

Safeguarding Vocabulary

Active Bystander

A person who directly or indirectly intervenes when they witness something troubling. Bystanders have a tremendous impact in the moment, supporting survivors and changing norms of behavior.

Bullying

Conduct that intends to or does hurt, control, or diminish another athlete, often someone who may be viewed as vulnerable. Bullying characteristically is repetitive and intentional and leverages an imbalance of power between parties. Bullying behavior tactics can include and involve previously described elements of verbal, emotional, physical, financial, and sexual abuse, discrimination, and/or harassment.

Consent

Consent requires a person to be informed, make the decision voluntarily, and be competent to do so, meaning an athlete knows what they are saying yes to. All three of these components must be met. When we apply this to athletes of all ages and in all settings, we must consider the power imbalance between athletes and people in positions of power, perhaps another athlete, a coach, a medical professional, a staff member, or another authority figure. For a romantic or sexual relationship between an athlete and a person in a position of power, consent isn't possible. The three components of valid consent cannot be met.

Discrimination

Discrimination is the prejudicial treatment of athletes or groups based on attributes or protected categories. Simply put, it is treating some athletes differently than others because of certain characteristics they have. Protected characteristics may include age, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, ability, marital status, pregnancy status, sexual orientation, genetic and health conditions. When discrimination occurs, athletes are negatively impacted by unfair decisions, practices, and policies.

Exploitation

Exploitation is an abuse of power when an athlete is harmed or treated unfairly for gain or benefit. In the world of sports, this can look like this:

- Financial abuse: financial control over an athlete (withholding, limiting access, stealing, or lying about funds), forced labor without fair compensation
- Sexual exploitation: forcing sexual activity for profit, recording, distributing, allowing others to watch sexual activity, exposure to disease
- Trafficking: transporting athletes for economic gain and/or forced labor or sexual acts, withholding documentation and paperwork

Grooming

A pattern of behaviors and tactics to gain the trust of an athlete through manipulation, control, isolation, and secrecy with the intent to exploit or abuse them.

Harassment

Harassment is unwelcome conduct that causes fear, humiliation, annoyance, discomfort, and/or offends, degrades, or reflects a discriminatory bias that creates a hostile environment. In sports, this can look like this:

- Verbal: Threatening, ridiculing, using slurs and offensive language or jokes, insults Physical: Touching, intimidation, or assault
- Sexual: unwanted advances, making sexual requests, communication, and conduct of a sexual nature
- Visual: displaying or forcing someone to look at offensive content
- Superiority: Attempting to assert dominance against a person or group based on discriminatory characteristics
- Conditional: Submission to, objection to, or rejection of such harassment as a term for employment, standing participation in, or sports-related decisions

Hazing

Hazing refers to actions or practices that intend to or likely subject an athlete to harmful circumstances and/or activities as a condition to join or be socially accepted by a group, team, or organization. Hazing behaviors are as follows:

- Intimidation: deception, assignment of demerits, silence period with threats for violation, social isolation, demeaning names, expecting certain items to always be in one's possession
- Harassment: verbal abuse, threats or implied threats, forced nudity, forcing to wear embarrassing attire, degrading or humiliating skits, sleep deprivation, sexual simulations
- Violence: forced substance consumption, physical assault, branding, forced ingestion of vile substances, water intoxication, kidnapping, sexual assault

Neglect

Neglect refers to actions or the absence of actions that fail to provide care, supervision, affection, protection, and support for an athlete's basic needs, health, safety, and well-being and that are likely to result in serious impairment of the athlete's holistic development. In sports, neglect can present in a variety of ways:

