



Welsh Triathlon Safeguarding and Protecting Children. What is abuse and how to recognise it?

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Introduction

Welsh Triathlon provides the following guidance for Information on what is abuse and how to recognise it.

All staff and volunteers have a role and responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of children.

In particular, you must:

- **Recognise** - Be able to identify abuse and neglect and raise a concern.
- **Respond** - Reassure the child, tell them what you will need to do.
- **Record** - Who, what, where, when - make sure you write down what you see, hear or are told (separating fact from fiction). Keep your record safe and maintain confidentiality.
- **Refer** - Your concerns to the Welsh Triathlon Lead Safeguarding Officer or your Club Welfare Officer if either you recognise or suspect abuse and neglect, or you are responding to an allegation from or about a child. If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999.

Sharing the right information, at the right time, with the right people, is fundamental to good practice in safeguarding and protecting children.

Recognise

Children may disclose abuse directly or indirectly and sometimes they may start sharing details of abuse before they are ready to put their thoughts and feelings in order.

Disclosure is the process by which children start to share their experiences of abuse with others. This can take place over a long period of time - it is a journey, not one act or action.

Not all disclosures will lead to a formal report of abuse or a case being made or taken to a case management group, but all disclosures should be taken seriously.

It takes extraordinary courage for a child to go through the journey of disclosing abuse. It is vital that anyone who works with a child undertaking this journey is able to provide them with the support they need.

How disclosure happens

Children may disclose abuse in a variety of ways, including:

- **Directly** - making specific verbal statements about what's happened to them.
- **Indirectly** - making ambiguous verbal statements which suggest something is wrong.
- **Behaviourally** - displaying behaviour that signals something is wrong (this may or may not be deliberate) non-verbally - e.g. writing letters, drawing pictures or trying to communicate in other ways.

Children may not always be aware that they are disclosing abuse through their actions and behaviour.

Sometimes children make partial disclosures of abuse. This means they give some details about what they've experienced, but not the whole picture. They may withhold some information because they:

- Are afraid they will get in trouble with or upset their family.
- Want to deflect blame in case of family difficulties as a result of the disclosure.
- Feel ashamed and/or guilty or need to protect themselves from having to relive traumatic events.

Barriers to disclosure

Some children are reluctant to seek help because they feel they don't have anyone to turn to for support. They may have sought help in the past and had a negative experience, which makes them unlikely to do so again.

They may also:

- Feel that they will not be taken seriously.
- Feel too embarrassed to talk to an adult about a private or personal problem.
- Worry about confidentiality.
- Lack trust in the people around them (including parents) and in the services provided to help them.
- Fear the consequences of asking for help.
- Worry they will be causing trouble and making the situation worse.
- Find formal procedures overwhelming.

Not all children realise they have experienced abuse, for example if they have been groomed.

What should I be recognising?

- General concerns about a child welfare.
- Concerns relating to a safeguarding incident e.g. poor practice or abuse.
- Concerns, suspicions, or allegations of misconduct.
- Code of conduct breach.
- Allegations of abuse by or against any child.

Spotting the signs of abuse

Children who have been abused may want to tell someone, but not have the exact words to do so. They may attempt to disclose abuse by giving adults clues, through their actions and by using indirect words.

Adults need to be able to notice the signs that a child might be distressed and ask them appropriate questions about what might have caused this.

Child abuse happens when a person - adult or child - harms a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but can also involve a lack of love, care and attention. Children who suffer abuse may struggle to find the words to speak out, so it's vital that anyone working with children is vigilant for the signs of abuse. We know that neglect, whatever form it takes, can be just as damaging to a child as physical or sexual abuse.

Abuse can happen to a child regardless of their age, gender, race or ability. Children may be abused by adults or by other children. Children can also be harmed through bullying, poor

practice, harassment or grooming. An abused child will often experience more than one type of abuse, as well as other difficulties in their lives. It often happens over a period of time, rather than being a one-off event and it can increasingly happen online.

Children may be abused by:

- Family members.
- Friends.
- People working or volunteering in organisational or community settings.
- People they know.
- Or, much less commonly, by strangers.

All individuals within triathlon should be able to recognise the signs and indicators of abuse and have an idea of how to respond to these signs. It is not the responsibility of individuals within triathlon to determine if abuse has occurred, or is occurring, but they should report any concerns/ incidents to the club welfare officer or Welsh Triathlon Lead Safeguarding Officer.

