



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

There are a number of ways that you may become aware that all is perhaps not as it should be. A child may tell you, a third party may report on suspicions or actual incidents, or, you may have seen an incident or have strong suspicions yourself. When you receive reports or suspicions of possible misconduct, a decision will be made as to whether or not it is justified, and if so, whether it relates to poor athletic practice or more seriously to abuse. Arriving at the final decision is not always easy or straightforward and what follows is offered as guidance to help reach that conclusion.

## **2. DEFINITIONS**

### **2.1 Children/Young People**

The Children Act of 1989 defines a child as being a person under the age of 18 years. When reading this policy the ages of children, child, young people or young person have not been used in their strictest sense, but each is used to define anyone under the age of 18 years.

### **2.2 Abuse**

Abuse which is caused not only by those who actually perpetrate it, but also by those who fail to prevent, condone, minimise or tolerate it comes in many guises:

- a) Physical - caused when adults or other children deliberately inflict injury on a child or knowingly fail to prevent such injury. This category includes supplying children with alcohol or inappropriate drugs, and can arise when the nature and intensity of training exceeds the capacity of the child's immature and growing body.
- b) Emotional - caused when adults fail to show due care and attention, or threaten, use sarcasm, taunt or shout at a child causing him/her to lose self esteem, self confidence and to become nervous and withdrawn. This type of abuse may also occur when an adult repeatedly ignores or fails to respond to a child's efforts or places the child under unrealistic pressure to perform up to the adult's high expectations.
- c) Neglect - arises when adults fail to meet a child's essential needs for clothing, warmth, food, shelter and medical care. This category also includes leaving a child without proper supervision or in circumstances which places the child at risk of injury, (It is important that the Club does not ask our volunteer adults to undertake tasks that are unsafe).
- d) Trust - Where young people are indoctrinated with attitudes towards drugs, training, cheating, or social, political and religious views which are unacceptable to the young athletes family, community, this Club or the rules of sport
- e) Sexual - Occurs when adults of either sex use children to fulfil their own sexual needs. It also includes suggestions that sexual favours can help advancement in sport or in a career or refusal hinder it.



### **3. IDENTIFICATION OF ABUSE**

Dealing with child abuse is rarely straightforward. In some cases a child's disturbed behaviour or an injury may suggest that a problem might exist. In many situations however, the signs may not be clear cut and decisions will need to be carefully considered.

- a) the appearance of obvious bruising, or a youngster showing signs of distress is often the first indicator that something is amiss, but frequently victims of abuse become skilled in hiding such signs and consequently their suffering becomes less apparent.
- b) uncharacteristic changes in the child's behaviour, attitude or commitment, inappropriate need of the child for closeness and attachment to his/her coach or other adult may all suggest some problem.
- c) fear of particular adults, especially someone with whom a close relationship would normally be expected, or, an unexplained request to change coach or helper or track side gossip may all lead to some concern.
- d) children who become increasingly unkempt, are reluctant to return home, or who are always alone and unaccompanied and/or prevented from socialising with their peers also need to be considered.
- e) when ill treatment seems nothing to do with the Club, exceptional care must be exercised about voicing allegations and advice should be sought.

It must never be assumed that the presence of one or more of the above is actually proof that abuse is taking place. Each at best is only an indicator that all may not be well, but it can provide the kick start needed to initiate discrete and tactful probing by the Child Protection Officer. Similarly, no outward signs may be present, yet the experienced Child Protection Officer may feel that something is wrong.

### **4. DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS**

This advice applies to any adult placed in the situation where a child comes to them, not just the Child Protection Officer.

- a) Listen to what the child is saying and show that he or she is being taken seriously.
- b) Reassure the child he or she is not to blame. Make it clear that you realise how difficult it must be to confide.
- c) Communicate at the child's pace, do not place undue pressure on the child to rush.
- d) Ideally this first contact with the child should be on a one to one basis. The presence of other adults can cloud the issue should discrepancies arise if and when formal statements are required.
- e) Keep questions to a minimum. Use open ended questions which elicit more than a yes or no answer. For example, ask "what have you done since breakfast this morning" rather than "did you go out tonight".
- f) On no account must you lead the child. The law is very strict and should the final outcome be a court appearance, if the child appears to have been led, or words or ideas suggested to him or her, the case could end up being dismissed.



