

Mason Manta Rays – Safe Sport Policies

Protecting Athletes – Bullying Policy

PURPOSE

Bullying of any kind is unacceptable at Mason Manta Rays (hereafter referred to as the “Club”) and will not be tolerated. Bullying is counterproductive to team spirit and can be devastating to a victim. The Club is committed to providing a safe, caring and friendly environment for all of our members. If bullying does occur, all athletes and parents should know that incidents will be dealt with promptly and effectively. Anyone who knows that bullying is happening is expected to tell a coach or athlete/mentor.

Objectives of the Club’s Bullying Policy and Action Plan:

1. To make it clear that the Club will not tolerate bullying in any form.
2. To define bullying and give all coaches, parents and swimmers a good understanding of what bullying is.
3. To make it known to all parents, swimmers and coaching staff that there is a policy and protocol should any bullying issues arise.
4. To make how to report bullying clear and understandable.
5. To spread the word that Club takes bullying seriously and that all swimmers and parents can be assured that they will be supported when bullying is reported.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

The USA Swimming Code of Conduct prohibits bullying. Generally, bullying is the use of aggression, whether intentional or not, which hurts another person. Bullying results in pain and distress.

The USA Swimming Code of Conduct defines bullying in 304.3.7. Bullying is the severe or repeated use by one or more USA Swimming members 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

An athlete who feels that he or she has been bullied is asked to do one or more of the following things:

- Talk to your parents;
- Talk to a Club Coach or other designated individual;
- Write a letter or email to the Club Coach or other designated individual;
- Make a report to the USA Swimming Safe Sport staff.

There is no express time limit for initiating a complaint under this procedure, but every effort should be made to bring the complaint to the attention of the appropriate club leadership as soon as possible to make sure that memories are fresh and behavior can be accurately recalled and the bullying behavior can be stopped as soon as possible.

HOW WE HANDLE BULLYING

If bullying is occurring during team-related activities, we STOP BULLYING ON THE SPOT using the following steps:

1. Intervene immediately. It is ok to get another adult to help.
2. Separate the kids involved.
3. Make sure everyone is safe.
4. Meet any immediate medical or mental health needs.
5. Stay calm. Reassure the kids involved, including bystanders.
6. Model respectful behavior when you intervene.

If bullying is occurring at our club or it is reported to be occurring at our club, we address the bullying by FINDING OUT WHAT HAPPENED and SUPPORTING THE KIDS INVOLVED using the following approach:

FINDING OUT WHAT HAPPENED

1. First, we get the facts.
 - a. Keep all the involved children separate.
 - b. Get the story from several sources, both adults and kids.
 - c. Listen without blaming.
 - d. Don't call the act "bullying" while you are trying to understand what happened.
 - e. It may be difficult to get the whole story, especially if multiple athletes are involved or the bullying involves social bullying or cyber bullying. Collect all available information.
2. Then, we determine if it's bullying. There are many behaviors that look like bullying but require different approaches. It is important to determine whether the situation is bullying or something else.
 - a. Review the USA Swimming definition of bullying;
 - b. To determine if the behavior is bullying or something else, consider the following questions:
 - What is the history between the kids involved?
 - Have there been past conflicts?
 - Is there a power imbalance? Remember that a power imbalance is not limited to physical strength. It is sometimes not easily recognized. If the targeted child feels like there is a power imbalance, there probably is.
 - Has this happened before? Is the child worried it will happen again?
 - c. Remember that it may not matter "who started it." Some kids who are bullied may be seen as annoying or provoking, but this does not excuse the bullying behavior.
 - d. Once you have determined if the situation is bullying, support all of the kids involved.

SUPPORTING THE KIDS INVOLVED

3. Support the kids who are being bullied
 - a. Listen and focus on the child. Learn what's been going on and show you want to help. Assure the child that bullying is not their fault.

