

Bullying Prevention in Sports

Whether it's from parents, players or coaches, disrespectful behaviour has become a growing concern in our gyms, rinks and on our playing fields.

There are steps we can take to equip ourselves with awareness and knowledge so that every athlete can walk away from practice and competition with a positive self-image.

This fact sheet will help parents, players and coaches identify and deal with issues such as bullying, abuse and harassment in sports.

"Team Alberta is committed to providing a sport environment in which all individuals are treated with respect. Participants shall refrain from comments and behaviours that are disrespectful, offensive, abusive, racist or sexist."

– Team Alberta Code of Conduct

Bullying is defined as:

Bullying is any repeated, hostile or demeaning behaviour intended to cause harm, fear or distress, including physical or psychological harm.

For an action to be considered bullying, it needs to involve:

- Intent: the actions happen on purpose.
- Harm: the recipient is hurt by the action.
- Repetition: the recipient is repeatedly targeted.

Bullying can be:

- Verbal: name calling, put downs, threats.
- Social/Relational: exclusion, gossiping, ganging-up.
- Physical: hitting, pushing, slapping.

Bullying before, during or after sports may appear as:

- Repeated unwarranted yelling directed at the target.
- Continually criticizing the target's abilities in a way that is hurtful.
- Repeatedly blaming the target for mistakes.
- Repeatedly making unreasonable demands.
- Repeated insults or put downs of the target.
- Repeated threats to remove or restrict opportunities or privileges.
- Repeatedly denying or discounting the target's accomplishments.
- Threats of and actual, physical violence.
- E-mails or texts containing insults or threats.

What Parents and Adults can do:

- Recognize that you are a role model and set a good example
- Maintain open and honest communication with your child and the coach to discuss any issues. Ensure that a pre-season meeting is held with parents, athletes, coaches and board members to discuss acceptable boundaries of behaviour
- Inquire whether the coach is certified and a member of a provincial sport governing body with a code of ethics and harassment policy. If not, work with the coach, other parents and board members toward getting the coach certified.
- Attend practices and games whenever possible. If private practices are held, ask for an explanation.
- If you see bullying, tell the coach, other parents or officials.

What players can do:

- Trust your instincts. If someone is making you feel uncomfortable or threatened, don't ignore it. You have the right to be treated respectfully. Talk to someone you trust – a parent, friend, coach, manager or another player. Remember to keep speaking up until someone helps you.
- Call the 24-hour Bullying Prevention Helpline at 1-888-456-2323, toll-free in Alberta, for advice.
- If you are being bullied, document the actions, find advocates and walk.
- Don't reply to Cyberbullying. If you're threatened keep the messages as evidence. The police and service providers can use these messages to help you.
- Understand what bullying is and the negative impact it can have on your team. If you witness bullying, support the person

who is experiencing the bullying. You, have the power to help as a bystander by

- Speaking up;
- Walking away and getting help;
- Helping the target; and
- Not fighting the bully.

What coaches and volunteers can do:

- Recognize that you are a role model to players and set a good example. Ensure a safe and respectful sport environment by not tolerating bullying
- Establish open and honest communication between all parties involved, including parents, players, managers and volunteers.
- Look critically at your own behaviour. Accept feedback without being defensive and change, if needed.
- Don't view screening procedures, policy or training as a threat to your character, but rather as an opportunity to learn and create a safer and healthier sporting environment for everyone.
- Get certified and become involved in a provincial sport governing body with a code of ethics and harassment policy.
- Promote healthy relationships by encouraging empathy, kindness, honesty and respect. Healthy relationships give people tools to resolve conflict and regulate their emotions and manage stress which can increase resiliency, making people less likely to be involved with bullying.