

# **Sports & Activity in the COVID-19 Era: Organisation Survey**

**ann craft trust**  
acting against abuse

**May 2020**

The results of a survey of sports and activity organisations and the effect of COVID-19 on their groups and how they've responded to the crisis.

# Sports & Activity Surveys

During April and May 2020, the Ann Craft Trust ran two surveys to assess the impact the coronavirus outbreak was having on activity levels and sports clubs in the UK. The first survey was focused on **sports and activity participants**, while the second was for **sports and activity organisations**.

The aims of the surveys were to gain information on how to help sports and activity organisations respond to the outbreak effectively and identify the gaps in safeguarding information and resources.

This report explores the results of the sports and activity organisations survey.

## Executive Summary

Some of the key findings of this report include:

- The majority of respondents were finding their safeguarding policy helpful in navigating the coronavirus outbreak.
- **69%** of respondents had considered potential safeguarding issues for new activities – yet **78%** had yet to make changes to their safeguarding policies.
- **22%** of sports and activity organisations had either updated their safeguarding policy or are in the process of doing so in response to COVID-19.
- The top three safeguarding challenges identified by respondents were: **Running online sessions safely, reaching participants effectively and appropriately** and **mental health concerns**.
- The two most commonly quoted COVID-19 related challenges for clubs and groups not related to safeguarding were: **Communication** and **technological issues**.
- Organisations are asking for safeguarding help and support when using **live-streams and social media**, identifying their **responsibilities** and accessing **safeguarding support**.
- Sports and activity organisations are particularly concerned about the growth of **domestic violence, sexual exploitation** and **mental health** challenges at this time.

# Organisation survey

The second survey focused on sports and activity organisations and how they've responded to the outbreak.

**Survey aim:** The aim was to get an insight into how the coronavirus outbreak affected sports and activity organisations. We also wanted it to help inform us of what safeguarding guidance and resources we can create and distribute to help sports and activity organisations.

**How was it run:** The survey was run through Survey Monkey and promoted to the Ann Craft Trust's known sports and activity organisation contacts. It had 82 completed responses from organisations in the UK.

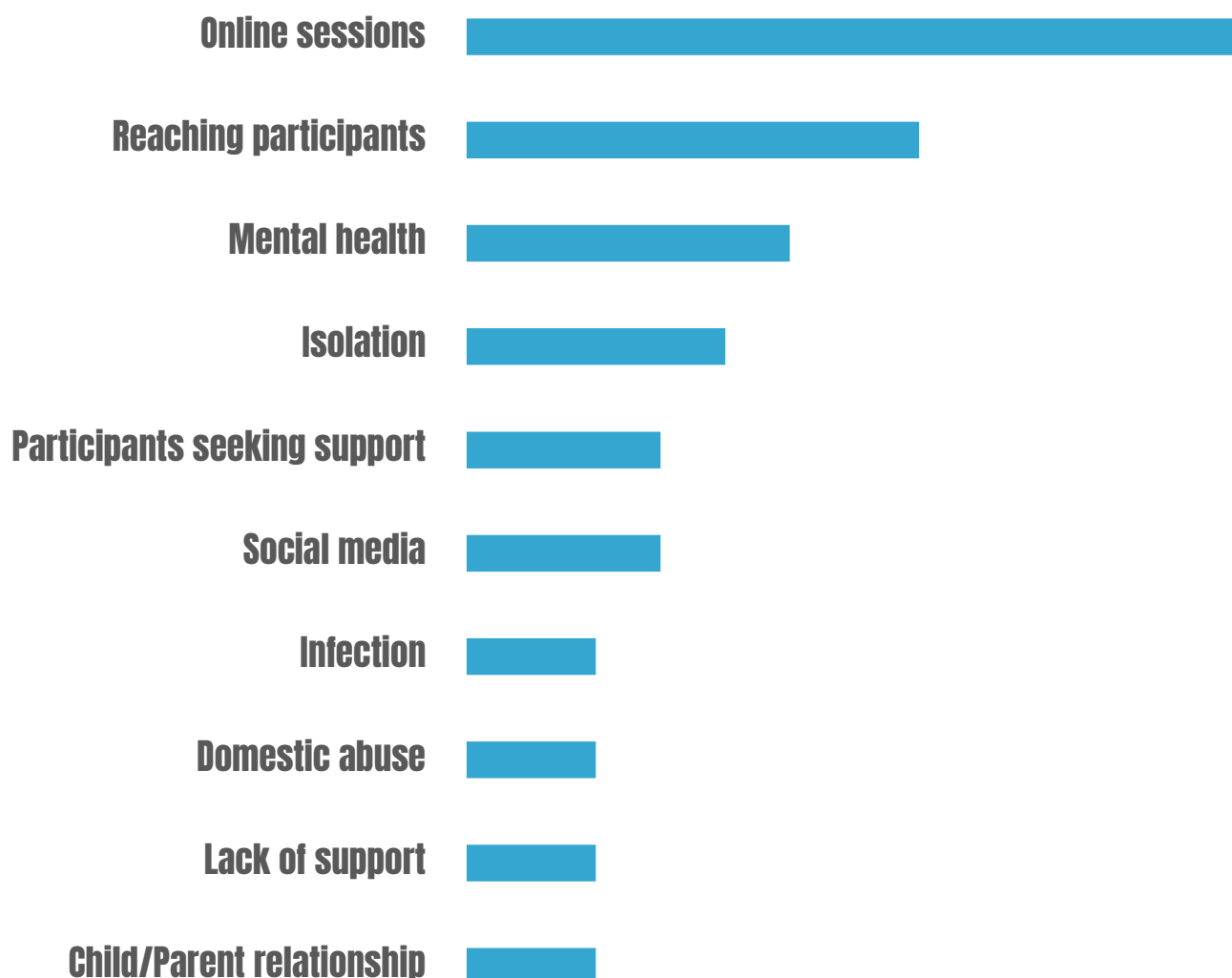
**Survey questions:** The questions mostly focused on whether sports organisations are running alternative activities, key challenges, how (and if) they are using their safeguarding policy at this time, what safeguarding questions they have and what resources could help them.