- b. Work together to resolve the situation and protect the bullied child. The child, parents, and fellow team members and coaches may all have valuable input. It may help to:
 - i. 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 is not at fault and should not be singled out. For example, consider rearranging lane assignments for everyone. If bigger moves are necessary, such as switching practice groups, the child who is bullied should not be forced to change.
 - ii. Develop a game plan. Maintain open communication between the Club and parents. Discuss the steps that will be taken and how bullying will be addressed going forward.
 - c. Be persistent. Bullying may not end overnight. Commit to making it stop and consistently support the bullied child.
4. Address bullying behavior
- a. Make sure the child knows what the problem behavior is. Young people who bully must learn their behavior is wrong and harms others.
 - b. Show kids that bullying is taken seriously. Calmly tell the child that bullying will not be tolerated. Model respectful behavior when addressing the problem.
 - c. Work with the child to understand some of the reasons he or she bullied. For example:
 - i. Sometimes children bully to fit in or just to make fun of someone is a little different from them. In other words, there may be some insecurity involved.
 - ii. Other times kids act out because something else—issues at home, abuse, stress—is going on in their lives. They also may have been bullied. These kids may be in need of additional support.
 - d. Involve the kid 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:
 - i. Write a letter apologizing to the athlete who was bullied.
 - ii. Do a good deed for the person who was bullied, for the Club, or for others in your community.
 - iii. Clean up, repair, or pay for any property they damaged.
 - e. Avoid strategies that don't work or have negative consequences:
 - i. Zero tolerance or “three strikes, you're out” strategies don't work. Suspending or removing from the team swimmers who bully does not reduce bullying behavior. Swimmers may be less likely to report and address bullying if suspension or getting kicked off the team is the consequence.
 - ii. Conflict resolution and peer mediation don't work for bullying. Bullying is not a conflict between people of equal power who share equal blame. Facing those who have bullied may further upset kids who have been bullied.
 - f. Follow-up. After the bullying issue is resolved, continue finding ways to help the child who bullied to understand how what they do affects other people. For example, praise acts of kindness or talk about what it means to be a good teammate.
5. Support bystanders who witness bullying. Every day, kids witness bullying. They want to help, but don't know how. Fortunately, there are a few simple, safe ways that athletes can help stop bullying when they see it happening.
- a. Be a friend to the person being bullied;
 - b. Tell a trusted adult – your parent, coach, or club board member;

- c. Help the kid being bullied get away from the situation. Create a distraction, focus the attention on something else, or offer a way for the target to get out of the situation. "Let's go, practice is about to start."
- d. Set a good example by not bullying others.
- e. Don't give the bully an audience. Bullies are encouraged by the attention they get from bystanders. If you do nothing else, just walk away.

Travel Policy and Code of Conduct

Team Travel Policy for Mason Manta Rays

Purpose: Athletes are most vulnerable to misconduct during travel, particularly overnight stays. This includes a high risk of athlete-to-athlete misconduct. During travel, athletes are often away from their families and support networks, and the setting – new changing areas, locker rooms, workout facilities, automobiles and hotel rooms – is less structured and less familiar.

Team Travel is defined as overnight travel to a swim meet or other team activity that is planned and supervised by the club or LSC.

Section 1 - USA Swimming Required Policies

Club and LSC travel policies must include these policies. These items are Code of Conduct stipulations in the USA Swimming Rulebook.

- a. Club travel policies must be signed and agreed to by all athletes, parents, coaches and other adults traveling with the club. (305.5.D)
- b. Team managers and chaperones must be members of USA Swimming and have successfully passed a USA Swimming-administered criminal background check. (305.5.B)
- c. Regardless of gender, a coach shall not share a hotel room or other sleeping arrangement with an athlete (unless the coach is the parent, guardian, sibling, or spouse of that particular athlete). (305.5.A)
- d. When only one athlete and one coach travel to a competition, the athlete must have his/her parents' (or legal guardian's) written permission in advance to travel alone with the coach. (305.5C)

Section 2 – Mason Manta Rays Policies

- a. During team travel, when doing room checks, attending team meetings and/or other activities, two-deep leadership and open and observable environments should be maintained.
- b. Athletes should not ride in a coach's vehicle without another adult present who is the same gender as the athlete, unless prior parental permission is obtained.
- c. During overnight team travel, if athletes are paired with other athletes they shall be of the same gender and should be a similar age. Where athletes are age 13 & over, chaperones and/or team managers would ideally stay in nearby rooms. When athletes are age 12 & under, chaperones and/or team managers may stay with athletes. Where chaperones/team managers are staying in a room with athletes, they should be the same gender as the athlete and written consent should be given by athlete's parents (or legal guardian).

