

# Preventing Bullying: What Great Coaches Need to Know



U.S. CENTER FOR  
**SAFESPORT**  
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**Preventing Bullying:  
What Great Coaches Need to Know**

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction.....  | 2  |
| 2. Understanding Bullying Behavior.....   | 3  |
| a. Distinguishing Bullying.....   | 4  |
| b. Methods of Bullying.....   | 6  |
| c. Cyberbullying.....   | 6  |
| d. Physical Health Effects of Being Bullied.....                                  | 7  |
| e. ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience).....  | 7  |
| f. Mental Health Effects of Being Bullied.....                                    | 9  |
| g. Who is Involved? .....   | 10 |
| h. The Prevalence of Bullying.....  | 15 |
| 3. Preventing Bullying Behavior.....  | 17 |
| a. Establishing Trust and Paying Attention to Athlete’s Feelings.....             | 17 |
| b. Helping Athletes Control Their Emotions.....                                   | 19 |
| c. Promoting Team Cohesion.....   | 19 |
| d. Additional Ways Coaches Can Provide Opportunities to Promote Team Bonding..... | 21 |
| e. Supporting Athletes to Make Responsible Decisions.....                         | 22 |
| 4. Responding to Bullying Behavior.....   | 23 |
| a. Encouraging Athletes Who Witness Bullying to Become Allies.....                | 23 |
| b. Teaching Athletes How to Intervene if They Witness Bullying.....               | 25 |
| c. Providing Possible Action Steps for Athletes.....                              | 25 |
| d. Coaching Strategies for when Athletes Report Bullying .....                    | 26 |
| 5. Scenarios.....   | 30 |
| 6. Appendix 1.....  | 35 |
| a. Glossary.....  | 35 |
| 7. Appendix 2.....  | 37 |
| a. Resources.....   | 37 |
| 8. References.....  | 40 |

# Introduction

Approximately 45 million children and youth participate in sports in the U.S every year.<sup>1</sup> Most young children cite “having fun” as their main reason for participating in sports. In addition to having fun and being with friends, other motivations include: improving skills, acquiring fitness, and experiencing the excitement of game play.

Participation in sports has many physical, mental and emotional benefits. In addition, playing sports positively affects personal development in areas such as self-esteem and leadership. Participation also builds character by teaching sportsmanship and discipline. Athletes who participate in sports develop a sense of belonging outside of the family and school community. Evidence shows that the quality of the coach is a large determining factor for the magnitude of these gains.<sup>2</sup>

This handbook is designed to educate coaches on the nature of bullying and its impact on children and youth, as well as the coaches’ role in preventing its occurrence on their teams. Prepared by Prevent Child Abuse America and the United States Center for Safe Sport, this handbook is intended for coaches working with athletes between the ages of 6-18.

The handbook is divided into four sections:

- 1) Understanding bullying behavior, with particular focus on vulnerable populations
- 2) Strategies to prevent bullying behavior
- 3) Strategies for responding to bullying behavior
- 4) Potential bullying scenarios to use in team discussions

A child’s first “team” is their family, but throughout life they will belong to many teams, such as study groups, clubs and work teams. As age and athletic ability increase, so does youth involvement in organized sport. To that end, highly competitive athletes are often spending more hours a week interacting with their coaches and teammates than they are with their families.

A coach’s influence cannot be overemphasized. Coaches build the skills that athletes need on and off the field. Coaching offers a unique opportunity to help athletes succeed in sports while simultaneously teaching valuable life lessons.

# Section One: Understanding Bullying Behavior

Bullying is defined as unprovoked, aggressive behavior among school-aged children and youth involving a real or perceived power imbalance. A power imbalance exists when an athlete exhibiting the bullying behavior has more “power,” either physically, socially, or emotionally, such as a higher social status, or is physically larger or emotionally intimidating.

For research purposes, bullying is defined as a behavior that is repeated over time. Given that youth sports require athletes to interact and work together on a frequent, if not daily, basis, a single incident may warrant cause for concern and intervention.

Anyone involved with bullying -- including **instigators, targets and witnesses** may face serious, lasting problems.<sup>3</sup>

**Instigator:** The athlete who initiates and engages in bullying behavior

**Target:** The athlete against whom the abuse is directed

**Witness:** The athlete(s) who sees the bullying behavior happening and either observes and does nothing or acts as an ally and intervenes.

The roles are complex and dynamic with some athletes playing multiple roles over time. The intent of the definition is to describe athlete’s behaviors at a given point in time, not to define and label their character.

## Distinguishing bullying

When distinguishing bullying from other behaviors, it is helpful to examine the relationship of the athletes involved. **Are they longstanding friends, taunting each other in a playful teasing manner, or do they have a history of conflict?** Pay attention to the expressions, body language and atmosphere surrounding them.

Rude Behaviors: Inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else. These behaviors are typically not meant to hurt, are spontaneous, and not necessarily repeated.

*Do you think you should be eating that donut?*

*I cannot believe you missed that pass; she was wide open.*

Mean Behaviors: Purposefully saying or doing something to hurt someone, but not as part of a pattern of behavior.

*You are only going in because I hurt my knee!*

*I can’t believe you are wearing that outfit...it’s so butch/gay!*

Whenever a coach is unsure of the intent, a word of caution on how teammates support each other may diffuse a potential bullying situation. By intervening, coaches might prevent an isolated incident of rudeness or meanness from becoming a pattern of bullying behavior. Preventing bullying makes team sports safer and likely increases performance levels by removing fear and negativity.

Conflict: Unlike bullying, a conflict is a struggle between two or more people who perceive they have incompatible goals or desires. Most conflicts arise in the moment because people of the same relative amount of power see the same situation from two different points of view.

*We could have easily scored more goals if you passed the ball to your teammates every once in a while.*

**Caution:** *These comments might be considered playful banter if the communication is among athletes known as close friends. If a coach is unsure or teammates raise concerns, the behavior should be treated as bullying. The likelihood for repetition, the likelihood that athletes might pretend there are no issues, and the fact that a coach or teammates might not have witnessed other incidents warrants action.*

Bullying behavior can take on a variety of different forms. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are **four types of bullying**:<sup>4</sup>

|   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
|  | <p><b>VERBAL</b><br/>Using words, statements, or insults in a negative way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name-calling</li><li>• Teasing</li><li>• Intimidation</li><li>• Threatening to cause harm</li></ul>  |  | <p><b>PHYSICAL</b><br/>Any type of unwanted physical force.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hitting</li><li>• Kicking</li><li>• Tripping</li><li>• Other forms of physical aggression</li></ul> |
|  | <p><b>SOCIAL</b><br/>Harming others through the manipulation and damage of their peer relationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spreading rumors</li><li>• Leaving out individuals</li><li>• Embarrassing someone</li><li>• Ignoring a teammate</li></ul> |  | <p><b>DAMAGE TO PROPERTY</b><br/>Damaging or threatening to damage an individual's personal belongings.</p>   |

## **Methods of bullying**

**Direct:** Aggressive behavior(s) that occur in the presence of the targeted individual. Direct aggression includes forms of physical bullying, verbal bullying, and damage to property.