In this report, we'll be looking in more detail at the responses regarding:

- Key safeguarding challenges to sports and activity organisations posed by COVID-19
- Other challenges to sports and activity organisations posed by COVID-19
- Have sports and activity organisations considered safeguarding implications of new activities?
- Are safeguarding policies helping clubs and groups navigate these issues?
- Have sports and clubs made any changes to their safeguarding policies?
- Key safeguarding queries and questions
- Safeguarding resources requested by sports and activity organisations

# Safeguarding challenges of COVID-19

We asked sports and activity organisations which safeguarding challenges they had faced or foresee due to the coronavirus outbreak. When we categorised these into similar themes, we found some topics to be of particular concern – the most common included:



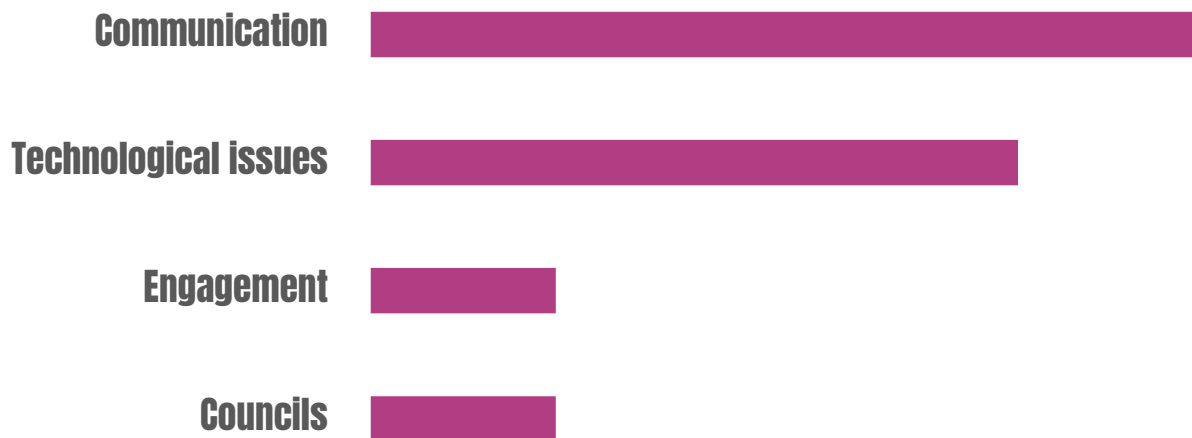
The **safety of online sessions** was by far the most commonly occurring challenge. This was followed by **difficulties in reaching participants** – including GDPR issues, out of date or incomplete contact details and lack of access to internet.

