



SANCTIONED EVENT POLICY

# Safeguarding Policy for Sanctioned Events

Minimum safeguarding standards for youth and vulnerable adult participation

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**Every sanctioned event is responsible for creating an environment in which participants can compete without being placed at unreasonable risk of abuse, exploitation, harassment, neglect, or retaliation.**

This policy establishes the minimum safeguarding requirements for OCA-sanctioned events. Organizers may adopt stronger protections where appropriate to their participants, venue, discipline, or risk profile.

# 1. Purpose and Scope

The Open Competition Alliance requires sanctioned events to take reasonable, proactive steps to protect participants from abuse, exploitation, grooming, harassment, neglect, boundary violations, retaliation, and other safeguarding harms. This policy applies to organizers, adjudicators, officials, staff, volunteers, contractors, coaches, mentors, vendors, media personnel, and any other individuals acting in an event role.

**Safeguarding is broader than emergency response.** It includes the design of event practices that reduce opportunities for abuse or exploitation, create clear behavioral expectations, make concerns easier to report, and ensure concerns are handled appropriately.

## CORE PRINCIPLE

**Participant safety and dignity are conditions of OCA sanctioning, not optional enhancements.**

# 2. Definitions

**Minor:** Any person under 18 years of age.

**Vulnerable adult:** An adult who, because of disability, dependency, impaired capacity, temporary circumstance, power imbalance, or another factor, may face increased risk of abuse, exploitation, coercion, or difficulty protecting their own interests.

**Safeguarding concern:** Any information, observation, disclosure, allegation, pattern, or incident suggesting that a participant may have experienced, be experiencing, or be at risk of abuse, exploitation, harassment, grooming, neglect, retaliation, or another significant boundary or welfare concern.

**Safeguarding Lead:** The designated event official responsible for receiving safeguarding concerns, coordinating the event's safeguarding response, ensuring reporting procedures are available, and serving as the primary safeguarding contact.

# 3. Mandatory Safeguarding Lead for Events with Minors

**Every OCA-sanctioned event that permits participation by minors must designate at least one Safeguarding Lead.** The Safeguarding Lead must successfully complete the OCA Safeguarding Youth & Vulnerable Adult Competitors course and assessment before serving in that role.

The designated Safeguarding Lead must:

- Be identified by name and role in the event's internal operating materials.
- Be reachable by event staff and participants throughout the event.
- Understand the event's reporting and escalation procedures.
- Know how to respond appropriately to disclosures and immediate safety concerns.
- Know when a concern must be referred to emergency services, law enforcement, child protective services, adult protective services, venue security, or another appropriate authority.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality while ensuring information is shared with those who need it to protect participants.

**OCA strongly encourages events with vulnerable adult participation or other elevated safeguarding risks to designate a trained Safeguarding Lead even when no minors are participating.**

## 4. Required Reporting Process

**Every OCA-sanctioned event that permits the participation of minors must maintain a documented process for reporting safeguarding concerns.** The process must be available to event staff and should be reasonably accessible to competitors, parents or guardians, volunteers, officials, and other participants.

At minimum, the process must identify:

- How and where a safeguarding concern may be reported.
- The Safeguarding Lead or other designated recipient of reports.
- An alternate reporting route when the concern involves the Safeguarding Lead or event organizer.
- How urgent or immediate-danger situations are escalated.
- How factual information will be documented.
- How confidentiality will be maintained to the extent reasonably possible.
- How retaliation against a person who raises a concern will be prohibited and addressed.
- How required external reports will be made when law or circumstances require them.

### **DO NOT INVESTIGATE BEFORE PROTECTING**

**An event's first responsibility is to protect participants, preserve relevant information, document what was reported, and refer concerns appropriately. Event personnel should not conduct amateur interrogations or pressure a person to prove a disclosure.**

## 5. Immediate Safety and Emergency Situations

**When a participant appears to be in immediate danger, the priority is immediate safety.** Event personnel should contact emergency services, law enforcement, venue security, medical personnel, child protective services, adult protective services, or another appropriate authority when circumstances require it.

**OCA reporting does not replace legally required reporting.** Organizers and event personnel are responsible for understanding and complying with mandatory-reporting laws and other legal obligations applicable in the event's jurisdiction.

## 6. Visibility, Supervision, and One-to-One Contact

**Interactions involving minors should be structured to be visible, observable, and reasonably interruptible whenever practical.** Events should avoid unnecessary isolated one-to-one contact between minors and unrelated adults acting in event roles.

Reasonable safeguards may include:

- Using open or observable spaces for coaching, judging preparation, instruction, or meetings.
- Avoiding locked or inaccessible rooms for one-to-one adult-minor interactions.
- Using two-adult or parent/guardian visibility practices when appropriate.
- Designing backstage, warm-up, changing, or holding areas with reasonable supervision and access controls.
- Ensuring event staff know who is responsible for supervision in youth-designated areas.

## 7. Communication and Digital Conduct

**Event-related communication with minors should remain professional, transparent, and related to legitimate event purposes.** Organizers should use official channels where practical and should discourage secretive, sexualized, coercive, manipulative, or otherwise inappropriate private communication.

Events should establish reasonable expectations regarding:

- Direct messaging and text communication with minors.
- Group chats and team communication.
- Photography and video.
- Social-media contact.
- Sharing participant images or personal information.
- Use of personal devices in changing, dressing, or private areas.