**Indirect:** Aggressive behavior(s) that are not directly communicated at the targeted individual. Indirect aggression includes forms of relational and social bullying.<sup>5</sup>

## **Cyberbullying**

With the increased use of the Internet and social media by youth, reports of cyberbullying are rising. In 2014, over 25 percent of youth reported that they experienced bullying through technology. <sup>6</sup> The national Cyberbullying Research Center defines cyberbullying as: “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike the forms of bullying mentioned above, cyberbullies can be anonymous and potentially gain a much wider audience. Among the various methods that cyberbullies use include:

1. Sending negative messages over text, email, or a social media account
2. Spreading rumors over the Internet
3. Displaying hurtful messages online about another individual
4. Stealing account information to post damaging material as another person
5. Taking or circulating unwanted pictures of an individual<sup>8</sup>

The highest reported method of cyberbullying is through spreading rumors online (19.4%), followed by mean or hurtful comments online (12.8%).<sup>9</sup> Research also indicates that girls are more likely to be cyberbullied than boys with 38% of girls reporting cyberbullying as compared to 26% of boys reporting these same behaviors.<sup>10</sup>

## **Effects of being bullied**

Athletes who experience bullying do not feel safe, and athletes who do not feel safe cannot perform at the top of their game. When bullying is not addressed, athletes are at risk for physical and mental health consequences, as well as serious long-term damage.<sup>11</sup>

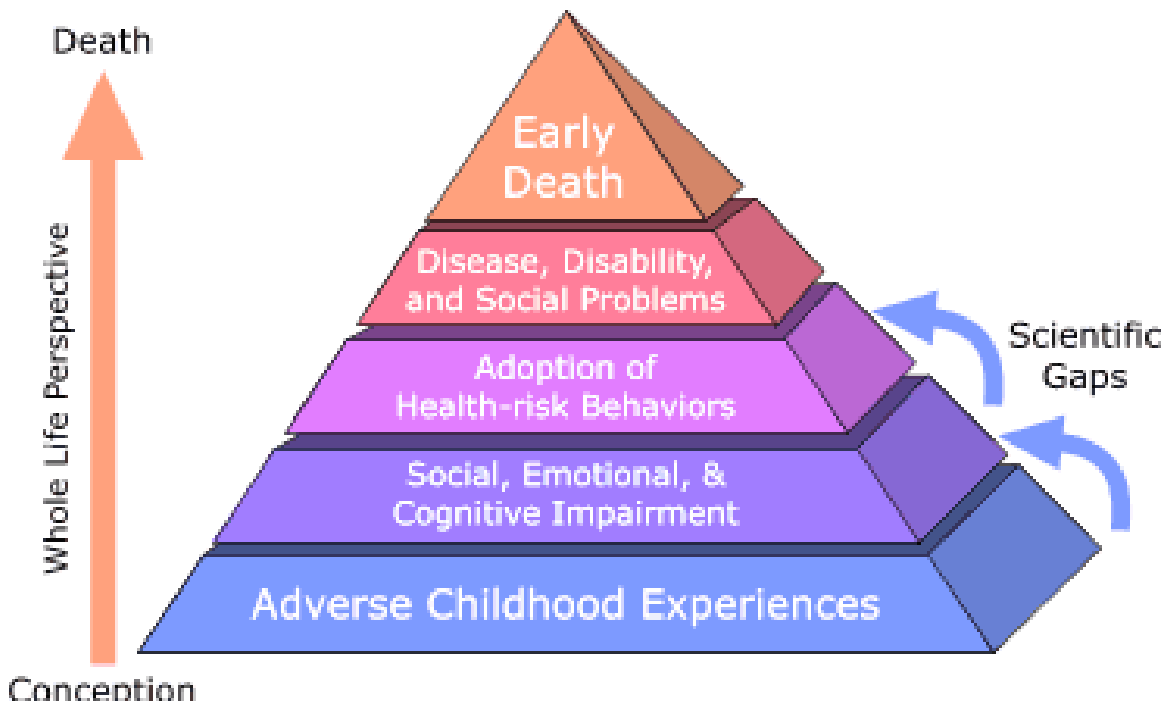
Victims of bullying are more likely than their peers to develop psychosomatic symptoms, or physical reactions from psychological damage. These symptoms can include, but are not limited to:<sup>12</sup>



## Potential physical health effects of being bullied

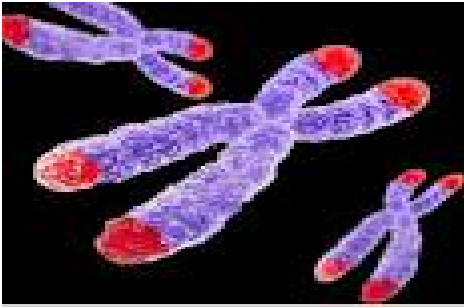
- Stomachaches
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Exhaustion
- Muscle pain
- Digestive issues

### Bullying is considered an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)<sup>13</sup>



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are specific painful experiences in childhood that have been proven to have a remarkably strong predictive effect on poor health. Bullying is considered an ACE, along with emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect in the home, exposure to domestic violence, hunger, loss of a parent through death, divorce or incarceration, household substance abuse or mental illness.

Recent research has found that the body responds to experiences of social pain and physical violence in a similar manner.<sup>14</sup> Being bullied creates social pain and puts the brain under significant stress. As a result, the body goes into “fight or flight” mode. When youth experience bullying regularly, the biological response, particularly the increased release of the stress hormone cortisol can have damaging effects on the digestive, circulatory and immune systems.<sup>15</sup>



Telomeres<sup>16</sup>

Children who experience ACEs such as bullying are also at-risk for telomere erosion. Telomeres are the protective ends of DNA strands. When they erode, children are at-risk for a decreased life span and early death.





## Potential mental health effects of being bullied

Victims of bullying may also suffer psychologically. In future years, athletes who are injured from sport might remember their cast or the hours spent at physical therapy, but they won't remember the *physical pain*. However, athletes who were excluded from a team outing or constantly criticized for their playing ability in front of their teammates, will most likely remember the *social pain*. The invisible scar bullying leaves behind gets under the skin and often lasts a lifetime.

Continuous episodes of bullying can cause a sense of learned helplessness. In other words, the person being bullied may learn to feel as if nothing they do will improve their situation, even if that is not true. As a result, unsupported victims may come to see themselves as weak with a shattered self-image. They start to believe what the bully is saying about them is true. The damage bullying does to a person's identity and self-esteem can cause a serious psychological reaction. The following is a summary of potential short- and long-term mental health effects bullied individuals might experience:

### Short -Term:

- Anger
- Generalized depression
- Generalized anxiety and panic attacks
- Anxiety related to the setting where the bullying occurred/may occur
- Withdrawal from normal activities
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Suicidal thoughts and feelings

### Long -Term:

- Difficulty trusting people
- Lingering feelings of anger
- Desire for revenge
- Interpersonal difficulties
- Avoidance of social interactions
- Low self-esteem and extreme social sensitivity
- Increased occurrences of bullying and peer abuse
- Suicidal thoughts and feelings

## Who is involved?

Bullying peaks in middle school, with a higher percentage of 6<sup>th</sup> graders reporting being bullied than 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. A higher percentage of white students report being bullied (24%) over African American (20%), Hispanic (19%) and Asian (9%) students.<sup>17</sup>

Boys are typically associated with physical bullying, while girls are more likely to be involved in social bullying. Yet, the roles played in bullying behavior are complex and dynamic, with some athletes playing multiple roles over time, and include those who encourage the behavior or perhaps join in.<sup>18</sup>

Those who engage in bullying behavior do not fit into a single profile, but there are some factors that come into play. Youth who bully are often stereotyped as marginalized kids, with low self-esteem who feel pressured by their peers and have trouble relating to other's feelings. Often, however, children who participate in bullying are well connected to their peers, considered "popular" and like to be in control of others. These "high-status" youth might be the best athletes on the team who have social capital to spare.