- d. When only one athlete and one coach travel to a competition, at the competition the coach and athlete should attempt to establish a “buddy” club to associate with during the competition and when away from the venue.
- e. To ensure the propriety of the athletes and to protect the staff, there will be no male athletes in female athlete’s rooms and no female athletes in male athlete’s rooms (unless the other athlete is a sibling or spouse of that particular athlete) after lights out. When an athlete of the opposite gender is in a room, the door must remain open at all times.
- f. A copy of the Club Code of Conduct must be signed by the athlete and his/her parent or legal guardian.
- g. Coaches/chaperones should obtain a signed Liability Release and/or Indemnification Form for each athlete.
- h. Coaches/chaperones should carry a signed Medical Consent or Authorization to Treat Form for each athlete.
- i. Curfews shall be established by the coaches/chaperones each day of the trip.
- j. Team members and staff traveling with the team will attend all team functions including meetings, practices, meals, meet sessions, etc. unless otherwise excused or instructed by the head coach or his/her designee.
- k. The directions & decisions of coaches/chaperones are final.
- l. Swimmers are expected to remain with the team at all times during the trip. Swimmers are not to leave the competition venue, the hotel, a restaurant, or any other place at which the team has gathered without the permission/knowledge of the coach or chaperone.
- m. When visiting public places such as shopping malls, movie theatres, etc. swimmers will stay in groups of no less than three persons. 12 & Under athletes will be accompanied by a chaperone.
- n. The Head Coach or his/her designee shall make a written report of travel policy or code of conduct violations to the parent or legal guardian of any affected minor athlete.

Section 3 - Other Policies

Behavior

- a. Be quiet and respect the rights of teammates and others in hotel;
- b. Be prompt and on time;
- c. Adhere to cell phone usage guidelines;
- d. Adhere to computer use guidelines including social media;
- e. Respect travel vehicles;
- f. Use appropriate behavior in public facilities;
- g. Must stay in assigned hotel room; and
- h. Needs and wellbeing of the team come first.

Financial

- a. No room service without permission;
- b. Swimmers responsible for all incidental charges;
- c. Swimmers responsible for any damages or thievery at hotel;
- d. Must participate in contracted group meals

Code of Conduct / Honor Code

Required:

All team members, team staff, and parents of minors are apprised in writing of this Code of Conduct and the attached USA Swimming Code of Conduct. A signature on this document constitutes unconditional agreement to comply with the stipulations of both documents.

- a. Team members will display proper respect and sportsmanship toward coaches, officials, administrators, teammates, fellow competitors and the public at all times.
- b. Team members and staff will refrain from any illegal or inappropriate behavior that would detract from a positive image of the team or be detrimental to its performance objectives.
- c. The possession or use of alcohol or tobacco products by any athlete is prohibited.
- d. The possession, use, or sale/distribution of any controlled or illegal substance or any form of weapon is strictly forbidden.
- e. No “deck changes” are permitted. Athletes are expected to use available change facilities.
- f. Team members are reminded that when competing in meets, traveling on trips, and attending other meet-related functions, they are representing both themselves and the MASON MANTA RAYS. Athlete behavior must positively reflect the high standards of the club (or LSC).
- g. Failure to comply with the Honor Code as set forth in this document may result in disciplinary action. Such discipline may include, but may not be limited to:
 - i. Dismissal from the trip and immediate return home at the athlete’s expense;
 - ii. Disqualification from one or more events, or all events of competition;
 - iii. Disqualification from future team travel meets;
 - iv. Financial penalties;
 - v. Dismissal from the team; and/or
 - vi. Proceedings for a LSC or USA Swimming National Board of Review.
- h. Swimmers are to refrain from inappropriate physical contact at team activities and events. Swimmers are to refrain from use of inappropriate language.