Any allegations or suspicions of abuse, bullying or poor practice need to be responded to and reported in line with the Welsh Triathlon Safeguarding reporting procedure document

Signs of abuse

Children who suffer abuse may be afraid to tell anybody about the abuse. They may struggle with feelings of guilt, shame or confusion - particularly if the abuser is a parent, coach, club member, caregiver or other close family member or friend. Many of the signs that a child is being abused are the same regardless of the type of abuse. Anyone working with children in triathlon needs to be vigilant to the signs listed below.

- Regular flinching in response to sudden but harmless actions, for example someone raising a hand quickly.
- Showing an inexplicable fear of particular places or making excuses to avoid particular people.
- Knowledge of 'adult issues' for example alcohol, drugs and/or sexual behaviour which is inappropriate for their age or stage of development.
- Angry outbursts or behaving aggressively towards other children, adults, animals or toys.
- Becoming withdrawn or appearing anxious, clingy or depressed.
- Self-harming or thoughts about suicide.
- Changes in eating habits or developing eating disorders.
- Regularly experiencing nightmares or sleep problems.
- Regularly wetting the bed or soiling their clothes.
- In older children, risky behaviour such as substance misuse or criminal activity.
- Running away or regularly going missing from home or care.
- Not receiving adequate medical attention after injuries.

These signs do not necessarily mean that a child is being abused. There may well be other reasons for changes in a child's behaviour such as a bereavement or relationship problems between parents/carers. In assessing whether signs are related to abuse or not, they need to be considered in the context of the child's development and situation.

Physical abuse

What is physical abuse?

Physical abuse happens when a child is deliberately hurt, causing injuries such as cuts, bruises, burns and broken bones. It can involve hitting, kicking, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or suffocating.

It also constitutes physical abuse for a parent or carer to make up or cause the symptoms of illness in children. For example, they may give them medicine they don't need, making them unwell. This is known as fabricated or induced illness (FII).

Spotting the signs of physical abuse

All children have trips, falls and accidents which may cause cuts, bumps and bruises. These injuries tend to affect bony areas of their body such as elbows, knees and shins and are not usually a cause for concern.

Injuries that are more likely to indicate physical abuse include:

Bruising:

- Bruises on the cheeks, ears, palms, arms and feet.
- Bruises on the back, buttocks, tummy, hips and backs of legs.
- Multiple bruises in clusters, usually on the upper arms or outer thighs.
- Bruising which looks like it has been caused by fingers, a hand or an object, like a belt or shoe or large oval-shaped bite marks.

Burns or scalds:

- Any burns which have a clear shape of an object, for example cigarette burn.
- Burns to the backs of hands, feet, legs, genitals or buttocks.

Other signs of physical abuse include multiple injuries (such as bruising or fractures) inflicted at different times.

If a child is frequently injured, and if the bruises or injuries are unexplained or the explanation doesn't match the injury, this should be investigated. It's also concerning if there is a delay in seeking medical help for a child who has been injured.

In sport, physical abuse may occur:

- If the nature and intensity of training or competition exceeds the capacity of the child's immature growing body.
- Where coaches encourage the use of drugs or harmful substances to enhance performance or delay puberty.
- If athletes are required to participate when injured.
- If the sanctions used by coaches involve inflicting pain.

Neglect

What is neglect?

Neglect is persistently failing to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs usually resulting in serious damage to their health and development.

Neglect may involve a parent's or carer's failure to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing or shelter.
- Supervise a child (including leaving them with unsuitable carers) or keep them safe from harm or danger.
- Make sure the child receives appropriate health and/or dental care.
- Make sure the child receives a suitable education.
- Meet the child's basic emotional needs - parents may ignore their children when they are distressed or even when they are happy or excited. This is known as emotional neglect.

Neglect is the most common type of child abuse. It often happens at the same time as other types of abuse.

Spotting the signs of neglect

Neglect can be difficult to identify. Isolated signs may not mean that a child is suffering neglect, but multiple and persistent signs over time could indicate a serious problem.

Some of these signs include:

- Children who appear hungry.
- Children who appear dirty or smelly and whose clothes are unwashed or inadequate for the weather conditions.
- Children who are left alone or unsupervised.
- Children who have untreated injuries, health or dental problems.
- Children with poor language, communication or social skills for their stage of development.
- Children who live in an unsuitable home environment, for example the house is very dirty and unsafe, perhaps with evidence of substance misuse or violence.
- Children who have taken on the role of carer for other family members.

In sport, examples of neglect could include a coach or supervisor repeatedly:

- Failing to ensure children are safe.
- Exposing children to undue cold, heat or extreme weather conditions without ensuring adequate clothing or hydration.
- Exposing children to unnecessary risk of injury by ignoring safe practice guidelines.
- Failing to ensure the use of safety equipment.
- Requiring children to participate when injured or unwell.

