

Advice about bullying in sports clubs

Is it bullying or banter?

We often hear from individuals or parents/carers about their concerns about bullying in a sports environment. We understand that bullying can happen anywhere at any time and that it does happen in sports clubs. Often people taking part in sports do not feel able to express how they feel if they are being bullied in case they get told that they are weak or they are worried they may get kicked off the squad. We often hear that some people who fear reprisals or the bullying getting worse.

Are you being bullied in sports?

If you're involved in an equestrian sport and you're feeling upset at the way you're being treated by other children or adults involved in the sport then there are things you can do about that. If your people make fun of you during a competition or at training, or try to upset you to put you off so that you don't want to take part in training sessions, that could be bullying if it keeps happening. It is important to try and trust your instincts as to whether it is bullying or something that is just a joke between all the team. If it upsets you or it becomes persistent then this could be bullying.

There are a number of types of bullying that can occur in sport clubs. You may find name calling and verbal bullying where someone is being given cruel nicknames, taunted, threats and intimidation. A person may be subject to physical bullying which could be hitting, slapping, tripping and anything else that causes physical harm. We also hear about social bullying in sports where players will gossip about others, leave someone out or embarrass players in front of others.

What action you can take?

- Speak to your parents or carer or an adult who you feel able to confide in
- Ask your parents to contact your team coach and explain the situation
- Keep a diary of what happens including dates, times and witnesses of the incident
- Ask friends to back up what you say if this is possible. Sometimes others may not want to get involved as they might be worried the bully will bully them.
- If the problem isn't resolved, your parents should ask the coach or team manager for a copy of the complaints and/or bullying policy.

Advice for parents

It can be really difficult for a parent to tackle bullying in sports if they are concerned their child is going through something like this. Your first instinct may be to protect your child or get involved but that may not help your child in the long term. Signs to look out for:

- Has your child suddenly lost interest in the sport?
- Has your child refused to attend or make excuses not to go?
- Do they say they are feeling unwell or look anxious about going?
- Have you noticed a change in their behaviour such as more snappy than usual or perhaps feeling low?
- Do they get agitated before going to their sessions?

If your child has confided in you, it is important to listen to what they say and allow them to have a say in the action. They may want to take their time as it may be a sensitive situation, so as important as it is to go at their pace it is essential to also encourage them to get this sorted sooner rather than later before it escalates. Understand and

respect their concerns and fears which are very real to them and need sensitivity. They may be worried they will get further bullied or kicked off the team or perhaps substituted all the time.

Agree a way forward with your child, and plan to meet with the coach as a united front. Speak to the coach, let them know you understand that banter can be high-spirited in sports but now it is becoming persistent it is damaging confidence and increasing anxiety and this is bullying. Be assertive with the coach if you need to be as we have heard from parents that a coach or sports leader had attempted to sweep things under the carpet. Ask the coach for a copy of the anti-bullying policy too.

It is important to support your child through this process too. Give your child a listening ear, space to talk and reassurance. Please read our advice on what to do if your child is being bullied.

Bullying on the sidelines

There have been many reports and accounts of bullying amongst parents and supporters who are spectating. This has resulted in extreme cases, parents or supporters being banned from watching their children participating in sport. Some of the bullying reported has been parents abusing other people's children during the competitions, threats and even physical violence. There have also been reports that the bullying has escalated on social media. This should not be tolerated by the clubs and coaches in any shape or form. If you have experienced this, speak to the coach and ask for them to intervene and take necessary action.

<http://www.bullying.co.uk/general-advice/advice-about-bullying-in-sports-clubs/>

<http://www.standupfoundation.com/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/>