Standards for Swimmers Injured at Practice

Ohio’s law concerning concussions in youth sports became effective on April 26, 2013. It requires OSI and its members to meet specific requirements. For OSI group members (swim teams), there are three basic requirements.

1. Each team must provide the parent or guardian of each athlete an ODH prepared disclosure form once each year. Teams who use a website to attempt compliance with the requirement may not be compliant. The form has to be “provided” not just made available.
2. Verify that all individuals acting as coaches comply with the law. Each individual who coaches must hold a certificate for mandatory concussion training (see below) or hold a pupil-activity program permit issued under section 3319.303 of the Revised Code for coaching interscholastic athletics - properly certified Ohio interscholastic coaches do not need further certification. Individuals may not coach without the required certification.
3. Verify that all of your referees comply with the law.
4. When hosting meets, insure that all referees and coaches comply with the law.

Mike Yeager’s safe sport committee is in charge of complying with the law.

ODH provides two online alternatives for the required training. Here is the one that should be used.

<http://www.nfhslern.com/electiveDetail.aspx?courseID=38000>

The reason for using the above site is that it keeps a searchable database of everyone who has completed training. OSI will be able to verify training.

OSI's general counsel has provided OSI the following observations concerning the law.

There are issues with the law. The sponsors have recognized that there are issues, and are pushing for amendments. None of the currently pending amendments address issues affecting OSI.

With respect to things as they are now, let me answer a few questions that I have received.

1. Timing. The law became effective April 26, 2013. There is no transition period. Compliance is required now.
2. Coaches. No one may coach without the training. If a coach does not have the training, the coach may not coach. Coaches should complete training before participating in practices.
3. Officials. OSI officials are well on the way to compliance. ODH (I talked with ODH) notes that the law covers "referees". Therefore, OSI has properly focused on getting referees in compliance.
4. Group members. Each team must provide the parent or guardian of each athlete an ODH prepared disclosure form once each year. Clubs who use a website to attempt compliance with the requirement may not be compliant. The form has to be "provided" not just made available. See 8. Below.
5. OSI (clubs too). OSI is required to inform coaches and referees of the requirements of the law as well as the clubs. See item 7. OSI is not required to enforce the law. Because of civil liability issues, at a minimum, OSI and each of its clubs should have mechanisms to ensure that all coaches, referees, and clubs comply with the law. The requirements of the law should be set forth in a meet packet, including the required ODH information sheet.
6. Procedures. An athlete suffering an injury may not participate further that day, and may not return to participation until the athlete is assessed and written clearance from a health care provider is produced.
7. Out of state coaches and referees. The law requires all coaches and referees participating in events in Ohio to comply with its requirements. There is no exception for out of state coaches coming into Ohio for a meet. I spent a great deal of time explaining the problems this causes to ODH and one of the sponsors. The statute requires OSI to inform out of state coaches using the following language: "The youth sports organization for which the individual intends to act as a coach or referee shall inform the individual of the requirement described in division (C)(1) of this section." The language does not require an enforcement mechanism. However, particularly for OSI coaches and referees, OSI and its clubs may have exposure to claims of liability if they do not enforce the law with respect to their members. Referees acting as judges or starters, would not have to comply.
8. Disclosures to out of state parents. The disclosures to parents and guardians would seem to apply to out of state parents and guardians participating in Ohio. Here is the language: " A youth sports organization shall provide to the parent, guardian, or other person having care or charge of an individual who wishes to practice for or compete in an athletic activity organized by a youth sports organization the concussion and head injury information sheet required by section 3707.52 of the Revised Code. The organization shall provide the information sheet annually for each sport or other category of athletic activity for or in which the individual practices or competes." The bolding and underlining are mine, and are not in the statute.
9. Whether Ohio may regulate out of state clubs. Arguably, Ohio may regulate out of state participants in activities taking place in Ohio. There may be some argument that the regulation is too onerous to withstand scrutiny under the commerce clause or the regimen imposed on USOC under federal legislation. I spent significant time explaining the issues to ODH and to one of the laws sponsors, and that compliance by the Ohio sponsoring.