**Mental health** was also identified as a challenge, with many citing self-isolation as a key driver. The **likelihood of participants seeking support** due to a failure to recognise their sports and activity organisation as a source of help or support was also a worry for some of our respondents.

Alongside social media safety, the effect of isolation, risk of infection, increased rates of domestic abuse – respondents also noted that they were having difficulties getting support from local councils and social services due to their increased workloads, as well as complications with contacting children through parents.

# Other challenges of COVID-19

Aside from safeguarding, we asked sports and activity organisations which challenges they had faced or foresee due to the coronavirus outbreak. When we categorised these into similar themes, we found some topics to be of particular concern – the most common included:



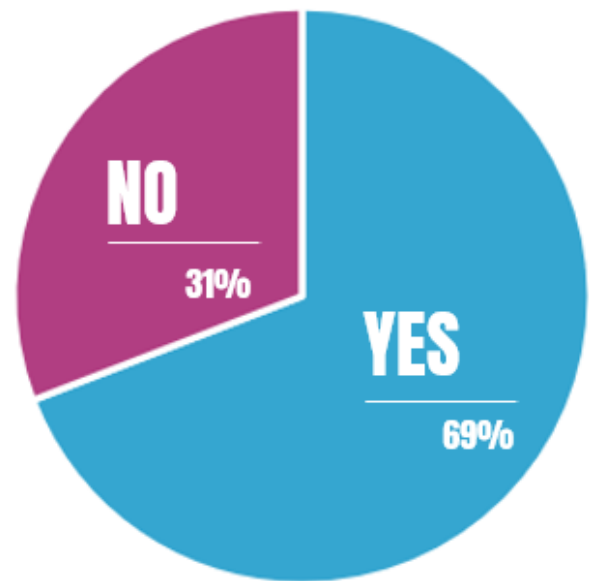
**Communication** challenges were most commonly cited by respondents. Difficulties in judging communication differences and the needs of individual participants were a key element of challenges in communication. Organisations showed concern for overwhelming some participants with too much communication, while also leaving some participants feeling isolated by not communicating enough. Practical issues were also at play, with GDPR legislation quoted by multiple respondents.

**Technological issues** were also commonly cited as a key challenge for sports and activity organisations during the coronavirus outbreak. Many respondents specifically mentioned the lack of internet access for some participants as well as poor-quality internet connections interrupting calls and online sessions. Reaching older participants was also commonly quoted as an issue, due to some older people being less familiar with video calling and messaging.

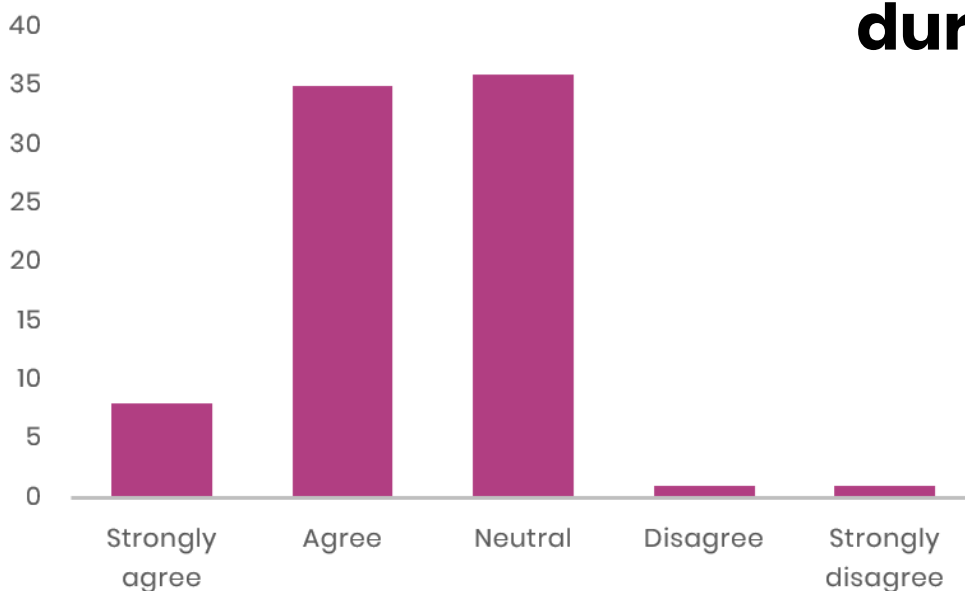
# Have you considered safeguarding issues for new activities?