There is no single predictor of bullying behavior. Bullying can happen for any reason and to any person. However, there are certain characteristics that are often targeted:

- Individuals who are very talented
- Individuals with vulnerable or introverted personalities
- Individuals who have few or no friends
- Individuals who are popular and have many friends
- Individuals with physical features that attract attention or are considered outside the norm
- Individuals who have an illness, physical disability, or mental disability
- Individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning
- Individuals with different religious or cultural beliefs
- Individuals who belong to a different racial group<sup>19</sup>

Any athlete with perceived differences is at-risk for becoming a target of bullying behavior. As coach, the most important question for you to ask is: **Is there someone on your team who is perceived different from the majority?** Once you know that, the goal is to prevent the "different" athletes from becoming victimized; what we can predict, we can prevent. Among the particularly vulnerable populations are:

### *LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) youth*

LGBTQ youth remain less likely than their non-LGBTQ peers to join an athletic team, which means that these young people miss out on an important developmental experience, and teams miss out on their talent!<sup>20</sup>

According to Changing the Game, a project of the GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), there are a number of strategies coaches might adopt to create safe teams for LGBTQ athletes.<sup>21</sup> These include:

- Evaluate your own assumptions about LGBTQ individuals and promise to restrict your assessment to the content of their character and athletic ability rather on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.
- Familiarize yourself and your staff with the definition of sexual harassment and the sexual harassment law.
- Assume that there are both athletes and coaching staff on your team who identify as LGBTQ.
- Communicate to athletes and parents that anti-LGBTQ actions and offensive comments will not be tolerated. When not explicitly prohibited and monitored, LGBT athletes have been known to go along with derogatory comments, and even make their own, as a coping strategy,
- Assure that locker rooms, athletic fields, and courts are understood to be safe spaces, and have procedures in place to ensure that they are.
- Include gender-neutral references in your remarks. As one former high school lacrosse player stated, “nothing means more than when a coach or teammate says **‘whomever girl or boy you go out with’**, they just take the extra step to passively include an alternate sexual orientation in the conversation.”

Former NFL player Wade Davis said, “If one of my coaches had the courage to say the words ‘gay athlete’ or ‘LGBT’ in a positive context, that would have changed my life. Saying those words creates an environment where athletes know they can trust their coach. This support would have made me a better player and affirmed me as a person.”<sup>22</sup>



**MY TEAMMATE IS  
LESBIAN  
GAY  
BI  
TRANSGENER  
...AN ATHLETE**

Language is important. When athletes are defined and judged by their sexual orientation or their sexual identity, it can hurt. It is important to teach your athletes not to let their opinions of their fellow teammate be clouded by characteristics irrelevant to playing and enjoying sports.

It is common for LGBT athletes to feel as if every conversation leads to mentioning or somehow discussing the fact that they are gay which becomes exhausting and distracts from the sport. When athletes are self aware and secure they can tolerate

the comments, but for those not yet comfortable in their skin, the constant attention becomes offensive. And, for those still questioning their orientation, sport the constant dialog is overwhelming, especially at a time when sport could provide a healthy diversion. While the presence of LGBTQ athletes on a team can provide valuable lessons to their non-LGBTQ teammates, they are there to play just like the rest of the team and should not have to bear the responsibility of educating as well.



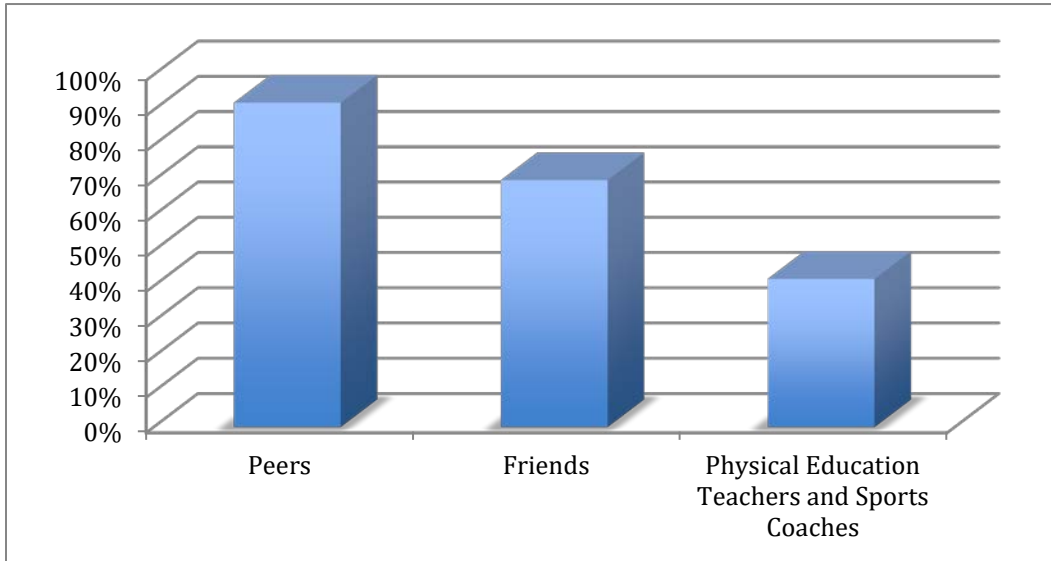
<http://www.bystanderrevolution.org/v/Jason+Collins+%7C+Homophobia+in+Sports/WF6A59WIDvM>

**Homophobia in Sports:** NBA player Jason Collins shares his experiences as a gay professional athlete. He also discusses LGBT slurs and stereotypes in the professional sports industry, and the way they are handled.

### *Overweight or underweight youth*

Overweight or underweight youth are often targets for bullying behavior. To prevent weight-based victimization, it is crucial to build a safe environment where all athletes are welcomed, regardless of their weight and body type. Meeting weight requirements should remain a discussion between coach and athlete, limiting opportunities for athletes to call attention to their teammates body weight.

### Perpetrators of Weight-Based Victimization:



<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2012/12/19/peds.2012-1106>

In the sports environment, athletes are at-risk for developing body image problems, unhealthy eating habits or eating disorders. The pressure to bulk up or slim down for certain sports can cause athletes to harm their body. While most athletes demonstrating attitudes or symptoms of disordered eating are female, males may be at-risk as well. Sports with assigned weight-classes, such as wrestling and rowing, as well as aesthetic sports such as swimming, diving, and gymnastics, represent the most at-risk athletes with an estimated 33% of males and 62% of females affected.<sup>23</sup>

Risk Factors for Athletes include:<sup>24</sup>

- \* Sports with assigned weight-classes (wrestling and rowing)
- \* Aesthetic sports (swimming, diving, and gymnastics)
- \* Sports that focus on the individual as opposed to the entire team (gymnastics, running, figure skating, dance, or diving)
- \* Endurance sports (track and field, swimming)
- \* Overvalued belief that lower body weight will improve performance
- \* Training for a sport since childhood or being an elite athlete
- \* Low self-esteem
- \* Family dysfunction (eating disorders, history of physical or sexual abuse)
- \* Other traumatic experiences
- \* Coaches who focus on performance rather than on the athlete as a whole person

Former Olympic gymnast Cathy Rigby shares, "It was too difficult for me to deny myself or restrict what I ate (anorexia), so bulimia was quite easy for me. It became an addiction through the 1972 Olympics. I got worse after I retired because I never learned responsibility. I never learned to think for myself. My coach did my thinking for me. Then I became a wife and mother and I was thrown into a whole new way of life. Well, I got down to 79 pounds."<sup>25</sup> Dr. Kate Ackerman, former national team

rower, recalls typical lightweight rower behaviors, “ I didn’t get my period for four months and I still sucked seven pounds off for Canadian Henley” or, “I once binged on 10 vending machine candy bars at a rest stop when driving back from U.S. Nationals my first summer of being a lightweight.”<sup>26</sup>

To help athletes maintain healthy eating habits, great coaches might begin by exploring your own values about weight, dieting, and overall body image. Consider how your beliefs influence the athletes with whom you work. Understand the importance of promoting positive self-image and self-esteem. Coaches should also:

- Provide their athletes with accurate information about weight in relation to their sport. It is important they know about body composition, nutrition, and unhealthy practices. Research suggests that when athletes expend more energy than they consume, the body adjusts by conserving energy and thereby reducing optimal performance.<sup>27</sup>
- Refrain from overemphasizing their athletes’ weight. This is especially crucial in sports such as wrestling and rowing when weight requirements are a part of competition and in gymnastics, swimming, and diving where participation favors a lean body type.
- Understand why weight is such a sensitive topic for so many athletes and a personal issue for many young girls. Comments about athletes’ weight, even when intended to be positive, could reinforce unhealthy weight loss habits.
- Reinforce how dangerous it is to be underweight, especially for female athletes. Give examples: underweight women are at a higher risk for low bone density and decreased immunity.<sup>28</sup>
- Learn to recognize the signs of common eating disorders, and take them seriously. Use your best judgment when deciding how to approach your athlete. If a coach believes that parents should be informed, they should do so in a way that will be most beneficial to the athlete’s health and include a professional referral that specializes in eating disorders. (See Appendix 2 Resources)