Here is the link to the ODH page on the concussion law.

<http://www.healthyohiprogram.org/concussion.aspx>

Electronic Communication Policy

PURPOSE

The Mason Manta Rays recognize the prevalence of electronic communication and social media in today's world. Many of our swimmers use these means as their primary method of communication. While the Club acknowledges the value of these methods of communication, the Club also realizes that there are associated risks that must be considered when adults use these methods to communicate with minors.

GENERAL CONTENT

All communications between a coach or other adult and an athlete must be professional in nature and for the purpose of communicating information about team activities. The content and intent of all electronic communications must adhere to the USA Swimming Code of Conduct regarding Athlete Protection.

For example, as with any communication with an athlete, electronic communication should not contain or relate to any of the following:

- drugs or alcohol use;
- sexually oriented conversation; sexually explicit language; sexual activity
- the adult's personal life , social activities, relationship or family issues, or personal problems; and
- inappropriate or sexually explicit pictures
- Note: Any communication concerning an athlete's personal life, social activities, relationship or family issues or personal problems must be transparent, accessible and professional.

Whether one is an athlete, coach, or parent, the guiding principle to always use in communication is to ask: "Is this communication something that someone else would find appropriate or acceptable in a face-to-face meeting?" or "Is this something you would be comfortable saying out loud to the intended recipient of your communication in front of the intended recipient's parents, the coaching staff, or other athletes?"

With respect to electronic communications, a simple test that can be used in most cases is whether the electronic communication with swimmers is **Transparent, Accessible and Professional**.

Transparent: All electronic communication between coaches and athletes should be transparent. Your communication should not only be clear and direct, but also free of hidden meanings, innuendo and expectations.

Accessible: All electronic communication between coaches and athletes should be considered a matter of record and part of the Club's records. Whenever possible, include another coach or parent in the communication so that there is no question regarding accessibility.

Professional: All electronic communication between a coach and an athlete should be conducted professionally as a representative of the Club. This includes word choices, tone, grammar, and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a staff member.

If your communication meets all three of the **T.A.P.** criteria, then it is likely your method of communication with athletes will be appropriate.

FACEBOOK, MYSPACE, BLOGS, AND SIMILAR SITES

Coaches may have personal Facebook (or other social media site) pages, but they are encouraged to not permit any athlete member of the Club to join their personal page as a “friend.” A coach should not seek any “friend” request from an athlete. Coaches and athletes are not permitted to “private message” each other through Facebook. Coaches and athletes are not permitted to “instant message” each other through Facebook chat or other IM method.

The Club has an official Facebook page that athletes and their parents can “friend” for information and updates on team-related matters.

Coaches are encouraged to set their pages to “private” to prevent athletes from accessing the coach’s personal information.

TWITTER

Coaches and athletes may follow each other on Twitter. Coaches and athletes are not permitted to “direct message” each other through Twitter.

TEXTING

Subject to the general guidelines mentioned above, texting is allowed between coaches and athletes during the hours from 7am until 9pm. Texts can be sent prior to 7am in the event of an early morning practice change. Texting only shall be used for the purpose of communicating information directly related to team activities.

EMAIL

Athletes and coaches may use email to communicate between the hours of 7am and 9pm. When communicating with an athlete through email, a parent, or another coach must also be copied.

REQUEST TO DISCONTINUE ALL ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

The parents or guardians of an athlete may request in writing that their child not be contacted by coaches through any form of electronic communication.

Athlete Discipline

Coaches should provide swimmers with opportunities to correct behavior. Removal from practices should be a last resort. The coach should use a three strike rule for practice. Should a coach remove a swimmer from practice, the coach needs to contact the parents and notify them of the situation. For serious offenses please refer to the policies set in the Safe Sport guidelines by USA Swimming.