- Physical neglect: failure to provide for physical needs, safety requirements, inadequate supervision during training, competition, and travel, allowing bullying or hazing
- Emotional neglect: withholding attention, failing to provide psychological support and well-being, or ignoring the athlete's emotional needs
- Medical neglect: failing to provide an athlete with needed medical attention, disregarding medical directions pertaining to time to heal from illness or injury, forcing athletes to play/performance while injured, improperly treating injuries
- General neglect: failure to provide an athlete with appropriate food and water, shelter, using inadequate and unsafe equipment, and/or the ill-treatment of athletes with disabilities, failure to report abuse
- Improper training and overtraining: forcing an athlete to train in a way that is dangerous to their body, not allowing enough recovery time between strenuous sessions

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse refers to intentional or unintentional physical actions that cause or threaten to cause harm to athletes. This does not include accidental injury or well-regulated sport sanctioned conduct acceptable in certain sports. In the sporting context, physical abuse can look like this:

- Contact: punching, hitting, poisoning, drowning, burning, shaking, beating, biting, striking, strangling, slapping, stabbing, pulling hair/ears, grabbing, pushing, cutting, paddling, scarring, whipping, branding, hitting with objects/sports equipment, rough corrections of position
- Non-contact: forcing an athlete to play while injured or return to sport without medical clearance, fabricating symptoms of injury on behalf of the athlete, deliberating inducing sickness, confining and isolating an athlete in a small space, forcing an athlete to assume a painful position for no legitimate reason, providing any illicit substance including drugs, alcohol, or non-prescribed medication to an athlete

Power Imbalance

Power imbalances exist when someone has power over another and holds influence over that person. When a power imbalance is present, there is an increased need for boundaries. Consent cannot be appropriately given when there is an imbalance of power.

Psychological/Emotional Abuse

Psychological or emotional abuse refers to acts and behaviors, most often repeated and persistent, that interfere with and negatively impact an athlete's positive emotional and social development and self-worth. In aquatics, this can happen online and in person and can look like this:

- Verbal acts: name-calling, body-shaming, ridiculing, humiliating, bullying, threatening, discriminating, mocking, spreading rumors, quick oscillation between praise and criticism, promoting disordered eating
- Physical acts: ignoring, isolating, segregating, denying coaching and guidance, punching/throwing things around the athlete
- Stalking: monitoring, observing, excessively messaging
- Tactics: manipulation, gaslighting, controlling an athlete's social interactions, domination, guilt-tripping, mind games, silent treatment, possessiveness, frightening

Safeguarding

The term safeguarding applies to actions taken to ensure participants are protected from harm. Abuse, harm, violence, and neglect prevention pertains to physical, emotional, mental, and psychological health and well-being. The goal of safeguarding is to proactively create safe and healthy sporting environments. This goal is achieved by providing clarity and standardizing expectations on preventative best practices and healthy relationship dynamics.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is conduct or threatened conduct that is forced and/or coerced, and is sexual in nature that the athlete does not fully understand, cannot consent to, or has no choice to consent to. In aquatics, this may look like this:

- Indecent exposure: exposing or requesting child sexual abuse material or pornographic material, forcing an athlete to look at or produce sexual images or activities, and encouraging an athlete to behave in a sexually inappropriate way
- Non-consensual contact: masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching with an object or body part (clothed or unclothed) of an athlete's genitals, breasts, or buttocks
- Non-consensual intercourse: oral sex, any penetration with an object or body part
- Grooming: a pattern of behaviors and tactics to gain the trust of an athlete through manipulation, control, isolation, and secrecy with the intent to exploit or abuse them
- Inappropriate relationships: a form of abuse that can be misunderstood by an athlete as consensual when the relationship involves an imbalance of power; consent is impossible as the athlete's options are limited due to force, coercion, or manipulation

Stigma as Abuse

Less known and discussed is how stigma, the societal or interpersonal disapproval or mark of disgrace towards a particular quality or circumstance, can be a form of abuse. Stigma can be associated with mental health, survivorship, domestic violence, disabilities, abuse, incarceration, and substance use. In sports, stigma can result in the shame, discrediting, negative perception, and mistreatment of an athlete. This means that the athlete may be treated differently due to stigma from others and may manifest as a lack of opportunity, a barrier to seeking help and resources, and dismissal of their experiences.