Sexual abuse

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities. It doesn't necessarily involve violence and the child may not be aware that what is happening is abuse.

Child sexual abuse can involve contact abuse and/or non-contact abuse. Contact abuse happens when the abuser makes physical contact with the child.

It includes:

- Sexual touching of any part of the body, whether the child is wearing clothes or not.
- Rape or penetration by putting an object or body part inside a child.
- Forcing or encouraging a child to take part in sexual activity.
- Making a child take their clothes off, touch someone else's genitals or masturbate.

Non-contact abuse involves non-touching activities. It can happen online or in person and includes:

- Encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts.
- Not taking proper measures to prevent a child being exposed to sexual activities by others or showing pornography to a child.
- Making, viewing or distributing child abuse images.
- Allowing someone else to make, view or distribute child abuse images.

Online sexual abuse includes:

- Persuading or forcing a child to send or post sexually explicit images of themselves, this is sometimes referred to as sexting.
- Persuading or forcing a child to take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone.
- Having sexual conversations with a child by text or online.
- Meeting a child following online sexual grooming with the intent of abusing them.

Abusers may threaten to send sexually explicit images, videos or copies of sexual conversations to the child's friends and family unless they take part in other sexual activity. Images or videos may continue to be shared long after the abuse has stopped.

Abusers will often try to build an emotional connection with a child in order to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse. This is known as grooming.

Spotting the signs of sexual abuse

There may be physical signs that a child has suffered sexual abuse. These include:

- Genitalia soreness or itching.
- Bruising or bleeding near the genital area.
- Discomfort when walking or sitting down.
- Sexually transmitted infections (STI).
- Pregnancy.

Changes in the child's mood or behaviour may also cause concern. They may want to avoid spending time with specific people. In particular, the child may show sexual behaviour that is inappropriate for their age. For example:

- They could use sexual language or know things about sex that you wouldn't expect them to.
- A child might become sexually active at a young age.
- They might be promiscuous.

In sport, coaching techniques which involve physical contact with children can create situations where sexual abuse can be disguised. An abusive situation can also develop if a person in a position of authority, such as a coach, misuses their power.

Contacts made within sport and pursued through other routes, such as social media, have been used to groom children for abuse. Sexual abusers can also groom protective adults and organisations in order to create opportunities for abuse to take place.

Emotional abuse

What is emotional abuse?

Emotional abuse is persistent and, over time, it severely damages a child's emotional health and development.

It involves:

- Humiliating, putting down or constantly criticising a child.
- Shouting at or threatening a child or calling them names.
- Mocking a child or making them perform degrading acts.
- Constantly blaming or scapegoating a child for things which are not their fault.
- Trying to control a child's life and not recognising their individuality.
- Not allowing them to have friends or develop socially.
- Pushing a child too hard or not recognising their limitations.
- Manipulating a child.
- Exposing a child to distressing events or interactions such as drug taking, heavy drinking or domestic abuse.
- Persistently ignoring them.
- Being cold and emotionally unavailable during interactions with a child.
- Never saying anything kind, positive or encouraging to a child and failing to praise their achievements and successes.

Spotting the signs of emotional abuse

There aren't usually any obvious physical signs of emotional abuse but you may spot signs in a child's actions or emotions.

It's important to remember that some children are naturally quiet and self-contained whilst others are more open and affectionate. Mood swings and challenging behaviour are also a normal part of growing up for teenagers and children going through puberty. Be alert to behaviours which appear to be out of character for the individual child or are particularly unusual for their stage of development.

Children who are being emotionally abused may:

- Be overly affectionate towards strangers or people they haven't known for very long.
- Not appear to have a close relationship with their parent.
- Lack confidence or become wary or anxious.
- Be aggressive or nasty towards other children and animals.
- Use language, act in a way or know about things that you wouldn't expect for their age.

- Struggle to control strong emotions or have extreme outbursts.
- Seem isolated from their parents.
- Lack social skills or have few, if any, friends.
- Fear making mistakes.
- Fear their parent being approached regarding their behaviour self-harm.

In sport, emotional abuse may occur if:

- Children are subjected to repeated criticism, sarcasm, name-calling or racism
- A child is ignored or excluded.
- Children feel pressure to perform to unrealistically high expectations.
- Children are made to feel like their value or worth is dependent on their sporting success.

Bullying and cyberbullying

What are bullying and cyberbullying?

Bullying is behaviour that hurts someone else. It usually happens over a lengthy period of time and can harm a child both physically and emotionally.