### *Youth with physical and developmental disabilities*

For youth with **physical disabilities**, there are opportunities to participate in adaptive sports teams. For example, Disabled Sport USA provides sports and recreational opportunities to both youth and adults with physical disabilities. These disabilities include visual impairments, amputations, spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, head injuries, cerebral palsy, neuromuscular or orthopedic conditions, autism, and related intellectual disabilities.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the Paralympics gives opportunities to athletes with physical disabilities. The goal of these games is to showcase the achievements of athletes with an impairment to a global audience. This way, the games can act as a vehicle to change societal perceptions of those with disabilities.<sup>30</sup>

If youth with physical disabilities wish to participate on sports teams that are not adaptive, they should be welcomed with open arms. As stipulated in the American with Disabilities Act, children with disabilities have the right to participate.<sup>31</sup> The United States Department of Education released a guidance that clarifies the existing legal obligation for schools to provide students with disabilities equal opportunities to participate in after school sports.<sup>32</sup> It is important that these students are included and respected on their sports teams. Coaches should:

- Learn the accommodations based on the rules and guidelines of the sport.
- Ask parents at the beginning of the season for any input or advice on the most successful strategies for accommodating their child.
- Learn more about your athlete's disability by talking to them, however, make sure they are comfortable discussing it.
- Research your player's disability, but focus on the person, rather than the disability.
- Collaborate with your player to modify their technique based on the sport, such as writing daily drills on a board for deaf athletes.
- Demonstrate your confidence in the athlete by providing opportunities for your athlete to be a leader.<sup>33</sup>

For athletes with **cognitive or social disabilities** such, as ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and Asperger's Syndrome, participation on mainstream athletic teams can be successful with the right coaching attitude and techniques. Suggestions include:

- Ask parents at the beginning of the season for any clinical input that will help provide instruction to their children, and offer your promise of confidentiality.
- Offer individualized attention/coaching; children with ADHD may not be able to focus well in a large group.
- Ask athletes to repeat back instructions. If one athlete did not pay attention or understand the first time, this gives them another opportunity to understand what you've said without singling them out.
- Assign younger athletes team buddies and make sure to partner a highly self-aware and empathic child with an athlete who has difficulty with social interactions.
- Offer sideline stretches or exercises to keep children with ADHD active <sup>34</sup> as they have difficulty sitting still when it is their turn to sit on the bench.

Youth with life threatening allergies, immigrants, and youth whose socioeconomic status or ethnicity differs from the majority are also at increased risk for experiencing bullying behavior. The same concepts of promoting empathy and inclusion apply.

## The prevalence of bullying

Research on bullying gives us insight into the scope of the problem. Abuse can occur in all sports, regardless of age, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics of the athletes. Data on bullying reports:

- 40-50% of athletes have experienced some form of abuse in their sport of choice (including mild harassment) <sup>35</sup>
- The reasons for being bullied reported most often by adolescents are looks (55%), body shape (37%), and race (16%)<sup>36</sup>
- 8% of adolescents are bullied every day<sup>37</sup>

It is important to note that among the students reporting being bullied, only 40% notified an adult, with students in grades 6-9 reporting a higher notification rate than 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades.<sup>38</sup> Section two addresses actions coaches might take to build trust and increase the probability that athletes will confide in them.

The National Crime Victimization Survey is a nationwide survey with a representative sample of students ages 12-18. According to this study:

- 14% of students were made fun of or verbally insulted
- 13% of students have had rumors spread about them
- 6% of students have been pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on
- 5% of students have been purposely excluded from activities
- 5% of students have been excluded from activities on purpose
- 4% of students have been threatened in some way
- 2% of students have had their property destroyed<sup>39</sup>

Note: Students could have experienced more than one type of bullying.



## Section Two: Preventing Bullying Behavior

Bullying is not a rite of passage. It is not inevitable and it does not have to be part of growing up. Bullying is a learned behavior that adults can help end. **Emotional intelligence** is also a learned behavior and one that coaches can work on – both for themselves and their athletes - to prevent bullying on athletic teams.

Emotions are the driving force in our ability to learn, pay attention and make sound decisions. Whether in school, on the court or the field or in a professional setting, emotional intelligence plays a significant role in relationships and achievement. People with a high emotional intelligence are better able to recognize how they are feeling, “read” or sense emotions in others, know how to motivate themselves and build productive relationships.<sup>40</sup>



Coaches who work to strengthen six skills above will be better able to teach them to their athletes, helping to prevent bullying behaviors from starting in the first place. In order to do this most effectively, coaches need to develop their athletes' **social and emotional skills**.

By building social and emotional capabilities, coaches and athletes are better equipped to resolve conflict, calm themselves when frustrated, initiate and sustain relationships, and make ethical and safe choices. (See glossary) Mastery in each of these skills improves the likelihood of preventing bullying and promoting team cohesion.

Coaches can get their team off to a fast start at the very beginning of the season by setting clear behavior expectations for their athletes. Just like conditioning or strength training, social and emotional learning is a core component of team building and will have the greatest effect by beginning as early as possible. Establishing norms for how athletes behave and treat each other can greatly reduce the risk that they will turn to bullying behaviors as the season progresses.

These expectations might include:

- Respect your coach by listening and following directions.
- Respect your teammates by treating them as you wish to be treated.
- Act responsibly, not impulsively.
- Demonstrate care, concern, and compassion for your teammates.
- Maintain honesty.
- Practice and play fair according to the rules.

In addition to outlining their expectations, coaches need to clarify the behaviors that will not be tolerated. It is important to set aside time to review the definition of bullying with their athletes so that everyone on the team understands that bullying behaviors are considered “out-of-bounds” on the field, on the sidelines, and in the bus or locker room. Perhaps most importantly, by sharing team rules with parents, coaches help to assure that parents understand the expectations and can reinforce them at home.

When coaches present potential bullying scenarios to their team and discuss what the athletes and coaches might do in each situation, (See **Section 4** for sample scenarios.) they help athletes understand how bullying behavior can affect both the players individually and the team as a whole. Coaches could acknowledge if there was a time they might have bullied someone or been bullied when they were children. Athletes will learn a very powerful lesson from the fact that a coach made a mistake and learned from it.

## **1) Establishing trust and paying attention to athletes’ feelings**

Great coaches balance a command of the strategy of sport with an ability to understand their players and relate to them. If coaches connect with their players as individuals, they develop trust and are better able to recognize when personal or interpersonal issues might interfere with an athlete’s performance. When coaches pay attention to each athlete’s unique needs, they help athletes feel valued and foster trusting relationships. Athletes who feel valued and important are more likely to engage and listen to their coaches. Trusting relationships allow coaches to influence, rather than control, athlete’s behavior, as they will choose to follow the positive behavior their coach role models. In essence they will take ownership over their actions.

Suggestions include: making eye contact, using a warm, professional tone and actively listening --- a way of listening and responding that demonstrates a shared understanding. Active listeners focus on the speaker, listen to the entire message without interrupting, and respond in a way that is both honest and unbiased.<sup>41</sup>

“Such seemingly straightforward techniques are actually based on hard science. In contrast to the fight-or-flight response triggered by perceived threats, seemingly minor acts of kindness, such as a few caring words from a teacher or a quick hug, can activate a cascade of Oxytocin, sometimes called the “love hormone.” In highly traumatized kids, such simple acts can have an outsized impact.”<sup>42</sup>

When athletes have off days or performance drops, great coaches check-in with them to see what is wrong, including if they are experiencing bullying.

Great coaches help athletes become more “self-aware” by asking questions that help them recognize and acknowledge their feelings:

*“You don’t seem like yourself today, anything you want to share with me? I’m here if you want to talk.”*

*“I can see that something is bothering you today, would you like to talk to me about it or would you prefer we get in touch with your parents?”*

*“It must be hard joining a team that has been together for a while.”*

If coaches reach out when something seems “off,” they offer an opportunity for athletes to check-in. Often, athletes who need support the most might be the ones who put on airs of “I’m OK”. If coaches keep reaching out, athletes will know that their coach will be available to them if a problem escalates and bullying occurs.