## 8. Photography, Changing Areas, Costumes, and Physical Contact

**Safeguarding requirements must be adapted to the realities of the discipline.** Some competitions involve costumes, makeup, grooming, spotting, physical contact, partner work, equipment fitting, changing areas, or other close-access activities. These activities are not inherently prohibited, but they require clear boundaries and appropriate controls.

Events should consider:

- Consent and role-appropriate physical contact.
- Visibility and supervision where physical assistance is required.
- Photography restrictions in changing or private areas.
- Parent/guardian access where appropriate.
- Privacy-respecting arrangements for changing and personal care.

- Accessibility accommodations that preserve dignity and autonomy.

## 9. Travel, Transportation, Lodging, and Social Activities

**Events that involve travel, transportation, overnight lodging, or organized social activities must account for the increased access and power dynamics these settings can create.** Organizers should adopt proportionate safeguards covering supervision, rooming arrangements, transportation, alcohol, private meetings, and adult-minor contact outside scheduled competition activities.

## 10. Vulnerable Adult Participants

**Safeguarding vulnerable adults must preserve dignity, autonomy, and personal agency.** Protection should not become infantilization. Events should use the least restrictive reasonable measures while responding seriously to coercion, exploitation, dependency, communication barriers, or other circumstances that increase risk.

## 11. Professional Boundaries and Prohibited Conduct

OCA-sanctioned events should prohibit conduct including:

- Sexual or romantic conduct with minors.
- Grooming behavior or deliberate boundary erosion.
- Sexualized comments, harassment, or unwanted sexual attention.
- Bullying, hazing, intimidation, coercion, or retaliation.
- Exploitation of a participant's dependency, disability, age, status, or access needs.
- Threats or pressure intended to prevent a person from reporting a concern.
- Secretive or inappropriate one-to-one contact with minors.
- Photography, recording, or image sharing that violates event rules, privacy, consent, or applicable law.
- Deliberate misuse of authority by judges, coaches, organizers, officials, or staff.

## 12. Responding to a Disclosure

**When someone discloses a safeguarding concern, event personnel should respond calmly and take the disclosure seriously.** They should not promise absolute secrecy, pressure the person for unnecessary detail, confront an accused person impulsively, or attempt to determine guilt on the spot.

A basic response should be:

- **Protect:** address immediate safety needs.
- **Listen:** allow the person to speak without leading or interrogating.
- **Document:** record factual information as accurately as possible.
- **Report:** follow the event's safeguarding process and make any required external report.

### OCA MEMORY AID

**Protect. Listen. Document. Report.**

## 13. Documentation and Confidentiality

**Safeguarding records should be factual, secure, limited to legitimate need-to-know access, and retained in accordance with applicable law and OCA requirements.** Documentation should distinguish direct observations, statements made by others, actions taken, and conclusions or assumptions.

**Confidentiality is important, but it is not the same as secrecy.** Information may need to be shared with OCA, law enforcement, protective services, venue management, insurers, legal counsel, medical professionals, or others when necessary to protect participants or comply with legal obligations.

## 14. Non-Retaliation

**Retaliation for making a good-faith safeguarding report, participating in a safeguarding process, or supporting another person who raises a concern is prohibited at OCA-sanctioned events.** This includes threats, exclusion, intimidation, adverse judging or official treatment, harassment, blacklisting, or other punitive conduct.

## 15. OCA Notification

Serious safeguarding incidents connected to an OCA-sanctioned event must be reported to OCA when required by sanctioning terms, event reporting requirements, or OCA policy. OCA notification does not replace any report that must be made to external authorities.

OCA may request information necessary to evaluate sanctioning status, participant safety, official credentials, or future event eligibility.

## 16. Organizer Responsibility

The event organizer remains responsible for implementing safeguarding measures at the event. OCA training, sanctioning, and policy materials do not transfer operational responsibility from the organizer to OCA.

Organizers are expected to:

- Designate required safeguarding personnel.
- Maintain required reporting procedures.
- Communicate expectations to staff and officials.
- Provide appropriate event-specific safeguards.
- Respond promptly to concerns.
- Cooperate with lawful external investigations or protective actions.
- Document significant incidents and actions taken.
- Notify OCA when required.

## 17. Compliance and Sanctioning Consequences

Failure to meet required safeguarding standards may result in conditions on sanctioning, required corrective action, suspension, withdrawal, or denial of future sanctioning. OCA may take immediate action when participant safety or event integrity requires it.

The severity of any OCA response will depend on the nature of the concern, the organizer's actions, participant risk, legal requirements, and whether deficiencies can be corrected safely and promptly.

## 18. Minimum Requirement Checklist

For every sanctioned event that permits minors, the following are mandatory:

- A designated Safeguarding Lead.
- Successful completion by that lead of the OCA Safeguarding course and assessment.
- A documented process for reporting safeguarding concerns.
- An alternate reporting route if the primary safeguarding contact is involved in the concern.
- A process for immediate-danger escalation and required external reporting.
- Reasonable event-specific safeguards for supervision, access, communication, privacy, photography, and other foreseeable risks.

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**Open competition depends on people being able to participate with dignity, trust, and reasonable protection from harm.**

**FAIR PLAY STARTS WITH SAFE PARTICIPATION.**

This policy establishes minimum OCA safeguarding expectations and does not replace applicable law, mandatory-reporting requirements, venue rules, insurance requirements, or professional safeguarding obligations.

Protect. Listen. Document. Report.