Bullying includes:

- Verbal abuse, such as name calling.
- Non-verbal abuse, such as hand signs or glaring.
- Emotional abuse, such as threatening, intimidating or humiliating someone.
- Exclusion, such as ignoring or isolating someone.
- Undermining, by constant criticism or spreading rumours.
- Controlling or manipulating someone.
- Racial, sexual or homophobic bullying.
- Physical assaults, such as hitting and pushing.
- Making silent, hoax or abusive calls.

In sport, bullying can occur based on a child's sporting ability, body size or shape. It might include name-calling, offensive gestures, physical assault or exclusion from team activities.

Bullying can occur between:

- An adult and child.
- Two children.
- A parent and their child.

With sporting environments being competitive the opportunities for bullying may be increased. Examples within triathlon could include:

- A participant being picked on for being weaker on a component sport or slower than teammates.
- Parents pushing too hard.
- A coach adopting a win at all costs attitude.
- Officials putting undue pressure on participants.

Bullying can happen anywhere - at school, at a triathlon club, at home or online. When bullying happens online it can involve social networks, games and mobile devices. Online bullying can also be known as cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying includes:

- Sending threatening or abusive text messages.
- Creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos.
- 'Trolling' - sending menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games.
- Excluding children from online games, activities or friendship groups.
- Setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child.
- Encouraging children to self-harm.
- Voting for or against someone in an abusive poll.
- Creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a child or cause trouble using their name.

Spotting the signs of bullying and cyberbullying

It can be hard to know whether or not a child is being bullied. They might not tell anyone because they're scared the bullying will get worse. They might also think that the bullying is their fault. No one sign indicates for certain that a child's being bullied, but you should look out for:

- Belongings getting 'lost' or damaged.
- Physical injuries such as unexplained bruises.
- Being afraid to go to school, being mysteriously 'ill' each morning, or skipping school.
- Not doing as well at school.
- Asking for, or stealing, money (to give to a bully).
- Being nervous, losing confidence or becoming distressed and withdrawn.
- Problems with eating.

Poor practice

Poor practice refers to when the behaviour of an individual in a position of responsibility falls below the organisation's required standard, usually as described in the organisation's code of conduct. The behaviour may not be immediately dangerous or intentionally harmful to a child, but it is likely to set a poor example.

Poor practice is potentially damaging to the individual, the organisation and to children who experience it. Examples of poor practice include coaching with alcohol on the breath, smoking and swearing in front of children as well as not paying due care and attention to all participants.

Poor practice can sometimes lead to an environment which is conducive to more serious abuse. It can also raise doubts about the person's motivation, even if no harm is intended. For example, if a coach or supervisor gives one child more attention than others, regularly transports children in their car or encourages physical contact without explaining the reason.

Harassment

Harassment refers to unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Harassment can take a variety of forms with the most common being:

- Suggestive sexual comments.
- Racist insults/jokes.
- Verbal abuse.
- Unwelcome attention.

The impact of harassment on a child can be profound and can result in the child feeling unhappy, demoralised or undervalued. Harassment is often an ongoing form of abuse which causes extreme distress by the repeated action, usually verbally.

Grooming

Grooming refers to an individual working to create an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust with the distinct purpose of sexual abuse or exploitation. Grooming can be undertaken by both males and females and can occur both online and in the real world. It can be undertaken by an individual the child knows or by a stranger. Many children will not understand that they have been groomed and that it constitutes abuse.

Abusers may invest a lot of time and effort into gaining a child's, and possibly the rest of their family's, trust by:

- Offering advice and understanding.
- Buying gifts, such as equipment.
- Giving the child attention.
- Using their professional position or reputation.
- Taking them on trips, outings or holidays.

Once they have established trust, groomers will exploit the relationship by isolating the child from friends or family and making the child feel dependent on them. They will use any means of power or control to make a child believe they have no choice but to do what they want. Abusers may introduce 'secrets' to control or frighten the child. Sometimes they will blackmail the child, or make them feel ashamed or guilty, to stop them telling anyone about the abuse.

Online Abuse

What is online abuse?

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on or using the internet, facilitated through technology like computers, tablets, mobile phones and other internet-enabled devices.

It can happen anywhere online that allows digital communication, such as:

- Social networks.
- Text messages and messaging apps.
- Email and private messaging.
- Online chats.

- Comments on live streaming sites.
- Voice chat in games.

Children can be revictimised (experience further abuse) when abusive content is recorded, uploaded or shared by others online. This can happen if the original abuse happened online or offline.