More than showing they understand how athletes feel, when coaches demonstrate empathy -- the ability to feel with them, they truly make the connection. When coaches accept athletes for who they are and what they are, they validate their individuality and model that validation for the other athletes inherently making them better teammates.

## **2) Helping athletes control their emotions**

In addition to helping athletes recognize their feelings, great coaches can help athletes manage their emotions. To prevent athlete-to-athlete bullying, there are a number of strategies coaches might implement to help athletes bounce back after they make a mistake or to remain calm when a teammate makes a mistake.

1. Ask parents when the season starts if they have any confidential insights to share with you on the most effective strategies to help their children maintain control of their emotions and motivate them to succeed.

2. Include athletes in on the conversation. Find out what motivates them as athletes and as teammates.
3. Regulate your own emotions, demonstrating respect toward athletes, coaches, and referees, particularly when athletes ignore directions or commit errors.
4. Offer support after mistakes or losses, making them teachable moments for the athlete and his or her teammates. If coaches do not “blame” athletes for mistakes or losses, teammates will understand that it is unacceptable.

*“I’m sorry you were out-run on that play, but I’m glad you are the kind of teammate who recovers after a mistake.”*

5. Encourage optimistic self-talk, a confident self-image, and strong self-esteem.
6. Celebrate both individual and team success. This will further promote team cohesion and a drive to perform well.
7. Be specific with your compliments. When athletes hear what they or others are doing well, they will want to follow.
8. Keep players’ attention focused on the game and limit unstructured time during practice. Research shows that most bullying in sports occurs during unstructured time when players are less focused.

### 3) Promoting team cohesion

To succeed on a team, athletes need to feel safe, supported, and respected. According to Pat Summit, “You win in life with people...It’s all about the people you surround yourself with and what they bring to the court, the game and to the understanding that it is a team concept and they have to do it together. Look in the mirror and see yourself and challenge yourself to be the very best and to always do the right thing and again never compromise your principles, never lower your standards.”

Generations of coaches have shared the messages: ***there is no “I” in team; we win and lose as a team.*** At the end of games, make sure that all athletes share responsibility for the outcome. History suggests that teams that function as cohesive units often succeed more than teams that have superior talent, because of their tight connection. In addition to preventing bullying, improved camaraderie will promote winning.

Coaches can boost team cohesion by modeling appropriate ways to:

- Encourage team members
- Provide positive and critical feedback
- Work together toward a common goal



- Cope with failure and disappointment
- Teach new skills

Coaches might **use praise as a “teachable moment”** – an opportunity to recognize one athlete while at the same time educating the rest of the team. When congratulating an athlete on an athletic accomplishment, make your comments specific so that their teammates hear and learn from the praise.

*Excellent choice to pass to...you paid attention to who was open and the other team was not expecting that move.*

*Great goal! That was clearly a team effort all the way down the field.*

It is as critical to **recognize athletes for their interpersonal efforts** as teammates as it is to acknowledge physical effort or goals. Competitive sports offer frequent occasions for “teachable moments” to do just that:

*“I like how you comforted Andre after he missed that goal. That will help him perform in the rest of the game.”*

*“Thanks for including Jordan in your post-game dinner plans, that’s how you make a new teammate feel included.”*

*“I understand that you are working hard to improve and I appreciate your letting me coach your teammates to do the same.”*

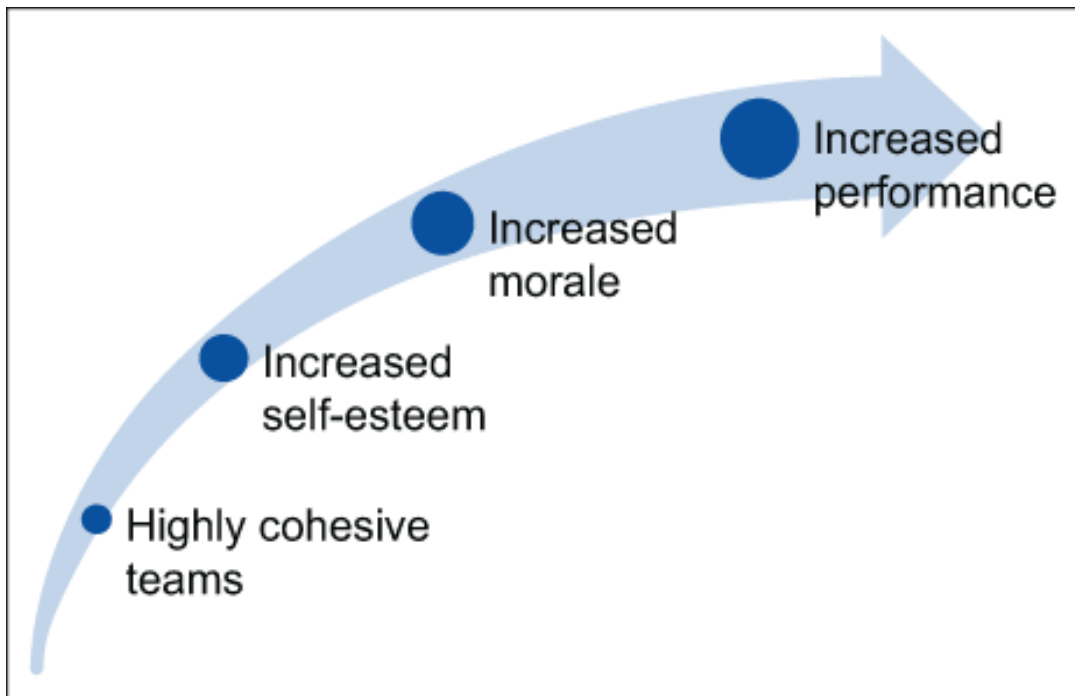
In late childhood and adolescence, peers play a much more influential role than adults in driving behavior. The need to fit in often takes precedence over sound reasoning with teens sacrificing morals for membership. Great coaches tap into the teammates with the most social capital, i.e., those who are well-liked and respected, to serve as role models for the team. Non-verbal acknowledgements such as high-fives, fist bumps, and smiles from coaches and teammates can have as much impact as verbal praise.

### **Additional ways coaches can provide opportunities to promote team bonding are:**

- Begin the season with **paired teammate interviews**.<sup>43</sup> Select pairing based on those individuals who are less familiar with one another. The more they get to know their teammates and their backgrounds, the more they will care for them and understand the impetus for their behaviors. Pick five or so questions ranging from favorite foods, to best day of life so far, to one thing they wish they could change about life to personal hero. It will take time to have team members share what they learned about their partners but you can spread the reporting back over multiple practices.
- Establish a **big brother/big sister** program, with upperclassmen or longstanding teammates assigned to mentor younger or newer teammates.

- Incorporate fun into practice and pre-game rituals.
- Encourage team-building activities outside of practice time, such as team dinners or social outings. These help athletes get to know more about one another and find commonalities other than their sport.
- Use charity events or food drives which strengthen confidence and commitment to teamwork while contributing to a larger goal of social responsibility.
- Enlist the captain(s) of the team to serve as role models. They command respect because of their position on the team so they have the social capital to expend. If they use their status to show acceptance of the most vulnerable team members, they increase the likelihood that others will follow. These peer influencers make it “cool to care.”
- For younger children participating on “everyone plays” teams, make sure to rotate positions so that everyone has a chance to learn and improve different skills and feel as if they are making an equal contribution.
- Monitor athletes’ social interactions. Emphasize the entire team rather than individual players. When cliques start to form, feelings of superiority or inferiority can arise based on inclusion, resulting in increased likelihood of bullying.<sup>44</sup>

By implementing strategies that appear directed at promoting team bonding, coaches also are reducing the likelihood of bullying and increasing the team’s chances for success. Many of the principles that apply to creating successful teams in the business world apply to creating successful athletic teams.



