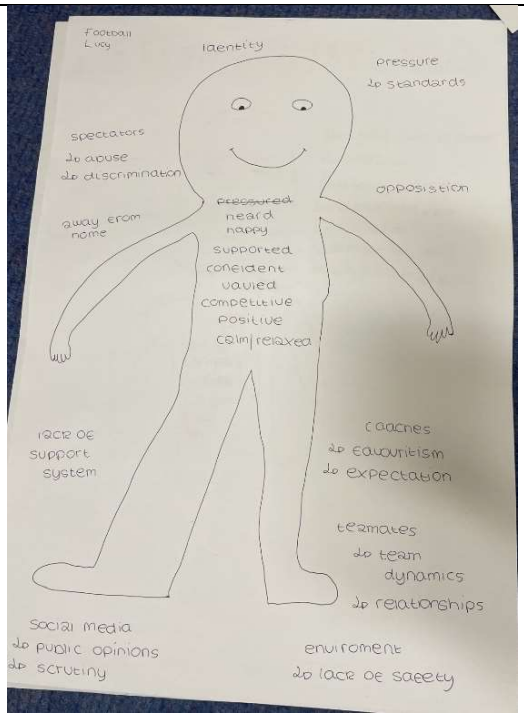
Whyte, A. (2022). *An independent investigation commissioned by Sport England and UK Sport following allegations of mistreatment within the sport of gymnastics*. https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/safeguarding/whyte-review

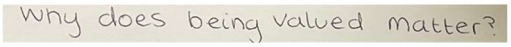
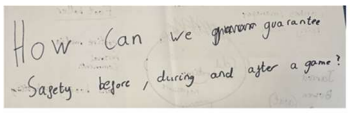
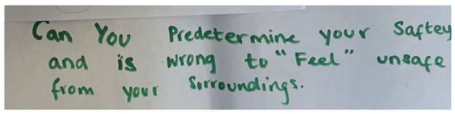
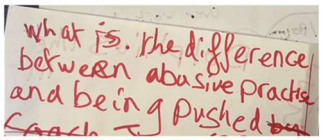
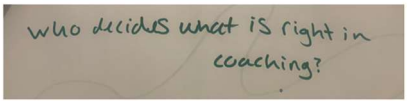
Willson, E., Kerr, G., Battaglia, A., & Stirling, A. (2022). Listening to Athletes' Voices: National Team Athletes' Perspectives on Advancing Safe Sport in Canada [Original Research]. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, *Volume 4 - 2022*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2022.840221

Woessner, M. N., Pankowiak, A., Kavanagh, E., Parent, S., Vertommen, T., Eime, R., Spaaij, R., Harvey, J., & Parker, A. G. (2024). Telling adults about it: children's experience of disclosing interpersonal violence in community sport. *Sport in Society*, *27*(5), 661-680.

7.0 Appendix

***Appendix. 1** Athlete workshop outline and examples*

Stage	Purpose	Activity	Facilitation Notes	Example
Creating a Fictional Athlete	Low risk activity that sets the tone for open dialogue	In small groups, participants created a fictional athlete. They then introduced this athlete to the rest of the group, giving them a name and a sport.	There are no 'wrong' answers; participants only shared with the wider group if comfortable.	
Exploring Safety Through the Socio-Ecological Model	Introduce a multi-layered understanding of safety	Participants reflected on what their fictional athlete might think/feel/do when safe or unsafe. Facilitator read a guided reflection using an 'onion' metaphor of influences (individual, relational, structural, and societal) on safety.	Participants had their eyes closed/down during the reflection. This gave the chance to think individually before sharing ideas within their small groups.	
Generating a Stimulus: "I feel safe when…"	This phase allowed participants to develop the stimulus for the enquiry.	Athletes wrote responses to: "In my sport, I feel safe when…" on sticky notes and posted them on a 'gallery wall'. The wall formed the stimulus for discussion.	Participants could write as much or as little as they wished. Viewing the wall helped highlight shared experiences and differences.	

Formulating Big Questions	Develop questions for the enquiry.	Athletes defined and created 'big questions' (open-ended and without clear answers) based on the gallery wall ideas.	Framed as a philosophical enquiry. Encouraged deep reflection.	    
Choosing a Question for Enquiry	Foster collective decision-making and democracy.	Each group shared their questions; individuals voted anonymously (eyes closed, hand raised). The question with the most votes guided the main discussion.	Voting process ensured democracy in decision-making and that the enquiry was based on something the majority of athletes wanted to discuss.	
Enquiry Discussion	Engage in critical, respectful dialogue.	The group who posed the question introduced it. All participants then discussed, using one another's names and building on ideas. The last speaker chose the next from those signalling readiness.	Facilitator took a non-directive role, speaking only to prompt further dialogue or deepen reflection. Rules of engagement promoted equity and participation.	

