

17. GUIDANCE ON IDENTIFYING THE TYPE OF CHILD ABUSE

GUIDELINES FOR IDENTIFYING TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

The following examples are ways in which children may be abused or harmed, either within or outwith sport. In Scotland child abuse is defined as follows:

“Children may be in need of protection where their basic needs are not being met, in a manner appropriate to their age and stage of development, and they will be at risk through avoidable acts of commission or omission on the part of their parent(s), sibling(s) or other relative(s), or a carer (i.e. the person while not a parent who has actual custody of the child)”

This definition includes placing children at risk through something a person has done to them or something a person is failing to do for them. For those working in the field of child care and protection the definition gets broken down further into categories of abuse, namely:

- i) Emotional Abuse**
- ii) Physical Injury**
- iii) Physical Neglect**
- iv) Sexual Abuse**

These categories are not mutually exclusive, for example, a child experiencing physical abuse is undoubtedly experiencing emotional abuse as well. The following definitions of the different types of child abuse are taken from “Protecting Children- A Shared Responsibility, Guidance on Inter-agency Co-operation” (Scottish Office, 1998).

Identifying child abuse

Although the physical and behavioural signs listed may be symptomatic of abuse, they may not always be an indicator and, conversely, children experiencing abuse may not demonstrate any of these signs.

Child abuse is often difficult to recognise. It is not the responsibility of anyone involved in sport to decide whether or not a child has been abused. This is the role of trained professionals. We all however, have a duty to act on any concerns about abuse.

(i) EMOTIONAL ABUSE

“failure to provide for a child’s basic emotional needs such as to have a severe effect on the behaviour and development of the child”

This could include making a child feel worthless or unloved, inadequate or not valued; inappropriate expectations being imposed on children for their age or stage of development; the corruption or exploitation of a child, or causing them frequently to feel frightened or in danger; persistent exposure to domestic abuse; failing to provide a child with love, care and affection.

Examples of emotional abuse in sport

- Persistent failure to show any respect to a child e.g. continually ignoring a child
- Constantly humiliating a child by telling them they are useless
- Continually being aggressive towards a child making them feel frightened
- Acting in a way which is detrimental to the child's self-esteem

Signs which **may** raise concerns about emotional abuse include:

- low self-esteem
- running away
- extremes of passivity or aggression
- significant decline in concentration
- indiscriminate friendliness and neediness
- self-harm or mutilation

(ii) PHYSICAL ABUSE

"actual or attempted physical injury to a child, including the administration of toxic substances, where there is knowledge or reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented"

This could include deliberately hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise harming a child. Physical injury may also occur where someone knowingly fails to take action to protect a child from physical harm.

Most children sustain accidental cuts and bruises throughout childhood. These are likely to occur in parts of the body like elbows, shins and knees. An important indicator of physical abuse is where the bruises or injuries are unexplained or the explanation does not fit the injury or the injury appears on parts of the body where accidental injuries are unlikely e.g. on the cheeks or thighs. The age of the child must also be considered. It is possible that some injuries may have occurred for other reasons e.g. skin disorders, rare bone diseases.

Physical injury may also be caused when a parent feigns the symptoms of or deliberately causes ill health to a child whom they are looking after. This is known as Fabricated Fictitious Syndrome by Proxy. A parent may do this because they need or enjoy the attention they receive through having a sick child.

Examples of physical abuse in sport

Bodily harm that may be caused by:

- over training or dangerous training of athletes
- over playing an athlete
- failure to do a risk assessment of physical limits or pre-existing medical conditions
- administering, condoning or failure to intervene in drug use

Signs which **may** raise concerns about physical abuse include:

- refusal to discuss injuries
- improbable excuses given to explain injuries
- running away
- excessive physical punishment
- avoiding activities due to injuries or possibility of injuries being discovered
- aggression toward others
- fear of parents being approached for an explanation
- untreated injuries
- unexplained injuries, particularly if recurrent

(iii) NEGLECT

“This occurs where a child’s essential needs are not met and this is likely to cause impairment to physical health and development. Such needs include food, clothing, cleanliness, shelter and warmth. A lack of appropriate care, including deprivation of access to health care, may result in persistent or severe exposure, through negligence, to circumstances which endanger the child”

As well as being the result of a deliberate act, neglect can also be caused through the omission or the failure to act or protect e.g. the failure to obtain medical attention for a child.