45

## 4) Supporting athletes to make responsible decisions

The critical areas of the brain that govern decision-making are not fully developed until age 25. Children make mistakes and teens, in particular, take risks, but coaches can help them learn from them.

Great coaches help athletes to make constructive behavior choices by teaching them that **Bullying Behavior Will NOT:**

- Increase a teammate's psychological toughness.
- Enhance a teammate's performance in high stress situations.
- Weed out the weak individuals on a team.
- Send a message that the team's success is more important than the individual or their accomplishments.
- Help them cope with feelings of jealousy or inadequacy regarding a teammate.
- Deal with anger and frustration if a teammate is not performing well.
- Damage the performances of individuals on the team they views as a threat.<sup>46</sup>

## Section Three: Responding to Bullying Behavior

As more and more researchers are studying what can be done to mitigate the harmful effects of trauma to the brain, they are learning that the brain is a lot more malleable than originally thought. While the first few years of life are critically important for developing some very specific abilities, we now know that brain's evolve over time so the right support from caring adults can assure that the damaging effects of bullying are not life altering. Brain development is strongly influenced by an individual's life experiences. Supportive environments can enhance development and functioning. **The presence of a caring, engaged, and responsible coach can dramatically reduce the impact bullying behavior can have on an athlete.**

### Encouraging athletes who witness bullying to become allies.

One witness can make a difference by standing up and taking the power away from those involved in the bullying behavior. Research shows that when peers intervene in a bullying incident, the bullying stops nearly 60% of the time.<sup>47</sup>

### One person can make a difference



<http://www.bystanderrevolution.org/v/Tiffany+%7C+It+Only+Takes+One/vzERmuTgEMc>

**It Only Takes One:** Tiffany, who is currently an educator, shares a story about her 5<sup>th</sup> grade gym class. When she stands up for a girl who is being bullied, her actions make a big impact.

Among the barriers that might prevent witnesses from acting are:

- They believe the behavior is not “their business”
- They fear becoming a target
- They feel like intervening will not help or will make things worse
- They believe the target deserves to be bullied
- They think someone else will help
- They do not know what to do<sup>48</sup>



## Teaching athletes how to intervene if they witness bullying

Often, children and youth bully when there is no adult present because they are less likely to get caught. Great coaches explain to their athletes that if they witness a teammate experiencing bullying, there are several actions they can take to reduce the harmful effects of the behavior and prevent it from happening again. Their actions may vary depending on the particular situation, how well they know the people involved, and whether they are older or younger, etc. Great coaches reinforce that although taking a stand might be the more difficult than doing nothing, it is the responsible decision to make.

### Providing possible action steps for athletes:

#### Confront the Instigator(s) in Action

- If they feel safe, athletes can tell the instigator that his/her behavior is not okay.
- When athletes are friends with the individual(s) involved, they might ask if them if they realize their words or actions are hurtful.



<http://www.bystanderrevolution.org/v/Shereen+%7C+Keep+the+Athletes+In+Check/opLugXo87bY>

**Keep the Athletes in Check:** Shereen, a high school sophomore, has friends on the football team who are very competitive. Sometimes, they bully less athletic students. Shereen discusses ways that she helps those involved.

#### Walk away

- When athletes do not feel comfortable or safe directly intervening, they can walk away.
- By walking away, athletes prevent the instigator from having an audience and implicitly encouraging the bullying behavior to continue.

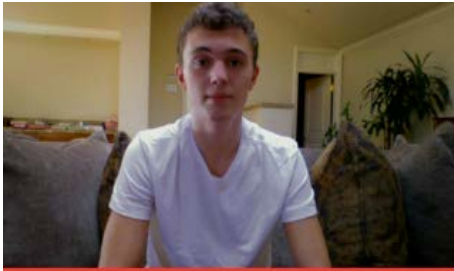


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=994jKQEj3X8>

**#JustStandUp:** In this video, a student is being bullied and socially isolated over a group chat. Another girl in the conversation shows how meaningful it is to just stand up and be an ally.

## Intervene on behalf of the target of the bullying

- Athletes can tell others to stop observing and walk away.
- Athletes might help the target get away.
- Athletes will minimize the impact of the incident by standing up for their teammate



<http://www.bystanderrevolution.org/v/Jesse+%7C+Just+One+Word/ebZOQEPiCbg>

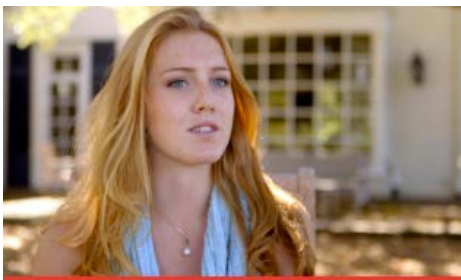
**Just One Word:** Jesse is an 11<sup>th</sup> grader on his school's crew team. When the coaches are not around, kids on the team get singled out and harassed. Jesse explains how standing up for those kids can make an impact.

## Reach out and talk to the target in private

Athletes will lessen the impact of the bullying if they make sure their teammate knows it was not their fault.

They might:

- encourage their teammate to talk to the coach or another trusted adult.
- offer to go with their teammate when they tell an adult.
- help their teammate overcome the incident by using social media to make a positive impact and including him/her in a future activity they plan to do.



<http://www.bystanderrevolution.org/v/Bella+%7C+Facebook+Story/ChImw3gcCg>

**Facebook Story:** Bella, a college sophomore, talks about bullying on social media. When one of her classmates is being harassed on Facebook, she decides to create a social-wide effort to support him.

## Seek help from the coach or other trusted adult

- When athletes are unsure of what to, they might approach the coach discreetly to avoid confrontation and further conflict.<sup>49</sup>

## Strategies for coaches when athletes report bullying behavior

In order to prevent bullying and protect children, laws and policies have been put into place, both at the state and local levels. Laws are in the state education codes, and model policies provide guidance to districts and schools. Each state addresses bullying differently. **Stopbullying.gov** provides an interactive map, with the anti-bullying laws and policies each state uses: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/>. Coaches working outside of the school environment should refer to their club's or organization's policies and regulations.

Responding quickly, consistently and respectfully to bullying sends the message that bullying of any kind is not to be tolerated. Among the key steps to follow in response to witnessing bullying behavior are:

1. Make sure that everyone is safe and not in need of medical attention.
2. Listen and assure the athlete that any information reported will be treated seriously.
3. Intervene immediately by removing those involved from the situation. Ask for the help of another coach or adult if necessary.
4. Remain calm and model respectful behavior.
5. Talk with each athlete separately, as well as witnesses. This way, you can evaluate what happened with the least amount of bias.
6. Re-visit a team discussion on the definitions of bullying behavior and what to do in different witness scenarios.<sup>50</sup>
7. Reinforce the discussion by praising teammates for standing up to unacceptable behavior and reporting it to you.
8. Check-in over time to make sure the behavior has stopped.
9. If you need additional support, seek help from a professional. A nurse, counselor, social worker, school psychologist, or other professional may have more expertise on bullying.<sup>51</sup>

### Actions that support the target

- Listening to the target and assuring them that you'll do everything you can to get them the help they need and relieve them from a painful situation.
- Giving the target advice on what to do in the future. This could involve role playing or talking about how to handle bullying situations if they occur again.
- Working together with the target and their parents to come up with a solution to protect them.<sup>52</sup>

## Actions that address the situation with the instigator

- Explaining how their behavior is considered bullying and why it is a problem for the target as well as the other athletes on the team.
- Reminding them that bullying is taken seriously and will not be tolerated.
- Working with the instigator to understand some of the reasons why he or she may have bullied. Try to get to the root of what caused the behavior:
  - Often, individuals act out because of issues at home. If this is the case, try to address with the parents or suggest a referral for professional help for the athlete.
  - Other reasons for bullying include: wanting to fit in, copying friends, or a feeling of superiority over the target. Many of these reasons stem from deeper issues. Those who demonstrate bullying behavior for these reasons should seek the help of a mental health professional as well. Listen to Justin reflecting on how a coach's intervention could have made a difference in his behavior:



<http://www.bystanderrevolution.org/v/Justin+%7C+We+All+Can+Change/srfzimYPPiA>

**We All Can Change:** Justin discusses his past football experiences, and how he regrets bullying a teammate. Justin also talks about what could have helped him in order to change.

