International Olympic Committee

EDUCATING ATHLETES ABOUT CYBER ABUSE

DAKAR 2026



Developed by the IOC Health, Medicine and Science Department.

This guide provides general educational information only. Laws, platform policies and available reporting mechanisms vary by country and platform and may change over time. The guide is not legal advice. References to third-party websites, tools or services are provided for information purposes only. These services are operated independently of the IOC and may change over time.

INTRODUCTION

For young athletes, social media can be a positive way to share their journey, connect with fans and use their voice. But increased attention, especially around major competitions, can also expose them to online abuse.

At Paris 2024 and Milano Cortina 2026, the IOC's monitoring service identified more than 24,000 abusive posts targeting athletes and officials. This guide is designed for **the adults supporting young athletes at Dakar 2026**, with practical advice on preparing before the Games, responding to online abuse and making sure athletes know where to get help.



"Online presence is no longer optional for Olympians, it's a fundamental part of how we connect with fans, represent our values, and sustain our careers through sponsorships and partnerships. But with that visibility comes vulnerability. Online abuse can have a real emotional and psychological impact, especially during major events when athletes are already under immense pressure."

Bruno Fratus, IOC Mental Health Ambassador

01 UNDERSTANDING ONLINE ABUSE



What do we know about athletes being online?

- A recent study has shown that social media is used on a daily basis by most athletes – and may impact sleep, performance, mental health and well-being. We break down the key results and provide some advice for using social media in a healthier way here: Expert advice: Protecting your mental health on social media
- Most athletes use social media every day, and research suggests that spending more time online may be associated with stronger negative effects.
- Social media can disrupt sleep and recovery, which in turn can affect mood, concentration, injury risk and performance.
- Constant comparison and pressure to maintain an online image can lower confidence and affect body image.
- Used actively and with clear limits, social media can bring real encouragement, connection and support.

What is online abuse?

- Online abuse is any behaviour online that intimidates, threatens, degrades or harms you – whether it comes from one account or many.
- It can come from strangers, anonymous or fake accounts, bots, or people you know, and can happen on social media, messaging apps, email, gaming platforms or comment sections.

Did you know? The IOC is committed to helping prevent, identify and respond to online abuse affecting athletes at the Olympic Games. Click here for more information. How the IOC is tackling the growing threat of online abuse in sport

Why athletes may be at increased risk during major events

- As an athlete, social media public profile and follower numbers can grow rapidly overnight, bringing attention from people who do not know you.
- Abuse can spike around specific events; after a result, a loss, a controversial officiating decision or a selection announcement.
- Global audiences mean messages can arrive around the clock, across time zones – including when you are trying to rest or recover.
- Off-field events and public statements can also trigger abuse. Comments on political or social issues, sponsorship or personal announcements, old posts resurfacing, or being caught up in a news story can draw comments that might include abuse, sometimes from people with no interest in the sport itself.
- This does not mean that we should avoid speaking out or sharing content online. It means being aware that increased visibility and public attention can sometimes attract abuse, so athletes can plan for it and know where to get support.

Potential impact on wellbeing, safety and performance

- Online abuse can affect athletes' sleep, concentration, confidence and mood, and can increase anxiety – especially in the lead-up to or around competition.
- It can also lead to worry about personal safety or that of family members.
- These are normal reactions. Watch for signs of distress, such as changes in mood, sleep or phone use, and keep communication open and non-judgemental.
- **Be alert to grooming** – individuals offering gifts, special attention or requesting secrecy or private images.
- Recognising signs early and encouraging an environment that is open to asking for support has the potential to protect both wellbeing and performance.

02 BEFORE THE EVENT: PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS



The following guidance is designed to help you engage with young athletes about being online. Use it to start simple, age-appropriate conversations about their social media use, what they share, who they interact with and how being online makes them feel. The aim is not to make young athletes responsible for managing online risks themselves, but to help them make informed choices and know that they can come to you or another trusted adult for support.

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

Help young athletes understand and reflect on their day-to-day social media use

- **Encourage them to notice how they feel after being online.** If certain accounts or content leave them feeling uncomfortable, show them how to unfollow, mute or use "Not interested" to change what they see.
- **Ask simple reflective questions:** How much time do you spend online? When do you use it – before training, after a result, in bed? How does it make you feel?
- **Help them set healthy habits:**
  - use screen-time tools to track their use;
  - agree set times for checking social media;
  - switch off notifications during training, recovery and before sleep.
- **Reinforce the positives.** Encourage them to stay connected with the people and communities close to them while they are away from their home environment.
- **Watch for changes.** Changes in mood, sleep or phone use, or withdrawing from teammates, can be early signs that something online is affecting them. Check in gently.

ONCE YOU ARRIVE

Below are a few small but important steps you can recommend that increase protection and safety when participating at a major sporting event.

1 Lock down accounts

- Set accounts to **private** and review who follows them.
- Limit who can **message, comment or reply** (e.g. followers only). Unexpected messages from strangers are the most common route to sextortion and grooming.

2 Hide location

- Turn off location for social media and camera apps.
- Post after leaving a place, not while there.
- Check photos and videos for anything that reveals a location: Village accommodation, room numbers, accreditation passes, team transport are all better kept private.

3 Know the tools

- **Mute** or **Restrict** accounts to stop seeing them without the account being notified.
- Use **hidden words** (META apps) to filter abusive comments.
- After a high-profile moment, switch on **Limits** (Instagram) or turn off comments.
- If abuse is received, save evidence before muting or blocking, and to tell someone about it.

4 Secure accounts

- Turn on **multi-factor authentication**, using an authenticator app rather than text messages where possible.
- Use a strong, different password for each account, and secure their email first.
- Platforms never ask for passwords or codes by message. Don't click links in "account warning" messages.

5 Brief family and friends

- Ask them not to share private information including locations, information about accommodation or schedules, or tag them in real time.
- Let them know they may also be targeted, and who to contact for help.

03 RESPONDING TO ONLINE ABUSE



Your role: Young athletes should never have to judge how serious something is. If something online has upset, frightened or confused them, that is enough reason for them to tell you. Your job is to listen, reassure them, assess the situation and act. Use the guidance below to decide next steps and follow your NOC's and the IOC's safeguarding procedures throughout.

Receiving a concern

- Listen calmly and without judgement. Thank them for telling you. Make clear it is not their fault and they are not in trouble.
- Don't promise to keep it secret. Explain that you may need to share it with others who can help, and only with those who need to know.
- Don't take away their phone or restrict their access as a reaction. Young people often don't report because they fear losing their devices.
- Don't contact or confront the person responsible.
- Make a note of what they told you, in their words, with the date and time.

Disengage or respond?

- Young athletes should not reply to abusive messages or respond publicly.
- Any public statement should be agreed with and handled by the NOC communications team, not the athlete.
- In sextortion cases, the athlete should stop all contact. They must not pay, send images or comply with demands. Keep the conversation; don't delete it.

ASSESS THE SITUATION (FOR YOUR USE ONLY)

Use these levels to decide your response. Never use them to decide whether a young athlete's concern deserves attention.

LOW

Negativity, criticism or unkind comments:

Help them mute, hide or filter the content and switch off notifications. Check in on how they are feeling.

MEDIUM

Abuse, hate speech, discrimination, harassment or impersonation:

Save the evidence, report to the platform, and inform the IOC Safeguarding Officer and the athlete's NOC.

HIGH

Threats of violence, stalking, doxxing, sextortion, sexual images, grooming, or any risk to the athlete or someone else:

Treat this as a child protection concern. Inform the IOC Safeguarding Officer immediately. Police and parents or guardians will be involved through the safeguarding process, unless informing a parent would put the child at risk. If there is immediate danger, call local emergency services.

If in doubt, escalate. Anything involving sexual content, requests for images, or an adult seeking private contact with a young athlete is always high level.

