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**MERC and the USA Swimming/Niagara**

**Safe Sport Initiative**

**What is Safe Sport?**

**Safe Sport** began as the Olympic community’s initiative to recognize, reduce and respond to misconduct in sport. The six primary types of misconduct are • Bullying • Harassment • Hazing • Emotional Misconduct • Physical Misconduct, and • Sexual Misconduct, including Child Sexual Abuse. **Why Safe Sport?** Sport provides athletes with an opportunity to perform and grow both on and off the field. Unfortunately, sport can also be a high-risk environment for misconduct and abuse. For example, studies indicate that as many as one in eight athletes will be sexually abused within their sport. Misconduct is a critical issue in sport, and one which we all need a game plan to prevent. **Who is Safe Sport for?** We all play a role in reducing misconduct and abuse in sports. Safe Sport provides resources for all members of the sports community – organizations, coaches, parents and athletes – to understand what misconduct is, implement ways to reduce it, and identify plans to respond to it. *Education and awareness are the most critical components to creating*safe*and respectful sporting environments, free of abuse and harassment.* The team of subject matter experts at USA Swimming Safe Sport has developed best practices, policies and programs consistent with guidance from leading professional organizations.

**Safe Sport Policies and Best Practices**

Every swim club in the Niagara Region is required to implement policies addressing (1) electronic communication, (2) anti-bullying, and (3) team travel. These are posted on the MERC website along with Guidelines for Best Practices. The Guidelines cover the three topics above as well as issues relating to how best to support young athletes swimming experiences and provide safety on and around the pool deck.

As an amendment to these policies and practices MERC has also implemented an **Injured Athlete and Return to Swim Protocol Form** and policy to be used if you have a swimmer who has become injured and directed by a health care professional to cease certain activities until he or she has returned to good health. This is essentially an agreement between you, your health care professional, and Coach Everett about when your athlete can return to practice and/or competition and the process for gradually participating again in various normal swimming activities. (Note that this includes standard Concussion Management Protocols if called for by the particular injury.)

**What does the Safe Sport Coordinator do?**

The key responsibilities of this position include the following:

* *Serve as the Safe Sport resource for the club.* This includes adding posting materials on the MERC website regarding important safe sport information, policies and best practices. I also have a Safe Sport Activity Book (in pdf form) developed as a teaching tool for our younger swimmers. If interested please let me know and I can send it to you via email. A hard copy can also be ordered through the Niagara swimming website. Niagara has additionally designated the first Monday of every month as Safe Sport Monday. On this first Monday Niagara posts a new safe sport scenario (e.g., how to respond to bullying) that you are encouraged to read and discuss with your swimmers.
* *Provide Safe Sport updates to the club membership.*
* *Foster an environment that cultivates positive team culture.* MERC families with any questions or issues regarding safe sport--including possible safe sport policy violations--are strongly encouraged to contact me or Coach Everett about them so that they can be addressed appropriately and in a timely manner. Niagara has created a formal incident reporting procedure, including the required documentation, to be followed if and when necessary. Note that it includes a "whistle blower policy" to protect from discrimination or harassment anyone who reports a possible safe sport violation.

**Where can I find more information on the Safe Sport Initiative?**

* Niagara Region Safe Sport Information and Resources (via USA Swimming) can be found at the following link: https://www.teamunify.com/TabGeneric.jsp?\_tabid\_=41006&team=eznslsc
* USA Swimming Safe Sport Information and Resources can be found at the following link: https://www.usaswimming.org/Home/safe-sport