- Asking the instigator to make amends and repair the situation with the victim.
- Reconsidering their position on the team, if the instigator is not willing to comply.<sup>53</sup>

## Actions that are not helpful

1. Asking athletes to apologize on the spot. It is important to understand exactly what happened before making decisions about next steps.
2. Forgetting about the witnesses. Often times they encourage the bullying. Talk to them about what happened, and let them know that encouraging bullying behavior is not tolerated.
3. Making assumptions about those involved in the bullying. You may find that the perpetrator was actually retaliating.<sup>54</sup>

Recognizing bullying and taking action can greatly reduce the risk of individuals developing physical and mental health complications. Research confirms that brains develop over time and are influenced by an individual's life experiences. Early intervention by a concerned coach can mitigate the harmful effects of bullying behavior.

## Strategies for coaches who witness bullying behavior

- If coaches remain calm and refrain from raising their voices, they show that they can control their emotions and teach athletes to do the same.
- Find a place to talk to the instigator in private.
- When confronting an athlete directly, coaches “I” messages are the most effective. “I” messages allow a coach to take ownership for their own feelings without putting the athlete on the defensive; they invite conversation rather than stop it.

*“Hey – that’s not cool.” “I’m certain he does not want to be called that name.”*

*“I’m telling you that is not how we speak to our teammates...are we clear?”*

*“I don’t find that funny, I’m surprised to hear you say that.”*

*“I understand that you are (frustrated, angry...) but it is not OK for you to (push, shove, threaten, verbally abuse) your teammates.*

- Consider what might be beneath the surface that is driving the negative behavior and assess the best way to address it. Is something happening at home? Did another athlete take over the starting position in his or her place? Rather than assigning blame, getting to the root of the problem remains the key to its prevention.
- 
- Refrain from labeling a child as a “bully.” The roles are complex and dynamic, with athletes potentially acting as targets, instigators and witnesses over the course of a given season. Labels have a tendency to endure and disregard the fact that **all children have the potential to learn and grow into responsible, caring citizens.**

## Section Four: Scenarios

After reviewing the definition of bullying with athletes at the beginning of each season, initiate a discussion with potential scenarios to make sure they truly understand the definition and have an opportunity to reflect on how they might behave under a variety of circumstances.

***Bullying is any unwanted, aggressive behavior. Bullying occurs when there is a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. Bullying is repeated or has the potential to be repeated.***

Present the following examples to your athletes. Ask them if each is considered bullying. Help your athletes to realize that each scenario is a different form of bullying (physical, verbal, social, and harm to property).

1. Tom has a special brace to help him run. When he goes to the locker room before practice, the boys consistently try to steal it and push him into the locker. (Physical)

*Individuals who have physical or cognitive disabilities have the right to participate in athletics and to be treated as equal team members. Bullying often happens in locker rooms when athletes think coaches might not notice. Make sure your team understands that this **physical bullying** will not be tolerated.*

2. Kate just got new glasses. When she puts on her goggles over the glasses before the softball game, the girls on the team start making comments about her appearance. Kate's teammates tell her that she looks like ugly.

*If this only happened once, one might define it as mean behavior due to a lapse in judgment. More often than not, however, these types of insults evolve into a pattern of behavior defined as **verbal bullying**. Remind your athletes that even if you only observe or learn about a single incident, you will intervene and address it as bullying behavior so that you prevent it from happening again.*

3. Jessica is on the swim team. After swim practice, the entire team always gets ice cream. The past few practices, Jessica has not been invited to get ice cream with her team. When she asks her teammates why she was not included, they pretend they cannot hear her and run away laughing.

*When an entire team regularly excludes one member that is **social bullying**. Make sure your athletes understand that even if an outing is not a required team event, when one individual is intentionally excluded and publicly mocked that is unacceptable.*

4. Jake is the goalie on his school's soccer team. During their last game, he let in three goals and his team ended up losing. When Jake goes to school the next day he discovers his locker was opened and his textbooks ripped apart.

*If Jake reports this discovery to his coach, the coach needs to intervene. Even if this is the first time this type of behavior has occurred, it should not continue. With regular practices and a season of games, the likelihood that this behavior could be repeated remains high. The best way to prevent bullying behavior is to make sure all team members understand that **harm to property** will not be tolerated.*

5. The football team arrives at the carb fest and Zach gets to the front of the line. He loads up his plate with three meatball sandwiches and piles garlic bread and brownies on top of that. Zach's teammates and buddies, Luke and Alex, mock the quantity of his food and tell him his fat ass is too big for the chairs.

*Since Luke and Alex are close friends of Zach's, this kind of **teasing** is not bullying behavior. Zach is the center on the football team, a position known for heavy set individuals. Zach is strong and comfortable with his body weight. He knows his friends are joking with him and so does the rest of the team.*

Once you feel your team has an understanding of bullying, present the following scenarios and ask the athletes to think about how they might respond in these situations. You might assign "parts" and ask a few teammates to role-play. Consult the sample answers below to support the discussion. Consider introducing a different scenario every few days at the beginning of the season. That way, the importance of social behavior will stay fresh in their minds.

***Sarah is sitting at the lunch table eating a sandwich and a bag of chips. Some of the other girls on her gymnastics team sit down at the table next to her. Immediately, they begin harassing Sarah. "Are you sure you should be eating all of that the day before a meet? You do realize that we have a big competition tomorrow and you will be wearing a leotard?" says her teammate Rachel. Rachel continues to make comments about Sarah's weight, and gets the other teammates to laugh at her comments.***

- 1) Is this Bullying?

Even though this may be the first time a teammate or coach has witnessed these behaviors, it might not be the first time they occurred among these or any other teammates. Without a strong reminder that talking to other athletes about their weight and body image is unacceptable, there is also a good chance that it could happen again. By intervening as if the incident is bullying, the coach may be able to

prevent repeat behavior.

2) What would you do as her teammate to help Sarah?

There are a couple of ways to take action in this situation. You can call out Rachel on the spot, saying something like, “hey, that’s not cool. She can eat what she wants”. If you are uncomfortable saying something in the moment, you should wait and confront her after the fact, saying something similar. You might also remind Rachel that many athletes struggle with weight and when others make judgments it could inadvertently contribute to disordered eating. Teammates should be encouraged to reach out to Sarah and let her know that Rachel was out of line.

3) What could your coach do in this situation?

It is the coach’s job to step in and say, “hey, that’s not okay”. When coaches remind athletes about behavior expectations and explain that judging others food choices and body weight might be considered bullying behavior, they reinforce lessons about acceptable and unacceptable conduct. Athletes do not feel as if their teammates are judging their food choices remain less likely to engage in disordered eating behaviors.

***Fatima is a freshman trying out for the volleyball team. She is extremely tall and was a standout volleyball player at her middle school. Kelsie, feeling that her starting position is in jeopardy, responds by pulling off Fatima’s hijab during practice.***

1) Is this bullying?

Even if this may be the first time this has happened, unwanted physical aggression is a form of bullying and has the potential to be repeated. Given that Fatima is a freshman, there is “imbalance of power” as Fatima likely already feels intimidated by Kelsie who has status and seniority on the team.

What would you do if you witnessed this happening to Fatima? What if you were good friends with Kelsie?

Even if you are good friends with Kelsie, you will help minimize the impact on Fatima if you step in and tell Kelsie that her actions are not okay. Ideally you intervene on the spot, but if you are uncomfortable doing so, it is important that you confront her in a timely fashion and that you tell your coach. Explain to Kelsie that you understand she is stressed about her position on the team, but that is never an excuse to hurt someone else. By supporting Fatima, you let her know that you will not ignore bullying behavior.

2) What could your coach do in this situation?