- g) Ensure that you clearly understand what the child has said. If at all possible make notes as the conversation proceeds or as soon as practicable after, as memory cannot always be relied on.
- h) Explain to the child what steps you intend to take having heard their account.
- i) Stay calm, do not rush into inappropriate action.
- j) If you feel that talking a problem through will help or need advice the NSPCC free phone help line is 0800800500. You do not have to identify either yourself or the Club, and the service operates 24 hours per day, 365 days of the year.
- k) Produce a report as soon after the conversation as is practicable. The report should include:
  - 1) Child's name, address and date of birth
  - 2) Date, time and nature of the incident
  - 3) The child's own account of what happened
  - 4) Your observations on the behaviour and emotional state of the child along with any obvious injuries
  - 5) An account of any actions you undertook and comments/advice made to the child. State whether or not the parents/carers have been informed at that stage. (See section 5a before making any approach to the parents/carers.)
  - 6) A statement as to whether or not concerns expressed in the report are your own or those of a third party.
  - 7) Signature, date and your contact details.
  - 8) Do not:
    - a) Ignore what has been disclosed
    - b) Make any promises you cannot keep
    - c) Make the child repeat the story unnecessarily
    - d) Delay
    - e) Take sole responsibility for further action

**If the report has been produced by an adult other than the Child Protection Officer, then it must be passed to the Child Protection Officer for further action. Only when an unacceptable delay will arise for example when the Child Protection Officer is on holiday should another suitably trained member of the Club initiate subsequent action.**

## **5. WHEN IT APPEARS ABUSE HAS TAKEN PLACE**

Child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can arouse strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgement about any action to take.

- a) Parents / carers should be informed to clarify initial concerns. This must be undertaken carefully as it may transpire that some personal concern of the young person e.g. the bereavement of a close family member has caused the unhappiness. However, in circumstances where a child may be placed at a greater risk if such concerns are shared with the parents / carers, they should not be informed.



- b) Social Services and / or the Police should be contacted immediately. Social Services are located at Bognor Regis Health Centre, West Street, Bognor Regis, telephone 01243 852700 and the Police have a Child Protection Team based at Haywards Heath Police Station, telephone 0845 607 0999 or Sussex Police at Lewes on 01273475432.

When making such a call make a note of what was said by both the official contacted and yourself and their name and designation should it become necessary to make further contact in the future.

- c) At the conclusion of the case you should take any appropriate action in regard to informing the Club Secretary or Chairman and the sport's governing body.

#### **6. When it appears poor athletic practice has taken place**

- a) You should refer the matter immediately to the Club Secretary or Chairman for consideration if appropriate by the Club's Management Committee.
- b) Should you not be able to resolve the matter satisfactorily within the Club, the regional association should be informed.

#### **7. ALLEGATIONS OF PREVIOUS ABUSE**

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (e.g. by an adult who was abused as a child by a member of the Club who is still currently working with children). Where such an allegation is made, the Club should follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to the social services or the police. This is because other children, either within or outside sport, may be at risk from this person.

#### **8. BULLYING**

The same procedure relating to suspicions or allegations should be followed if bullying is suspected. All settings in which children are provided with services or are living away from home should have rigorously enforced anti-bullying strategies in place.

#### **9. ACTION TO HELP THE VICTIM AND PREVENT BULLYING IN SPORT**

- a) Take all signs of bullying very seriously.
- b) Encourage all children to speak and share their concerns (It is believed that up to 12 children per year commit suicide as a result of bullying, so if anyone talks about or threatens suicide, seek professional help immediately).
- c) Speak with the victim and the bully(ies) separately, and take action to ensure the victim is safe.
- d) Talk to the bully(ies), explain the situation, and try to get the bully(ies) to understand the consequences of their behaviour. Seek an apology to the victim(s).
- e) Inform the bully's parents and impose sanctions as necessary.