

2026 Position Statement on Violence in Sport

Safety is Not an Option



Director's Message



As the Executive Director of Olivia Douglas Support Services BC, I am appalled by the never ending violence in adapted sport across Canada. As self-advocates running a peer support network, and ancillary services, we persevere.

Safe communities is one of our pillars. Every day, athletes are being bullied by other athletes, coaches, and families of other athletes. Safety is paramount, and right now that safety is being challenged. This research paper is a call to action, a call to understand what is really going on, what is at stake, and what we can do as a community to foster safe, inclusive sport.

Thank you for supporting ODSSBC's mission of Innovate. Deliver. Repeat.

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**Domestic Violence in Adapted Sport: An Exploration of Special Olympics Related Court
Cases in Canada: Causes, Case Law and Solutions**

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Domestic Violence in Adapted Sport: An Exploration of Special Olympics Related Court Cases in Canada: Causes, Case Law and Solutions

The violence epidemic in Canadian adaptive sport is profound and far reaching, creating safety issues in the intellectual disability community. From testimonial injustice, harassment of the queer community, and issues in safe sport, to the wide amount of information on disability offending, the world is truly a scary place for those with disabilities (Amos et al., 2024; Goethals, 2024; Latvala et al., 2023; Parry & Lindsay, 2003; Williams & Jobe, 2025). This paper argues that we need to do more to stand up to crime in adaptive sport.

The Issues of Domestic Violence in Sport

From injustices to the root causes of violence, the permeation of violence in our communities, seeping into the crevasses of adaptive sport, makes our sport community unsafe. Williams & Jobe (2025) stated in a report of four anonymized case files that the style of communication of an autistic person or one of a learning disability can associate the testimony with a lack of integrity; with little wiggle room for inconsistencies and inaccuracies, due to the requirement to show the rigidity of a narrative in a report (2025). Appeasing and subservient behaviour towards police officers can introduce new challenges in obtaining valid testimony, and ensuring it is not tampered with by the communication, along with appeasing and subservient behaviour (2025). Those with learning disabilities also succumbed to the abyss that is ignored police non-conviction records, and that created significant challenges to secure justice for those affected (2025). Words such as untruthful, “promiscuous”, or an expression that the victim lacks capacity are hurled at disabled survivors of sexual violence (2025, p. 1075). Queer disabled youth are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Amos et al. (2024) stated that amongst 14-21 year olds and a sample size of 2,500 people showed that 48.4% experienced verbal harassment, 29.7%

experience sexual harassment, and 12.4% experienced physical harassment. Out of that, 88.2% experienced mental illness, a third are neurodiverse, 13.9% experience intellectual disability, and 28.8% with a sensory disability (2024). Amos et al. (2024) also reported that in division, words that threaten the emotional safety of others were observed to be likely uttered towards transgender men, youth with an intellectual disability, those suffering from mental illness, and openly queer individuals (2024). Sexual harassment victimization was most prevalent in transgender women, and those with physical, sensory, and mental challenges (2024). Intellectual, physical, sensory, and mental disabilities overall increase the risk of victimization (Amos et al., 2024). Those who experience intellectual disability are prone to committing acts of violence in the community. Parry & Lindsay (2003) outlined a school of thought by determining whether those who suffer from more mild intellectual disabilities can have their sexual deviancy explained by impulsivity. A group of 41 men divided by 22 sexual offenders, 13 non-sexual offenders, and 6 with no prior convictions, with an intellectual quotient between 55 and 75 demonstrated that sexual violence is planned and premeditated compared to non-sexual violence (2003). These findings are in agreement with other studies that look at general prison populations (2003). Amongst those with a broader range of neurotypes, neurodiverse people can be victims of violence, or perpetrate the violence. A study explored the association of intellectual disability and the perpetration of violence in community. Out of those with intellectual disability, dual diagnosis with autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder was shown to be somewhat common, between fourteen and twenty-eight percent (Latvala et al., 2023). Those with intellectual disability and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder had a higher probability of victimization and higher probability of committing violent offences, while those with intellectual disability alone had a higher probability of experiencing victimization and perpetrating sexual

crimes(Latvala et al., 2023). Men with intellectual disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are at an elevated risk of performing a non-consensual intimate act against another person, while women with the same comorbidity are more likely to experience victimization (Latvala et al., 2023). There is a serious lack of knowledge out there for those with disabilities. In prison and forensic populations, 10% meet the diagnosis requirement of learning disability, and 60% of male inmates have the possibility of having a learning disability (Goethals, 2024). Offending behaviour amongst those with learning disabilities is anywhere from two percent to forty percent (Goethals, 2024). Those with learning difficulties have a limited or non-existent concept of certain social skills, such as ascertaining sexual consent, respecting an expected standard of privacy, understanding relationships and differences in maturity, the consequences of offending, and making positive choices for themselves that reduces potential future occurrences of offending (Goethals, 2024). Victims with intellectual disabilities experience feelings of frustration, rash choices and behaviours, and a significantly impaired ability to solve interpersonal problems (Goethals, 2024).

The Issues in Safe Sport

The status of Safe Sport is critical to keeping athletes safe. When we look at athletes within adaptive sport, they are at their most vulnerable, entrusting another person to train them and not sexually interfere with the athlete (MacIntosh et al., 2025). Experiences of sexual harassment in sport by athletes is anywhere between twenty and fifty percent, and the chances of experiencing this type of violence are higher in the adaptive sport community (Oboudi et al., 2026). Coaches also have a role in providing a safe place to play and interact with other peers. Practices of unsafe sport include the rigidity of coaches along with a lack of openness to new ways of coaching, placing a huge emphasis on winning to the point where athletes are pushed

beyond their physical limit, and the acceptance of abusive coaching (MacIntosh et al., 2025). There are risks in vulnerable situations including change rooms and competition accommodations, transportation, and online platforms in situations of weak supervision (Oboudi et al., 2026). Safe Sport isn't inclusive of everyone. Minorities in the adaptive sport community feel a sense of unease and discomfort in participating in adaptive sport, wondering if the space they occupy is safe, or if it will put them at risk of violence. Some athletes in minorities feel like Safe Sport policies don't accommodate their lived experience, afraid of the usage of slurs from other athletes, and criticism of one's faith from members of the adaptive sport community (Gurgis et al., 2022). Ableism, racism, sexism, heteronormative, and cisnormative cultures, facilities that don't accommodate their disabilities, policies around division, excessive shadowing, favouritism in athlete selection, and a lack of diversity, equity and inclusion, and rampant sexualization and favouritism in athlete selection (Gurgis et al., 2022).

Case Studies of Criminal Law in Canada

There are many court cases that involve Special Olympics athletes in Canada. From a search of the CanLII database, searching for sex assault, assault, and harassment cases in the past 5 years. There were 10 court cases that matched our search queries, 8 of which involve criminal law. There were 10 cases that were found and this section will report on each case, what happened in each case, and the disposition. The first case is from Manitoba, where a conviction was registered for the dangerous operation of a vehicle, and assault with a weapon, with the individual being involved in the Special Olympics. The individual received a custodial and probationary disposition (R. v. Harper, 2022). In Saskatchewan, a cognitively impaired athlete in Special Olympics was assaulted, and an intimate assault conviction was registered, and a custodial disposition was issued (R. v. Laurie Thompson, 2014). In Alberta, a child who participated in

Special Olympics was victimized via assault, and the offender received a conditional disposition of two years (R. v. A.D.T, 2015). In Ontario, a vulnerable employee was assaulted, and the offender received a custodial disposition and a sex offender registration (R. v. R.L., 2013). Also in Ontario, a sexual assault and harassment took place between one athlete and another individual. The offender received a conditional disposition and probation; two counts of sexual assault and one count of criminal harassment (R. v. C.J.R., 2025). In British Columbia, a mental health review board found that a Special Olympics athlete needed their conditional discharge revoked, along with the declaration that the offender does not know the consequences of the crime that was committed (Sanderson v. British Columbia (Adult Forensic Psychiatric Services), 2023). One mental health case of note is an athlete who accepts, then rescinds treatment, with the disposition of community supervision and outings on conditions (West Montreal Readaptation Centre v. M.L., 2019). At the end of the day, there is a lot of evidence that Special Olympics athletes are extremely vulnerable to abuse by those responsible for them, and their fellow athletes.

Solutions to the Violence Crisis

The violence crisis is an epidemic. Communities are suffering, people are feeling unsafe, which leaves the singular question: What can we do?

To support offenders, we should pay more attention to deviancy in a disabled person's sexuality and grooming behaviours, a person's cognitive and social functioning level, and the systemic failures in policing, courts and corrections to accommodate neurodivergent offenders (Goethals, 2024). We can train perpetrators to see others as humans, by supporting offenders in accessing cognitive behavioural therapy for sex offenders (Heppell et al., 2022). Some studies in this review showed significant improvements in relating to victim's experiences, and other

studies showed some growth, that is consistent, in sexual knowledge, overall reducing cognitive distortions (Heppell et al., 2022). Supporting those who have a high risk of offending by providing wrap-around supports from mental health, loved ones, employers, residential caretakers, quality managers, and public guardian oversight enables high risk offenders to live in the community and be included, instead of incarcerated (Hollomotz, 2022).

In supporting victims, two hour support sessions for twenty to thirty-three year old female sexual assault survivors boosted assertiveness, self-esteem, and alleviated depression in the women studied. Attendance was high, and women liked doing leisure activities such as painting, collages, and role playing (Barber et al., 2000). In the justice system, we can provide fair and equitable access, by educating police and prosecutors about people who are neurodiverse to encourage and allow representatives to speak on a disabled person's behalf, to accommodate disabled adults in forensic interviews, and to include the lived experiences of disabled adults in the way law enforcement is run (Williams & Jobe, 2025). Supporting victims doesn't just mean providing therapy though, it means making the play environment safe. This means having coaches that reflect upon their own behaviours, collaborate with other coaches and athletes, as well as being certified to coach sports (MacIntosh et al., 2025). Plain language rules for conduct is important and helps those who are neurodiverse understand what is and isn't acceptable behaviour (MacIntosh et al., 2025). We can also use Safe Sport to support athletes, by providing comprehensive education on healthy relationships, and by making bystander training a mandatory lesson at the beginning of each season to reiterate that standing up to bullies is important (Adriaens et al., 2024). Lastly, in regards to the LGBTQ community, we can help queer neurodivergent adults includes educating our leaders about the issues, and by putting forward pressure on healthcare, education, and community support services (Amos et al., 2024).

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