To emphasize that Kelsie’s actions were not okay, your coach might want to re-read



the code of conduct to all players and suggest that they not return to tryouts unless they intend to adhere to it. All athletes need to feel safe in the gym and on the team. If the coach intervenes early, he will minimize the negative effects on Fatima and reduce the potential for the behavior to re-occur.

***Justin is a transgender athlete on the baseball team. The other boys on Justin's team constantly harass him, saying that girls cannot play on a boy's team. One day on Justin's walk home, his teammates attack him from behind. Some of the players punch and kick Justin, while others steal his baseball glove and rip it apart. His teammates tell him he needs to quit playing baseball.***

1) Is this bullying?

The pattern of verbal abuse, combined with an unprovoked physical force is considered bullying behavior. Even if this is the first time someone has witnessed the physical abuse, it may not be the first time it has happened. Without immediate intervention, there is a good chance that it could happen again and both the coach and team need to make sure they prevent repeat behavior.

2) What would you do if you witnessed this behavior?

Step in and stop the other boys from hurting Justin. Tell them that by hurting another teammate, their actions are detrimental to the entire team. As always, if you are uncomfortable getting involved in the moment, it is imperative to tell your coach about what happened. Also, reassure Justin that he belongs on the team and let him know that you support him.

3) What could your coach do in this situation?

Your coach should check on Justin and make sure he's okay. Your coach should also talk to athletes about team rules and remind them that such behaviors will not be tolerated. It is also important for coaches to acknowledge the athlete(s) who stepped in to stop the other boys. Your coach might consider suspending the boys from a game or two, or issuing an alternate penalty in accordance with team rules. Your coach should follow the organization's policies as to the appropriate consequence and as to when they should contact the parents of the boys involved.

***Ryan is a 13-year-old competitive swimmer who has just made your club team. He has an above knee amputation and is not permitted to wear his prosthetic leg in the water. After practice, two of his teammates have hidden his prosthetic.***

1) Is this bullying?

Damaging or threatening to damage an individual's property is considered bullying. Ryan has the right to participate on the team and be accepted as an equal team member. Hiding his prosthetic was an unprovoked act of physical aggression and

could potentially damage a personal belonging essential to Ryan's well-being. Even if the prosthetic remains intact, the fear of it missing is damaging to Ryan's emotional state.

2) What would you do if you witnessed this behavior?

As soon as it feels safe and comfortable for you to intervene, return the prosthetic to Ryan and let him know he is a valued member of the team and has your support. Tell your coach what happened so that he or she can address the situation with the instigators and work to prevent subsequent incidences.

3) What should your coach do in this situation?

By intervening, the coach will reinforce the message that any unprovoked interference with personal belongings will not be tolerated. Without the coach's involvement, a one-time occurrence could turn into routine behavior. To emphasize that the boys' actions were not acceptable, a coach might want to bench them for the next meet or issue an alternate penalty in accordance with team rules. Your Organization policies often dictate the procedures for coaches to follow and consequences to implement.

***Brianna is a starting forward on the soccer team. She is strong, fast and a leading scorer on the team. While a cooperative teammate, she is not close friend with the girls outside of practice. After Brianna shares with one teammate, what she thinks in a confidential story about an experience at a recent party, she learns that the teammate twisted her words and shared an alternate version through a group text to the rest of the team.***

1) Is this bullying?

Harming others by spreading rumors is a form of social bullying. Even if the teammate only sent one text, the text was transmitted to an entire group and that group has the potential to extend the rumor to an even wider audience.

2) What would you do if you witnessed this behavior?

Tell the teammate who initiated the text that it is hurtful. Show the message to your coach so he or she has evidence and then delete the conversation and tell your teammates to do the same. Tell Brianna what you did so she knows she has support.

3) What should your coach do in this situation?

If your coach checks on Brianna to make sure she is okay and demonstrate support, he or she will likely lessen the impact of the rumor. Your coach should also talk to athletes about cyberbullying and remind them that such behaviors will not be tolerated. Your coach might consider suspending the teammates from a game or two, or issuing an alternate penalty in accordance with team rules. Coaches should

follow the organization's policies as to the appropriate consequence and as to when they should contact the parents of the teammates involved.

***Basketball practice just ended and Patrick, Julian and Kevin, all starters and co-captains, leave together for dinner and a movie. Anthony, also a starter, was not invited to join them. He watches as they all get into Patrick's car and leave together.***

1) Is this bullying?

Going out to dinner with only a few friends is not bullying. If the entire team had been invited, and Anthony was the only one left out, then it would have been considered bullying behavior. When boys who are friends outside of their team also happen to be co-captains, they are free to socialize with whom they want when it is not during official team time.

2) What would you do if you witnessed this behavior?

If you are comfortable, you could tell the co-captains that they might try to be a little more discrete when they have social plans as you think some teammates also considered themselves friends and felt left out. If you are friends with Anthony, you could ask him if he wants to go to dinner.

3) What should your coach do in this situation?

While your coach wants to make sure that all athletes get along on team, he or she is not responsible for intervening in personal friendships.

# APPENDIX 1

## Glossary

### Bullying

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Education (ED), and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) partnered with bullying experts to develop a uniform definition of bullying. In January of 2014, they agreed on the following definition: **“Bullying is any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves a real or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm.”**<sup>55</sup>

NOTE: Given that youth sports require athletes to interact and work together on a frequent, if not daily, basis, a single incident may warrant cause for concern and intervention.

### Sexual Harassment

Bullying and sexual harassment differ under the law. Although there are various anti-bullying laws in each state, they are not uniform in defining bullying or in the consequences for violating the laws. There are no federal bullying laws in place. In contrast, sexual harassment of any kind is illegal under federal law. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This law prohibits sex discrimination. It also prohibits discrimination based on gender, race, color, national origin, and religion.<sup>56</sup>

### Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.<sup>57</sup>

1. **Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism
2. **Self-management:** The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and



behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

**3. Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

**4. Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

**5. Responsible decision making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.<sup>58</sup>

## **Appendix 2**

### **Resources**

#### **CASEL**

[www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the leading organization dedicated to integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into education. CASEL delivers detailed research, practice, and policy dedicated to SEL

#### **Cyberbullying Research Center**

[www.cyberbullying.org/resources/teens](http://www.cyberbullying.org/resources/teens)

The Cyberbullying Research Center provides information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents. The website serves as a clearinghouse for parents, educators, law enforcement officers, counselors, and others who work with youth.

#### **Disabled Sports USA**

[www.disabledsportsusa.org](http://www.disabledsportsusa.org)

Disabled Sports USA provides adaptive sports opportunities for people with disabilities to develop independence, confidence, and fitness through sports. Each year through its nationwide network, Disabled Sports USA serves over 60,000 youth and adults each year. Browse its website to learn more about these incredible programs, or search its national network of over 100 community-based chapters in 37 states on over 30 different sports.

#### **GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network)**

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

GLSEN's mission is to ensure that every member of the school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. GLSEN provides policies and research supporting LGBTQ issues in education. The GLSEN website shares resources and programs implemented locally.

#### **National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)**

<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

NEDA supports individuals and families affected by eating disorders, and serves as a catalyst for prevention, cures, and access to quality care. NEDA has created a Coaches and Trainers Toolkit offering information about eating disorders as well as prevention and early intervention tips.

## **PACER'S National Bullying Prevention Center**

[www.pacer.org/bullying](http://www.pacer.org/bullying)

Pacer's National Bullying Prevent Center aims to lead a social change so bullying is no longer accepted as a rite of passage for children. PACER provides children, parents, and educators with resources and information on bullying. Its website also contains videos, stories, news, campaigns, and other ways to get involved in anti-bullying efforts.

## **StopBullying.gov**

[www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)

StopBullying.gov is a federal government website with information on all types of bullying, including cyberbullying and who is at risk. StopBullying.gov also suggests ways to prevent and respond to bullying for parents, educators and youth.

## **You Can Play Project**

[www.youcanplayproject.org](http://www.youcanplayproject.org)

The You Can Play Project works to ensure the safety and inclusion of everyone in sports, including LGBT athletes, coaches, and fans. Visit its website to learn more about its cause, partners, and how to take a stand.

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