Children may experience several types of abuse online:

- Bullying/cyberbullying.
- Emotional abuse (this includes emotional blackmail, for example pressuring children to comply with sexual requests via technology).
- Sexting (pressure or coercion to create sexual images).
- Sexual abuse.
- Sexual exploitation.

A child who is experiencing abuse online may:

- Spend much more or much less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media.
- Be withdrawn, upset or outraged after using the internet or texting.
- Be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone.
- Have lots of new phone numbers, texts or e-mail addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet.

A child may be reluctant to speak out about the abuse they've experienced online. They may:

- Not understand that they are being abused.
- Feel dirty and ashamed.
- Be too embarrassed to share the sexual details of what's happening to them.
- Be afraid because of threats of violence from the abuser.
- Have been told by the abuser that they won't be taken seriously.
- Have established an emotional attachment with the abuser and don't want to get them into trouble.

Female genital mutilation

What is female genital mutilation?

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It's also known as female circumcision or cutting.

The age at which FGM is carried out varies. It may be carried out when a girl is newborn, during childhood or adolescence, just before marriage or during pregnancy.

Religious, social or cultural reasons are sometimes given for FGM. However, FGM is child abuse. It's dangerous and a criminal offence.

There are no medical reasons to carry out FGM. It doesn't enhance fertility and it doesn't make childbirth safer. It's used to control female sexuality and can cause severe and long-lasting damage to physical and emotional health.

Spotting the signs of female genital mutilation

A girl at immediate risk of FGM may not know what's going to happen. But she might talk about or you may become aware of:

- A long holiday abroad or going 'home' to visit family.
- A relative or cutter visiting from abroad.
- A special occasion or ceremony to 'become a woman' or get ready for marriage.
- A female relative being cut - a sister, cousin or an older female relative such as a mother or aunt.
- Missing school repeatedly or running away from home.

A girl who has had FGM may:

- Have difficulty walking, standing or sitting.
- Spend longer in the bathroom or toilet.
- Appear withdrawn, anxious or depressed.
- Have unusual behaviour after an absence from school or college.
- Be particularly reluctant to undergo normal medical examinations.
- Ask for help, but may not be explicit about the problem due to embarrassment or fear.

If you suspect that a child may have been the subject of any form of abuse or neglect, the allegation must be referred as soon as possible. Do not start asking leading questions which may jeopardise any formal investigation. A leading question is where you suggest an answer or provide options that only need a 'yes' or 'no' answer, instead of allowing the person to explain things in their own words. An example would be asking 'did X hit you?' instead of 'how did you get that bruise?'. Use open questions such as 'what happened next?'. Only ask questions to confirm that you need to refer the matter to someone else.

Non-recent abuse in sport

Why it's important for sports organisations to be aware

All organisations who work with children are required to do everything they can to recognise, and report abuse quickly and appropriately in order to keep children safe. In relation to non-recent abuse, there are several ongoing investigations and inquiries criminal and otherwise at institutions across the UK. For example, Operation Hydrant and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. It's therefore important for everyone to be aware of what to do if they encounter a disclosure of non-recent abuse.

What is non-recent abuse?

There are a few terms that are used to describe this kind of abuse, such as historic abuse and non-recent child abuse, and these are sometimes used interchangeably. These terms are commonly used to refer to disclosures of sexual abuse that were perpetrated in the past.

Many survivors of abuse say that they are still impacted and traumatised by abuse many years after the abuse ended. With this in mind we prefer to use the term non-recent abuse as for many people impacted by abuse it is not "historical" and those who committed the abuse may still represent a real and ongoing risk to children.

It can also be about an allegation of neglect, physical, sexual or emotional abuse from someone who is now 18 years or over, relating to an incident that took place when the alleged survivor was under 18 years old.

Allegations can be:

- An adult making an allegation of abuse when they were under 18 years of age, that occurred at least one year before it was reported.
- A child making an allegation of abuse that occurred at least one year before it was reported.
- An individual who reports an allegation, on behalf of another child or adult, that occurred at least one year before it was reported
- Children who have been abused or neglected may experience physical or emotional harm. The effects can be short term but sometimes they last into adulthood. If someone has been abused as a child, it is more likely that they will suffer abuse again. This is known as re-victimisation.

A non-recent abuse procedure must be followed in the following circumstances:

- Allegations of child abuse involving people in positions of influence due to being in the public eye or people in a position of trust.
- Allegations of child abuse offences that took place in the past where there may have been a failure within an organisation to protect children.
- Allegations of child abuse involving people who are likely to be active where other children may be at risk of harm.