Appendix. 2 *Statements generated for concept mapping*

# Statement	# Statement continued
1. I play confidently	62. I know where I am
2. I am physically prepared	63. I know who I am with
3. I have no injuries	64. I am encouraged to win, but it is okay if I lose
4. There is care for me when I am injured	65. There is a healthy amount of pressure
5. I am playing with friends	66. I am not worried about my weight
6. Everyone socialises after the game	67. I am trusted by my coach
7. Umpires/referee are fair	68. I can trust my coaches when talking about areas of weakness
8. The rules are strictly applied in competition	69. I can trust my coaches when talking about personal things
9. I play with people my age	70. I am around people I trust
10. The changing rooms only have my age group in them	71. I am organised
11. I am not playing older athletes/players	72. I am motivated
12. I am having fun	73. I am listened to
13. I am playing well	74. I am not judged
14. I am focused on improving performance	75. I can communicate with people around me
15. I can play freely	76. I can act the same whether I'm selected or not
16. I am playing on a safe court/pitch/venue	77. Selection/de-selection isn't a threat to me
17. The changing rooms are spacious	78. I can see or measure my progress
18. I can see my parents	79. I understand the talent pathway I am on
19. I have suitable equipment	80. I'm not thinking about life outside of sport at games
20. I get help with something I don't understand	81. I am wearing my own kit
21. My coach's reactions are predictable	82. I am wearing full kit
22. I am given individual feedback from my coach that helps me improve	83. I have a healthy nutritional diet
23. My coach shares relatable experiences with me	84. I get drinks breaks at training
24. The coach praises me	85. I can warm up before a game
25. My teammates give me constructive criticism	86. I know my opposition
26. My coach has open communication with my parents/carers	87. My training is planned
27. I have a strong bond with my teammates	88. Equipment is safe to use
28. My teammates celebrate achievements with me	89. I have a goal to work towards
29. I am a valued member of the team	90. I've spent time with my coach before a competition/event
30. I know what behaviours are acceptable from other athletes	91. I am protected from social media
31. Other athletes are seen as part of the team, not competitors	92. I am protected from public scrutiny
32. I know my teammates	93. There is designated safeguarding support at big events

33. I am comfortable speaking to my teammates
34. I am not teased or picked on by my peers
35. I know what behaviours are acceptable from adults
36. My coach is experienced
37. My coach is prepared
38. My coach is welcoming
39. My coach knows me
40. My coach does not yell at me
41. My coach treats me fairly
42. My coach is honest
43. My coach shows care and kindness
44. My coach is approachable
45. My coach is patient
46. My coach explains decisions to me
47. Coaches act on concerns I raise
48. My coach has a good relationship with my team mates
49. My family supports me
50. There is a clear leader
51. My captain supports me
52. It is okay to make mistakes
53. My teammates are supportive
54. Parents don't shout negatively from the side-lines
55. I can talk to my coaches about my worries
56. My parents say they are proud of me
57. People I am with challenge me to improve
58. There is a competitive environment at competitions
59. Competitors' behaviour and language is not abusive
60. I am stronger than the opposition
61. I train with others and not on my own
94. Organisations have clear safeguarding procedures
95. I know who my welfare/safeguarding officer is
96. I am given the tools to tackle a problem by myself
97. When my national governing body (NGB) is involved in safeguarding issues/concerns
98. When there are at least two coaches per group
99. Safeguarding policies are up to date
100. I know who I can approach if there is a problem
101. There is evidence of criminal record checks (DBS) for relevant staff
102. I know the rules
103. I am signed in and out of training/events
104. The training environment is fenced off from public
105. I am aware of how to report a concern
106. My club's website is up to date
107. Coaches show an understanding of safeguarding
108. Security is talked about
109. There are strict guidelines/a code of conduct
110. My club runs workshops on safeguarding
111. There are trained personnel to support mental health
112. There is accountability for bad behaviour in adults (eg, coaches and parents)
113. I have clear boundaries
114. Activities follow recommended safety guidelines
115. Other people are around
116. There are females around
117. I know there is a plan for life outside of sport
118. I am told what to do
119. I know what to expect from my club
120. Open discussions about safeguarding occur without being prompted by problems
121. My teammates do not judge me