With reports of sports clubs arranging alternative activities to keep their participants engaged and active during the coronavirus outbreak, we asked our respondents whether they had considered the safeguarding issues around these new activities.

69% of respondents said that yes, they had considered the safeguarding issues and implications of new activities they may have introduced or are considering introducing during the outbreak.



## Is your safeguarding policy helping during the crisis?



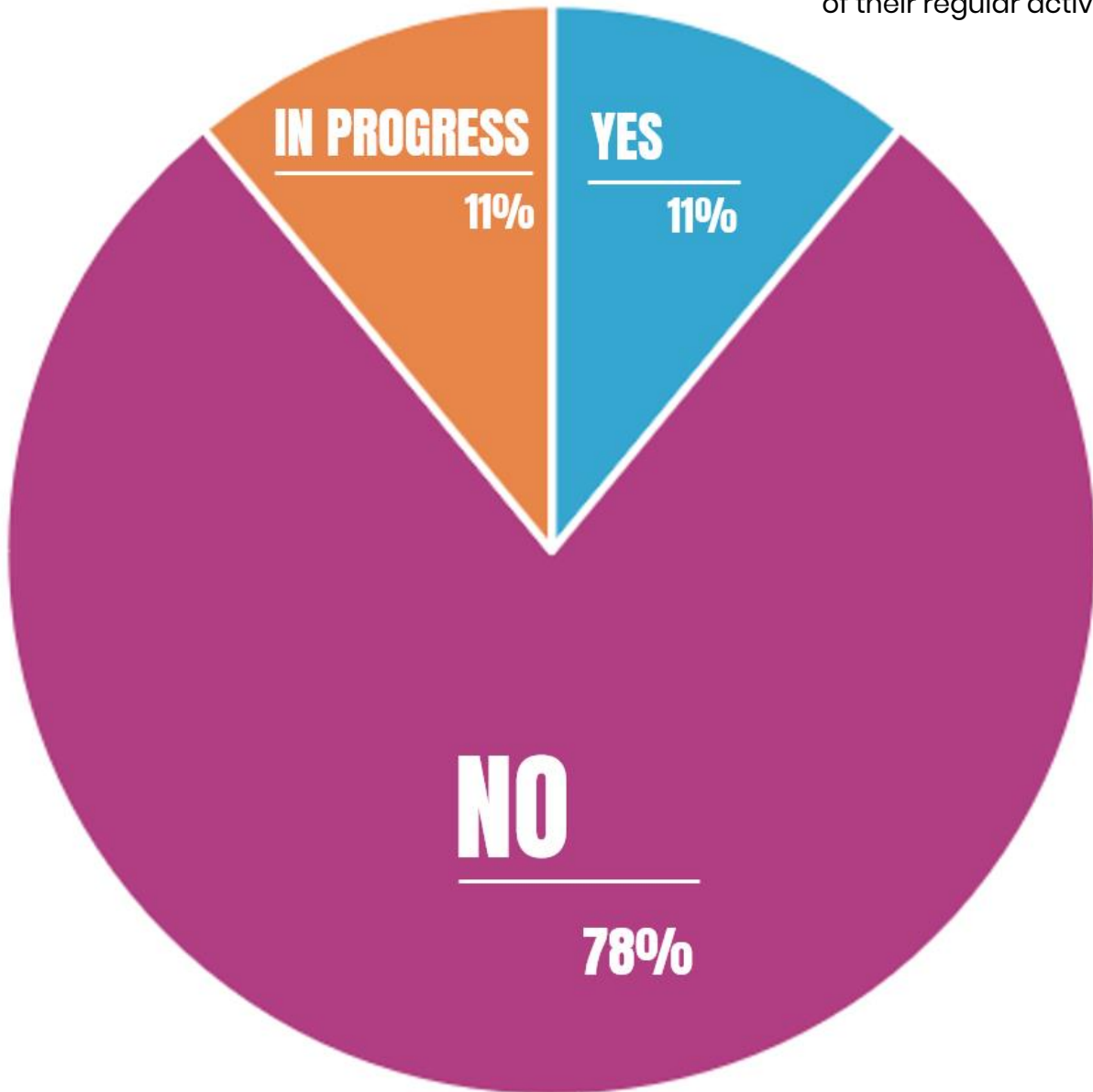
We asked how much respondents agreed with the statement, 'Your safeguarding policy is helping you navigate the challenges caused by coronavirus'.