Examples of neglect in sport

- exposing a child to extreme weather conditions e.g. heat and cold
- failing to seek medical attention for injuries
- exposing a child to risk of injury through the use of unsafe equipment
- exposing a child to a hazardous environment without a proper risk assessment of the activity
- failing to provide adequate nutrition and water

Signs which **may** raise concerns about physical neglect include:

- constant hunger
- constant tiredness
- untreated medical problems
- poor peer relationships
- poor personal hygiene and/or poor state of clothing
- frequent lateness or unexplained non-attendance (particularly at school)
- low self-esteem
- stealing

(iv) SEXUAL ABUSE

“Any child may be deemed to have been sexually abused when any person(s), by design or neglect, exploits the child, directly or indirectly, in any activity intended to lead to the sexual arousal or other forms of gratification of that person or other person(s) including organised networks. This definition holds whether or not there has been genital contact and whether or not the child is said to have initiated or consented to, the behaviour”

This includes forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities whether or not they are aware of or consent to what is happening. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, and non-contact acts such as forcing children to look at or be involved in the production of pornographic material, to watch sexual activities or encouraging them to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Some of the aforementioned activities can occur through the internet.

Boys and girls are sexually abused by males and females, including persons to whom they are and are not related and by other young people. This includes people from all walks of life.

Some children may never be able to tell someone they have been sexually abused. Changes in a child's behaviour may be a sign something has happened. In some cases there may be no physical or behavioural signs to suggest that a child has been sexually abused.

Examples of sexual abuse in sport

- exposure to sexually explicit inappropriate language or jokes
- showing a child pornographic material or using a child to produce such material
- inappropriate touching
- sexual intercourse and/or sexual activity with a child under 16

The following signs **may** raise concerns about sexual abuse:

- lack of trust in adults or over-familiarity with adults, fear of a particular adult
- sleep disturbance (nightmares, bed-wetting, fear of sleeping alone)
- girls taking over the mothering role
- reluctance or refusal to participate in physical activity or to change clothes for games
- drug, alcohol or solvent abuse
- sexual promiscuity, over-sexualised behaviour, compulsive masturbation
- unusual interest in the genitals of adults, children or animals
- bruises, scratches, bite marks to the thighs or genital areas
- discomfort/difficulty in walking or sitting
- urinary tract problems, vaginal infections or genital damage
- stained underwear, soiling or wetting
- fear of bathrooms, showers, closed doors
- having irrational fears
- psychosomatic factors e.g. recurrent abdominal or headache pain
- social isolation - being withdrawn or introverted, poor peer relationship
- running away from home
- school problems e.g. falling standards, truancy
- low self-esteem
- display of sexual knowledge beyond the child's age
- eating disorders
- anxiety, depression, self-harm/mutilation, suicide attempts
- pregnancy
- fear of medical examinations
- genital odour, venereal/sexually transmitted diseases
- itchiness, soreness, discharge, unexplained bleeding from the rectum, vagina or penis
- abnormal sexual drawings
- developmental regression/acting younger than their age
- 'grooming' including over the internet

Grooming

Grooming is a set of behaviours that normally fall under sexual abuse. These are practices - which may appear to be carried out with the best of intentions - are used by people who sexually abuse children to 'groom' their victim:

How abusers "target and groom" - they:

- engineer 1-1 situations
- develop a special friendship
- make promises of success
- engage family, other coaches, people of influence
- use text, internet chat rooms
- have "special secrets"
- extend the relationship from the sports venue to socialising
- buy gifts to buy affection
- have unnecessary physical contact with young people e.g. excessive handling/supporting, cuddling, kissing, "friendly" taps
- alienate curlers and coaches from their peers

