

Fullerton Aquatics Sports Team Bullying Policy

Summary

The Fullerton Aquatics Sports Team (FAST) is committed to providing a safe, supportive, and productive environment for all members. Bullying of any kind is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Bullying is detrimental to the team environment, distracting for athletes and coaches, and can be devastating to a victim. If bullying does occur, all athletes and parents should know that incidents will be dealt with promptly and effectively when they are reported in accordance with the policy described in this document.

Bullying Defined

Generally, bullying is the use of intimidation or badgering which hurts another person. Bullying can result in fear, anxiety, and/or distress. The USA Swimming Code of Conduct prohibits bullying and defines it in Article 304.3.7.

[T]he severe or repeated use of oral, written, electronic or other technological expression, image, sound, data, or intelligence of any nature (regardless of the method of transmission), or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at any other member that to a reasonably objective person has the effect of:

- i. causing physical or emotional harm to the other member or damage to the other member's property;
- ii. placing the other member in reasonable fear of harm to himself/herself or of damage to his/her property;
- iii. creating a hostile environment for the other member at any USA Swimming activity;
- iv. infringing on the rights of the other member at any USA Swimming activity; or
- v. materially and substantially disrupting the training process or the orderly operation of any USA Swimming activity (which for the purposes of this section shall include, without limitation, practices, workouts and other events of a member club or LSC).

Reporting Procedure

Any FAST member who observes or knows that bullying is happening at FAST should inform the coach of the group in which the bullying is occurring. If a resolution is not reached at this level, FAST members should bring the matter to the attention of the Head Coach.

Any FAST athlete who feels that he or she has been bullied should do one or more of the following things:

- Talk to their parents
- Talk to their group coach
- Write a letter or email to their group coach

There is no time limit for reporting an incident, but all members must recognize that every effort should be made to communicate with the appropriate leadership as soon as possible. This ensures that all behavior can be accurately recalled and enables FAST to address the bullying behavior as soon as possible.

Action Plan

Step 1: Address the Issue Immediately

FAST staff members are responsible for stopping bullying immediately if it occurs during team-related activities. The following steps will be taken.

1. Stay calm and model respectful behavior
2. Separate the children involved
3. Make sure that everyone is safe
4. Meet any immediate medical needs
5. Reassure all children and/or witnesses of their safety

Step 2: Find Out What Happened

FAST staff members involved with bullying matters will proceed in the following manner.

1. Do not call the act “bullying” while trying to understand what happened. Remember that it may not matter “who started it”. Some children who are bullied may be seen as annoying or provoking, but this does not excuse the bullying behavior.
2. Collect all available information. Get the story from several sources. The children involved, children who observed, coaches who were present, parents who were present, and/or parents who were later informed by their child may all have valuable information.
3. Determine if the behavior is truly bullying by considering the following questions:
 - Have there been prior conflicts between these children?
 - Is there a power imbalance, physical or otherwise?
 - Is the child worried it will happen again?

Step 3: Support All Children Involved

FAST staff members are educated to execute the following process for supporting all of the children involved in an incident.

1. Listen to and focus on the children. This shows the bullied child that you want to help and shows the bullying child that the issue is being taken seriously. Speak to the children separately.
2. Ask the child being bullied what can be done to make him or her feel safe. Remember that changes to routine should be minimized. He or she should not be singled out.
3. Make sure the bullying child knows what the problem behavior is and why and/or how it is harmful to others and the FAST environment.

Step 4: Move Forward

1. Develop a game plan. Maintain open communication between all children, coaches, and parents involved.
2. Work with the bullying child to understand some of the reasons he or she bullied. For example,
 - a. Sometimes children bully to fit in or just to make fun of someone who is different from them. In other words, there may be some insecurity involved.
 - b. Other times children act out because something else is going on in their lives. For example, stress, issues at home, or abuse. They also may have been bullied and in need of additional support.
3. Be persistent. Bullying may not end overnight. Commit to making it stop. Consistently support all children involved.

4. Involve the child who bullied in making amends or repairing the situation. The goal is to help them see how their actions affect others. For example, the child can:
 - a. Write a letter apologizing to the athlete who was bullied.
 - b. Do a good deed for the person who was bullied, for FAST, or for the community.
 - c. Clean up, repair, or pay for any property they damaged.

FAST staff members know to avoid the following strategies, as they do not work and/or have negative consequences.

- Zero Tolerance or “Three Strikes, You’re Out”: Suspension or expulsion of swimmers who bully does not reduce bullying behavior. Swimmers may be less likely to report and address bullying if suspension or expulsion is a consequence.
- Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation: Bullying is not a conflict between people of equal power who share equal blame. Facing those who have bullied may further upset children who have been bullied.

Step 5: Follow-Up

After the bullying issue is resolved, it is the responsibility of the FAST staff to:

- Continue to ensure that the bullying behavior is not repeated to the original victim or any other FAST athlete.
- Continue finding ways to help the child who bullied to understand how what they do affects other people. For example, talk about what it means to be a good teammate.

Resources

FAST supports all athletes by providing the following suggestions for handling a bullying situation. One or more of the following may be applicable.

1. Set a good example by not bullying others.
2. Do not give the bully an audience. Bullies are encouraged by attention from bystanders. If you do nothing else, just walk away.
3. Help the child being bullied to get away from the situation. Create a distraction, focus the attention on something else, or offer a way for the child to get out of the situation. For example, one could say, “Let’s go. Practice is about to start.”
4. Alert your group coach to the situation.
5. Be a friend to the person being bullied.