It is positive to see the majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that their safeguarding policy was helpful at this time. However, this leaves just under half of respondents either feeling neutral or disagreeing with the statement.

While very few respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, we were surprised to see such a large number of respondents feeling neutral – given that the coronavirus outbreak has raised new safeguarding challenges and risks, even for clubs and groups which have closed due to the lockdown.

# Have you made changes to your safeguarding policy?

We asked respondents if they had considered the potential safeguarding issues surrounding any new activities introduced in place of their regular activity.



Despite 69% of respondents claiming they had considered the potential safeguarding issues surrounding new activities, only 22% have made changes or are in the process of making changes to their safeguarding policy.

Although there is likely to be some sports and activity organisations with safeguarding policies and practices that are able to adequately cover the new challenges raised by the coronavirus outbreak, it's unlikely that such a large percentage wouldn't benefit from updating them. New safeguarding challenges are being raised by self-isolation, shielding, the increase in online sessions and social distancing measures which will almost certainly affect how you support your participants. Organisations will want to review their policy in accordance with these new challenges.

# Safeguarding queries and questions

Aware that many sports and activity organisations will require support at this time, we asked whether they had any questions for safeguarding experts. The questions generally fit into three main categories; live-streams and social media, the role of clubs and general safeguarding support.

## Live-streams and social media

- How do we effectively run a fully online delivery service?
- What is the safety advice around use of Zoom or other live-streaming services when delivering sessions to a vulnerable population?
- Should I be updating our policy to cover access to social media use?
- What changes do we need to make with regards to live sessions and social media contact for both our staff and our users?

## How and when to get involved

- Should we be advising participants on how to use the WhatsApp groups and shared phone lists they are creating by themselves?
- What should we, as a club, be doing?

## Safeguarding support & conduct

- Is there any free software to support safeguarding?
- How should we conduct investigations on cases of sexual exploitation for people in lockdown?

To answer these queries, we will be producing and distributing guidance to address these common questions – as well as answering them (and any others) directly through the ACT Safeguarding Hour on Twitter from 12pm to 1pm every Wednesday. Find it at

**#ACTSafeguardingHour**



# Requested safeguarding resources

Finally, we asked sports and activity organisations which safeguarding resources they felt could help them navigate the coronavirus outbreak more safely.

- General support in the form of simple FAQs and 'Dos and Don'ts' for clubs and groups during the coronavirus outbreak
- How to provide support to self-isolating people
- Safe use of live-streaming and video conferencing software (including Zoom)
- Guidance on how to do DBS checks
- Safe use of social media
- How to reduce the risk of grooming
- Policies and advice on how to manage lockdown breaches

Many of these resources reflect the key challenges raised earlier in the report and the Ann Craft Trust are aiming to produce and distribute resources to help clubs and groups throughout this period.

## Growing concerns

Alongside specific resources to help clubs and organisations respond to challenges, respondents also indicated key concerns they had which may be increasing.

The most mentioned growing concerns were the rise in domestic violence incidents, the risk self-isolation and social distancing poses to mental health and the rising risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.

These are all areas that need to be highlighted and considered especially in times like this where there are increased levels of uncertainty. Everyone across the UK has been affected by coronavirus but some, unfortunately, have lost their livelihoods, putting them in a financially precarious situation and have lost the ability to meet and contact crucial support networks like friends and family. These factors, combined with the challenges of identifying these issues without direct contact has increased the risk of instances of domestic violence, sexual exploitation and a decline in mental health – as well as the risk of not identifying and acting upon concerns fast enough.

At the Ann Craft Trust, we are working on resources and guidance for sports and activity organisations to help understand their responsibilities and how they can more effectively support their participants in such a challenging time.

**Domestic violence**

**Sexual exploitation & abuse**

**Mental health**