

WHAT IS ABUSE?

Forms of Abuse

Abuse is the maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others (e.g. via the Internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults or another child or children. There are four main types of abuse:

PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, EMOTIONAL, NEGLECT

An individual may abuse or neglect a child directly or may be responsible for abuse by failing to prevent another person from harming that child. Bullying is also abusive behaviour, which generally incorporates more than one of the four types of abusive behaviour. Those involved with children should be aware that abuse, neglect, and safeguarding issues are rarely standalone events that can be covered by one definition or label and in most cases, multiple issues will overlap with one another.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical abuse may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of or deliberately induces illness in a child.

Examples of physical abuse in sport include extreme physical punishments, forcing a child into training and competition that exceeds the capacity of his or her immature and growing body or limitations of a disability, assaulting a person, or where the child is given drugs to enhance performance or in the case of a child, delay puberty.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative sexual acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual photographic or online images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via text or the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child, which causes severe and adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless, unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or "making fun" of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing them from participating in normal social interaction. It may involve a child seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another as well as serious bullying (including online bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children.

Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may also occur alone.

Examples of emotional abuse in sport include subjecting children to constant criticism, name-calling, and sarcasm or bullying. It could also include their regular exclusion from an activity, such as unjustified non-selection for a team, or more subtle actions, such as staring at or ignoring a child. Putting participants under consistent pressure to perform to unrealistically high standards is also a form of emotional abuse.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the severe impairment of their health or development. Neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment); protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger; ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate caregivers); or ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Examples of neglect in sport include failing to ensure children's safety, exposing them to undue cold, heat, or unsuitable weather conditions, or exposing them to unnecessary risk of injury.

Bullying

Bullying is often considered to be a fifth type of abuse, but when it does occur, it usually has elements of one or more of the four categories identified. The bully can be a parent who pushes too hard, a coach or manager with a 'win at all costs' attitude or another intimidating child. It should also be recognised that bullying can take place in the virtual world of social networking sites, emails or text messages (online bullying is sometimes referred to as cyberbullying). Bullying is serious and must not be ignored, and in common with all other forms of abuse, the victim should be supported through what can be a traumatic experience.

Bullying will not just go away. Bullies can be very cunning and develop strategies to ensure their actions remain unnoticed by anyone except the victim.

Bullying takes many forms, but ultimately, it is the perception of the victim that determines whether or not they are being bullied rather than the intention of the bully.

There are opportunities to bully at any parkour gym/club or activity. It is the way that bullying concerns are dealt with which makes the difference between life being tolerable or becoming a misery for the victim.

Poor Practice

Poor practice arises when the needs of children are not afforded the necessary priority, compromising their well-being. Poor practice can easily turn into abuse if it is not dealt with as soon as concerns are raised or reported. Gyms/clubs which allow poor practice to go unchallenged may find that their culture is one which allows abuse to exist and be accepted as the norm.

Examples of poor practice may include shouting, excessive training, creation of intra-club 'elite squads', ridicule of children or children's errors, ignoring health and safety guidelines and failing to adhere to the gym's/club's code of conduct.

Signs of Abuse

Possible Signs of Abuse Include, but Are Not Limited To:

- The child says they have been abused, asks a question or makes a comment, which gives rise to that inference.
- There is no reasonable or consistent explanation for a child's injury, the injury is unusual in kind or location, or there have been a number of injuries, and there is a pattern to the injuries.
- The child's behaviour stands out from the group as either being extreme model behaviour or extremely challenging behaviour, or there is a sudden or significant change in the child's behaviour.
- The child's development is delayed, the child loses or gains weight, or the child's general well-being deteriorates.
- The child appears neglected, e.g. dirty, hungry, or inadequately clothed.
- The child is reluctant to go home or has been openly rejected by his/her parents or carers.
- Inappropriate behaviour displayed by other members of the club or any other person working with children, for example, inappropriate sexual comments, excessive one-to-one attention beyond the requirements of their usual role or responsibilities, or inappropriate sharing of images.

The Department for Education Advice [“What to do if you're worried a child is being abused”](#) provides advice in identifying child abuse. The NSPCC website is also a good source of information and advice. [Understanding child abuse: types, signs, and support | NSPCC.](#)