Preserve evidence

- You or another designated adult should collect the evidence, not the athlete. This avoids them repeatedly viewing harmful content.
- Save evidence before reporting, blocking or muting, because content may disappear.
- Capture the full screen: username, profile link, the post's URL, date and time.
- Keep a log: date, time, platform, account, what happened and what action was taken.
- Store evidence securely, in line with safeguarding and data protection procedures, and share it only with those who need it.

Never screenshot, save, forward or show sexual images of anyone under 18, even as evidence. Doing so is illegal in most countries. Record the URLs, usernames and account details only, and seek advice from the IOC Safeguarding Officer.

If an athlete is impersonated or hacked

- Help them report fake accounts using the platform's impersonation form.
- If their account has been hacked, support them to:
  - secure their email account first;
  - change passwords and sign out of all devices;
  - turn on multi-factor authentication;
  - remove unfamiliar third-party apps.
- Use only the platform's official recovery tools. Warn the athlete about "recovery services" that contact them offering help; these are usually scams.
- Work with the NOC communications team to warn followers not to engage with the fake or compromised account.

If intimate images are shared or threatened

- Reassure the athlete: it is not their fault, they are not in trouble, and help is available. Young athletes are increasingly targeted by sextortion, often by people posing as someone their own age.
- Make sure they don't pay or send more images, and stop all contact.
- Inform the IOC Safeguarding Officer immediately. This is a child protection concern and will involve the police.
- Take It Down helps under-18s, or adults whose images were taken when they were under 18, to stop those images being shared on participating platforms. The image never leaves the young person's device. (StopNCII.org is for adults aged 18+ only.)

Look after the athlete

- Check in regularly, not just once. Online abuse can affect sleep, mood, focus and performance.
- Encourage them to step away from their phone, switch off notifications and avoid searching their own name or re-reading comments.
- Support their normal routine: sleep, training, recovery and time with teammates.
- Remind them that what strangers write online does not define them.
- Make sure they know where to get support, including onsite mental health practitioners.
- **If you are concerned about their safety or that they may harm themselves, follow the Games Mental Health Emergency Action Plan and seek urgent help.**

Look after yourself

Supporting young people through online abuse can be distressing. Talk to your team or the IOC Safeguarding Officers if you need support.



Reporting to platforms

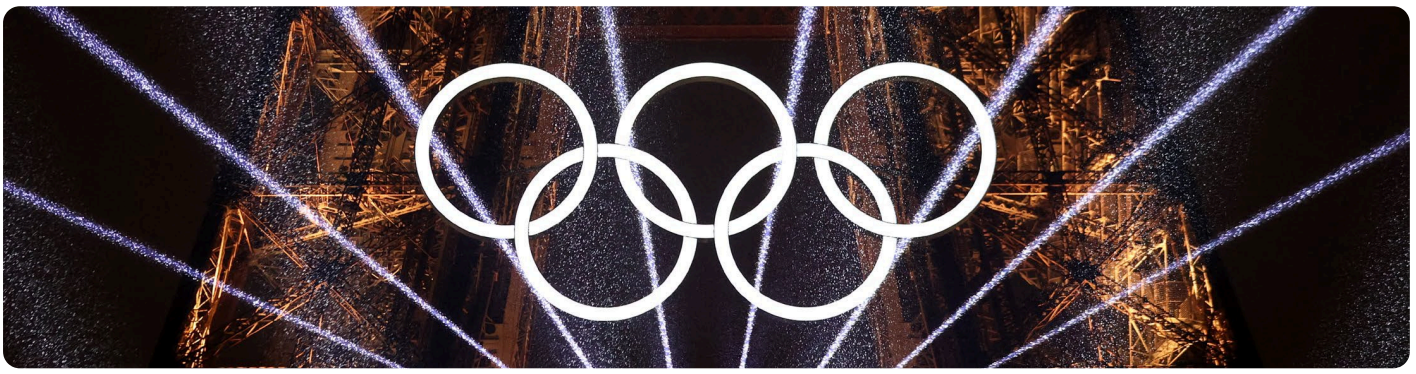
You can help young athletes report content, or report it on their behalf. Use the links below for each platform's latest reporting process:

