

Guide to Handling Bullying Situations

This guide is designed to assist USA Swimming clubs when situations of bullying occur. This guide will provide information to assist coaches, boards of directors and other club personnel in promoting and maintaining a safe environment for all members of the team. This guide may not cover every situation but it is designed to provide direction. For specific questions, contact USA Swimming Safe Sport staff at (719) 866-4578.

You can see bullying happen in three ways; verbally, physically and emotionally. Verbal bullying could include spreading rumors, name calling, threatening consequences or making sexual or racist comments. Physical bullying may include kicking, hitting or theft/ destruction of property. Emotional bullying could be seen through ignoring or excluding, talking behind someone's back, writing letters/text messages or even comments on internet sites such as Facebook or Twitter.

Bullying can happen to an adult or to a child and it can be difficult to talk about. Many times the victim of the bullying may have been threatened with consequences should they tell anyone about what has happened to them. Should a victim of bullying demonstrate the courage to talk to someone it is important that they are reassured that they will be listened to and that their concerns will be addressed in a sensitive manner. This does not always mean that you agree with where they are coming from, however it shows compassion for how they are feeling.

The person being bullied may feel scared or upset and worried because they don't know why it is happening to them. This person needs to be reassured that they have done nothing wrong and the fault is definitely not theirs. The bully may not see how their behavior was wrong, especially if people around them seem to justify it. They need to be made aware that there is absolutely no excuse for their behavior. The person looking on while someone is being bullied, the bystander, is also involved in the situation. This person may have the impression that they are causing no harm as they are not actively doing the bullying. They may also be fearful for what might happen to them if they step in and say something. Encourage all that as a bystander they can help in some way. A bystander could intervene by distracting the bully, maybe by asking them a question or distracting them by saying that they have to tell them something. A bystander could also go and report to someone who may be in a better situation to address what the bully is doing.

It is often difficult to know how to best handle situations of bullying. In order to assist clubs with this, USA Swimming has created a Bullying Prevention Worksheet. This worksheet is meant to help walk clubs through the steps of how to address a report of bullying.

Be Prepared - Know What You'll Do if an Incident Occurs

The team should proactively determine how complaints will be handled when an issue such as bullying comes up. Here is a **sample** process:

1. The bullying is reported, and all necessary members of the leadership team (i.e., Head Coach and/or Board President) are notified.
2. Ensure safety- take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the bullied and/or to protect the bullied from possible further incidents.
3. Depending upon the nature and severity, you may be required to report the incident to local law enforcement. USA Swimming can assist you with this.
4. The leadership team meets with the bullied child and his/her parent/guardian to understand their wishes and explain the next steps.
5. The leadership team meets with the bullying child and his/her parent/guardian to discuss the situation and explain the next steps.

Respond Responsibly

There are a number of steps that should be covered when addressing a concern:

1. Consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation and the ages of who is involved.
2. Speak with children, coaches, parents/guardians or others that were involved in or bystanders to the situation.
3. Identify the bully's motivation and find out what made him/her act out in this manner. Explain the behavioral expectations to the bully; refer to the team's required Action Plan to Addressing Bullying and/or team Code of Conduct.
4. Identify specific risk areas that encourage the bullying and spell out how the bully will manage his/her risk.

It is very important throughout your response that the thoughts and feelings of both the bullied and the bully are considered. When resolving a situation, using statements of thoughts, feelings and lessons that have been learned are more effective and helps increase accountability. Expectations and consequences should be clear and realistic.

The worksheet is an accountability tool and should include consequences for behavior that violates the plan. Consequences should be discussed in conjunction with behavioral expectations and clearly articulated to the bully and his/her parent/guardian during an in person meeting. Consider using a progressive discipline approach up to and including termination from the team.

This worksheet should be made official by a statement of agreement. The statement of agreement includes all those parties involved in the development and implementation of it— club leadership, coach(es), parent/guardian, and children. It should also specify how long consequences or loss of privileges will be in place and a short description of the progress review when privileges are reinstated and the consequences reach its end date.

