

THE INS AND OUTS OF THE US CENTER FOR SAFESPORT INVESTIGATION PROCESS

**This sheet is for:**

This document is to help advocates and athlete survivors better understand the process of reporting and investigating a case of abuse through the US Center for SafeSport (USCSS).

How advocates can use this:

Advocates can use this to talk through the process with athlete survivors so that they are better informed as to the process with USCSS and the implications of reporting through USCSS.

The US Center for Safe Sport (USCSS) is the national organization created by the US Congress in 2017 to investigate cases of sexual abuse and extreme emotional/physical abuse in US Olympic and Paralympic sport.

1**Initial Report:**

In general, the process starts with a report to the USCSS.

[Advocates can help by supporting the athlete through the report as a support person.](#)

2**Internal Review:**

USCSS conducts an immediate internal review of the report and decides whether the Center will take jurisdiction of the case, that is, whether they will carry out an investigation based on the report.

[Advocates can support the athlete during this time, making sure there is connection to meaningful resources such as counseling, safety planning, etc.](#)

3**Initiate Investigation or Refer:**

Either Initiates Investigation or Refers to the National Governing Body for an Investigation or Review.

[Advocates can help survivors think about planning and implications for the investigation, including the implications of witnesses being interviewed and the protection of confidential information during the investigation process, as well as how to request updates during the process from the USCSS.](#)

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Investigation:

The case review involves examining the facts in the report and contacting other witnesses to gather evidence. This process also includes contacting the person accused of causing harm, who may then provide names of additional witnesses.

[Advocates can be a support person during the investigation interviews.](#)

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Immediate Short-term Sanctions:

During the Investigation, the Center can take immediate, short-term action to limit someone's access to sport. These decisions are appealable by the Respondent (person accused of causing harm) and would be appealed to arbitration firms. This is called the appeal of a temporary measure.

[Advocates can help survivors consider the impacts of temporary sanctions and how safety planning might need to adjust.](#)

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Findings:

The Center issues a report of findings that is accessible to both the Claimant and the Respondent. Respondents, the individuals accused of causing harm, have the right to appeal these decisions through a process called arbitration, which utilizes a third-party, neutral fact-finder to determine if the Center's initial findings should be upheld or overturned.

[Advocates can help athletes understand the findings and support with updated resources as well as safety planning that reflects the impacts of the findings.](#)

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Appeal through Arbitration:

The Respondent has the right to appeal the Center's findings through an arbitration process. In this process, the US Center for SafeSport defends its findings against the Respondent, and the proceedings resemble a hearing, with witnesses, including the Claimant, being called to testify. This process will require the Claimant and Respondent to be face-to-face on a virtual call.

[Advocates can join the proceedings as a support person, and can also connect with the athlete survivor before and after the hearing to help process and unpack the proceedings.](#)

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Arbitration Decision:

The arbitration decision is considered the final finding on the matter. There are no other avenues for an appeal within the Center process.

[Advocates can support the athlete survivor around the decision and processing as well as updating safety planning and support/self-care strategies.](#)

CASE STUDY

Amelia is a 19 year old Fencer who wants to report sexual abuse by her coach to the USCSS. Pam is an advocate at ABC Rape Crisis Center.

01 Before the initial report, Pam talks with Amelia about the USCSS process, including the timeline of up to 2 years in some cases. Pam shares that the investigation will take several months, and if there are sanctions or findings against the coach, the coach will have the right to appeal the process in an arbitration hearing. Amelia decides she would like to report the abuse to the USCSS. Pam talks with Amelia about setting accurate expectations around what the process could look like and how it may differ from a criminal investigation. They work on a safety and self-care plan for Amelia before she submits the report of abuse. Pam refers Amelia for additional counseling and support services.

02 Amelia writes out the report on the online system. Pam reviews and supports Amelia while she writes the report by talking with her through what happened, creating an accurate timeline, and determining what information to include in the report. Pam is there to support Amelia in making the report clear and concise while supporting any retraumatization that can occur while Amelia writes the report. Throughout this process, Pam invites Amelia to take breaks as needed, pauses to incorporate a somatic reset exercise, and gets Amelia water.

03 Amelia is contacted by USCSS for an interview. Amelia requests that Pam join via the phone and USCSS reschedules the interview for when both of them are available.

04 Pam provides an office space, writing utensils, fidget and grounding toys, and water for Amelia to take the interview with SafeSport. They come up with a list of questions Amelia has before the call and ensure she is prepared. Pam sits with Amelia through the interview and listens to the conversation. At the end of the interview, the Investigator asks Amelia if she has any questions and Pam reminds her of the questions she had written down. Afterwards, Pam invites Amelia to take a walk with her to ground herself and practices grounding exercises. They talk through what parts were most retraumatizing and come up with ideas Amelia can advocate for herself in further conversations. Pam talks with Amelia about any concerns or changes she might need for her safety plan. After speaking with the Investigator and learning of next steps, Pam can support Amelia in better understanding how to stay safe as others are contacted.

05 Amelia names several witnesses and USCSS lets her know they will be contacted for interviews. Amelia and Pam adjust her safety plan given that more people in the fencing academy may become aware of the report of abuse.

06 USCSS placed the coach on temporary suspension during the investigation. The coach appeals the temporary suspension. Amelia's fencing academy is in an uproar for the coach's suspension. Several witness that were contacted by USCSS start asking fencers in the academy if they were the person who reported the abuse. Amelia and Pam work to make a plan for Amelia to take a leave from the academy because she is worried about retaliation.

CASE STUDY, CONTINUED

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- 07** Amelia reports concerns about retaliation to USCSS. Pam supports Amelia in documenting the retaliation by helping her create a document where she can write the date, time, and location of the retaliation and to attach any evidence such as screenshots or emails to the document.
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- 08** The temporary suspension is upheld. USCSS investigation continues for 8 months. Amelia doesn't hear from USCSS very often. Pam puts together reminders every month to ask USCSS for an update and helps Amelia send an email follow up.
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- 09** 9 months later, Amelia gets news that the investigation is concluded and the findings of a permanent ban of the coach are sent to her. Amelia talks with Pam about the investigation report and findings, including some very explicit details shared by the coach and language that blames Amelia for the abuse and claims it was consensual. Pam helps Amelia think through safety moving forward and provide crisis intervention counseling. Pam schedules for Amelia to receive more counseling and support.
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- 10** Amelia is notified that the coach is appealing the ban through arbitration. Amelia is contacted by the USCSS arbitration team. She asks to have Pam join as her support person. The calls are scheduled with both Amelia and Pam available. Pam helps Amelia think through the arbitration where she will be on a Zoom call with the coach.
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- 11** Pam joins Amelia during the arbitration hearing as Amelia's support person. They maintain a text chain so they can talk during the hearing. After 2 days of arbitration hearings, the arbitrator makes a final finding that the ban will be removed because there was not sufficient evidence of abuse.
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- 12** Amelia is devastated and angry. She talks with Pam about the decision and how she feels like she can not be a fencer anymore. Pam and Amelia adjust her safety plan to incorporate ways to connect with others outside of the fencing community and utilize other forms of self-care. Amelia decides to relocate back to her home state. Pam connects Amelia to the local rape crisis center. Pam checks in with Amelia every month and keeps in mind any changes in Amelia's life that may impact the safety plan.
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- 13** Years later Amelia reached out to Pam and ABC center to see if she can become an advocate for policy change to end abuse in sport. Pam connects Amelia to an advocacy training program at The Athlete Survivors' Assist.