X:	https://help.x.com/en/safety-and-security/report-a-post
Instagram:	https://help.instagram.com/2922067214679225/
Facebook:	https://www.facebook.com/help/1380418588640631
TikTok:	https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/tools-and-guides/reporting
YouTube:	https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2802027?hl=en-GB
Snapchat:	https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-us/articles/7012399221652
Threads:	https://help.instagram.com/6602413966453273/
WhatsApp:	https://faq.whatsapp.com/414631957536067/

Platform policies change often, so check these links for current processes. Where possible, tell the platform the account holder is under 18; many platforms prioritise these reports.

What to expect after reporting

- In most cases, the reported account is not told who reported it.
- Platforms review content against their own rules. Responses can take from a few hours to several days.
- Content may be hidden or limited rather than removed. That still reduces who sees it.
- If content isn't removed, you can often appeal or ask the NOC or the IOC to escalate.
- Report each post or account separately and keep your own copy of the evidence.



SUPPORT AT DAKAR 2026

- **Cyber Abuse Protection Service (CAPS):** Youth Olympic athletes are covered by an IOC service that monitors public posts and comments on major platforms and reports abuse for action. It doesn't see private messages, so concerns in direct messages, group chats or messaging apps must be reported by the athlete or through you.
- **IOC Safeguarding Officers** are based in the Mind Body and Me Space in the Olympic Village. They are your first point of escalation for any medium- or high-level concern.
- **NOC and International Federation safeguarding or welfare officers** can help report and escalate concerns.
- **Onsite mental health practitioners** are available in the Village Polyclinic.

Reporting to law enforcement

- Cases involving threats of violence, stalking, sextortion or blackmail, doxxing, sexual images, or grooming of a young athlete should be referred to the police. Coordinate this through the IOC Safeguarding Officer.
- **If there is immediate danger, call local emergency services straight away.**
- Laws differ between countries. A report may be made in the host country, the athlete's home country, or both. The IOC Safeguarding Officer and NOC can advise.
- Bring the evidence log, URLs and account details, and ask for a crime or reference number.
- Parents or guardians should be informed and involved, unless doing so would put the young athlete at risk.

After the Games

- Online abuse often continues after the Games. Make sure there is a clear handover of responsibility before they return home.
- Agree who will follow up with the athlete and their family, and who will make referrals to local services or authorities in their country.
- Check in with the athlete after they return home, especially if they were heavily targeted.



05 CONTENT FOR YOUNG ATHLETES



The final section of this manual contains guidance written directly for young athletes. Consider sharing it with them so they know what to do and that they can always come to you.

If something online makes you feel upset, scared, uncomfortable or confused, tell someone. It doesn't matter if it seems small. You don't have to work out how serious it is – that's the job of the adults around you.

WHAT TO DO:

Stop
Don't reply to the person or message.

Don't delete it
A trusted adult may need to see it.

Tell a trusted adult
A parent or carer, your coach, your team's safeguarding officer, or another adult you trust. They will help you report it.

Step away
Put your phone down and do something that makes you feel calm.

If someone asks you for photos, or threatens to share pictures of you:

It is **not your fault**, and you won't be in trouble for telling someone.

Don't send anything and don't pay. Stop replying.

Don't screenshot or forward the pictures. Tell a trusted adult straight away.

If you feel unsafe right now, tell an adult near you or call the emergency number for the country you're in.

Remember: If it made you feel bad, it's worth telling someone. You're never alone.

Key contacts:

- IOC Safeguarding Officer (Games-time): safeguardingofficer@olympic.org
- Dakar2026 Helpline: 1515 English and French service. Available 24/7
- Local emergency number (host country): 17 (Police)

Useful tools:

- StopNCII.org – stops intimate images being shared (18+)
- takeitdown.ncmec.org – removes intimate images of under-18s
- haveibeenpwned.com – checks whether your details have been in a data breach