Challenging bullying should be rooted in the culture of the team and being successful in addressing bullying really takes the whole team. This includes coaches, children, parents, volunteers, board members and anyone else involved. We must remember that what one person might see as insignificant or kids being kids can be perceived totally different by someone else, especially through the eyes of a child.

Bullying Worksheet

This worksheet should be completed together with the bullying child and his/her parents. Explain to the child that he/she has exhibited concerning behavior but you believe they know the right behavior. This worksheet is a tool to help the child demonstrate appropriate behavior. Explain to the child and his/her parents that the worksheet is private but not confidential – the coaches/administration who work closely with the child will be made aware of it. The bullied and his/her parents will also be made aware of the worksheet.

At the conclusion of the meeting, everyone will agree to and sign the worksheet. If all parties are unable to agree on the contents and actions, the outcome will be:

- Suspension from the team*
 - New Practice Group Assignment*
 - Other disciplinary measure:*
-

Date of Meeting and Attendees:

Step 1: Identify Bully Behavior

Describe the incident(s). Ask the bully to describe the incident in his/her own words (you would also include information that you gathered from speaking with others):

Does the child understand why his/her behavior is problematic? Does the child understand the impact his/her behavior had on the other child/children involved? Record his/her understanding (in child's own words) here:

What are the wishes/concerns of the bullied child? How did the bully's behavior impact the bullied child? (Ask the bullied child or the parent/guardian of the child before the safety planning meeting. The bullied child and his/her parent do not need to attend the meeting)

Step 2: Identify Wishes of the child's Parents:

Check all that apply or fill in stated wishes of the bully child and his/her parents.

- That I can continue to practice and compete with [CLUB]
- For all athletes of [CLUB], including me, to be safe at practices and meets
- _____
- _____
- _____

Step 3: Identify Appropriate and Expected Behavior from the bullying CHILD:

Include here your club's Code of Conduct. Include any additional specific behavioral expectations you have for this child relative to the incident(s). Discuss this with the child and his/her parents during your meeting.

Step 4: Safety Planning

Identify risk areas and how the bully child/club will handle each risk area.

Locker Rooms

CHILD uses the locker rooms: ___ Yes ___ No

How will the child use the locker room going forward?

- No locker room privileges – the child will come and go from practice in his/her swim suit. Parent is responsible for weather appropriate clothing.
- No locker room privileges – the child may use the [identify appropriate and available private bathroom at facility] only. Child [does] or [does not] need supervision to use this locker room.
- Child can use the locker room under the supervision of his/her parent.
- Child will use the [designated bathroom] if he/she has to go to the bathroom during practice. Child [does] or [does not] need supervision to use this bathroom.
- _____

Travel Meets

BULLYING CHILD participates in travel meets: ___ Yes ___ No

How will child travel to away meets going forward?

- Parent/guardian is responsible for supervision during travel and lodging. Child cannot travel or stay overnight without the supervision of a parent/guardian.
- Child can travel with the team (car/plane) but parent is responsible for own lodging. Child cannot stay overnight unsupervised.
- Child can travel and stay with the team if parent is serving as a chaperone on the travel trip.
- Child can travel with the team and share a room with like aged children
- _____
- _____

Teammates

How will the bullying child interact with his/her teammates?

During practice:

After practice:

Supervision: Identify one or more adults who know about the child's bullying behavior and his/her restrictions and can be actively involved in helping the child stay in safe situations. This adult(s) should be someone known to and trusted by the child.

Name:

Phone:

Name:

Phone:

What is the nature of the supervision? Example: Parent/babysitter attends practice every day; coach (not actively coaching) willing to keep an eye on child. Describe the supervision here.

Step 5: Agreement

We agree to the contents of this worksheet and supporting [child's name] as described above. These rules will be in effect until [DATE] at which time we will review the child's progress and evaluate if privileges can be restored.

Athlete:

Head Coach:

Child's Group Coach:

Parent/Guardian:

Parent/Guardian:

Other Supervisory Adult:

Date Effective:

Date Progress Reviewed: