



## USA Swimming – Club Crisis Communication

### Initial Steps

1. Call the main members that make up your club's leadership team. If it is truly a crisis, call anytime of the day or night.
2. For assistance with media inquiries, reach out to Scott Leightman ([sleightman@usaswimming.org](mailto:sleightman@usaswimming.org)) at USA Swimming.
3. In areas of athlete protection, make sure that Susan Woessner ([swoessner@usaswimming.org](mailto:swoessner@usaswimming.org)) from USA Swimming is notified.
  - o Get all the facts from Susan Woessner, including what they can share with Board, parents
4. Determine desired course of action for Club, taking into account governance rules
5. Determine what and when to tell stakeholders – *will be impacted by media coverage or lack thereof.*
  - a) Staff
  - b) Board
  - c) Parents
  - d) Media
6. If a criminal investigation is underway, you should work with the Police's public information officer to know what is going on. Media questions in this situation should also be directed to the Public Information Officer.

### Messaging

1. Get USA Swimming message if applicable and formulate club messaging
  - a) Messaging should include:
    - i. Facts that are appropriate to share
    - ii. Actions taken or planned to be taken by club
    - iii. Contingency plan (who will coach in the meantime? Etc.)
    - iv. Process (investigation, National Board of Review (NBOR) hearing, appeal, decision) – This should be the heart of the message. "HERE's where we are. HERE's the process, which is the same for everyone. HERE's the next step."
    - v. When to expect next communication (even if not known, give something like, "Once there is a decision by the NBOR")
    - vi. What safeguards your club and USA Swimming have in place regarding providing a safe environment for their children.
  - a) Messaging should **NOT EVER** include
    - vii. Speculation "*I doubt this is true...*" or "*He would never do that in my opinion*"
    - viii. Emotion
2. Determine proper venue for messaging stakeholders
  - a. Consider in-person meeting vs. email
  - b. Be open and willing to be available for questions

- c. Be honest about what you do and don't know, and what you can and can't share
  - d. Consider distributing FAQ document (template questions provided by USA Swimming) and process explanation (provided by USAS)
3. Share message with stakeholders
4. Determine media approach
  - a. Statement by Club
  - b. Statement by USA Swimming
  - c. Spokesperson
5. Post-decision by NBOR: Plan how to notify stakeholders and any statement by the club. Your statement should include:
  - a. What the decision was
  - b. How it affects the club
  - c. Reinforce what services will be offered by the club going forward
  - d. Provide internal stakeholders with a contact for questions

**\*\* If this is a Safe Sport issue Susan Woessner will notify you of the NBOR's decision.**

### **Background Information**

#### **USA Swimming's Safe Sport Program**

There is nothing more important to USA Swimming than the safety and well-being of its 300,000 members. For that reason, the organization has developed the most comprehensive Safe Sport Program among Olympic Sports.

In the interest of protecting all members, USA Swimming:

- Requires criminal background checks of all non-athlete members prior to membership in the organization, and updates these checks on a real-time basis
- Provides all non-athlete members with mandatory online athlete protection education every three years
- Requires clubs to conduct pre-employment screening of all new coaches
- Has in place a specific complaint reporting and review process to handle complaints of misconduct. This includes due process for all accused individuals as mandated by the Amateur Sports Act.
- Has a Code of Conduct, by which all members are governed. The Code of Conduct includes specific Athlete Protection Policies.
- Publishes on its website the list of Individuals Suspended for Life from USA Swimming
- Employs a full-time director of safe sport and a safe sport coordinator to manage the Safe Sport Program and oversee the complaint and review process. Also has a standing committee including representatives from within the swimming community and child protection industry to review the programming to ensure it is in keeping with industry best practices.
- For more visit [www.usaswimming.org/protect](http://www.usaswimming.org/protect)

### **FAQ document Template Questions**

- What is the club doing to keep its members safe?
- Have there been any changes to the club?
- What are the current allegations?