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**DEIXA-ME
EM PAZ!**

**GUIDELINES
PARENTS**

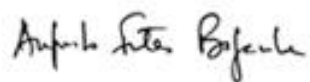
Good practice guide for the prevention of interpersonal violence in youth sport training

Guidelines for parents



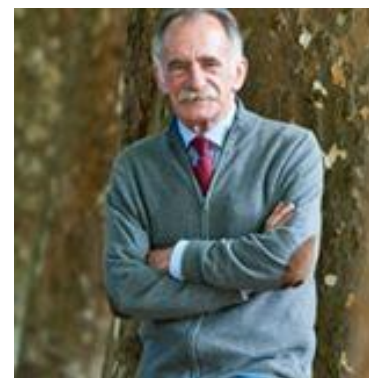


Augusto Baganha



President of Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude

"It's not an easy task to approach bullying in sport. However, it's a necessary condition to solve this problem. This is an innovative document, with both pedagogic and scientific unique contents." **Augusto Baganha**



Carlos Neto



Coordinator of "Sport Without Bullying"

"Bullying in youth sport training has several consequences which include early sport practice abandonment. It became urgent to take study and intervention measures in order to eradicate these negative behaviours from sport." **Carlos Neto**

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Disclaimer: No person should rely on the contents without first obtaining advice from a qualified professional. The contents are intended as a guide only.

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Introduction

This guide for parents is an anti-bullying tool in sports which is part of the “Red Card to Bullying” project. The main objectives of this guide are creating awareness for parents and other adults on specific characteristics of this phenomenon, and delivering tools for them to better cope with bullying episodes experienced by their children.

In the **first section**, you will find general information about the definition of bullying, types of bullying, and profile of stakeholders. Also, here in, some false beliefs on bullying are demystified. In the **second section**, you will find information about bullying between athletes in terms of frequency of bullying episodes, places where these tend to occur, motifs, and reactions from victims and from bystanders. Moreover, herein, consequences of bullying for the victims are addressed, finishing with a set of practical implications constituted by prophylactic measures parents can adopt; signs to help parents detect if their son/daughter is a victim of bullying by his/her peers; and, in situations of victimization, guidelines for action. In the **third section**, focus is set on bullying perpetrated by coaches. Herein, we state risk factors, examples of bullying behaviour committed by coaches, reasons by which frequently silence is generated around these types of abuse, and consequences of this type of relationship for the athletes’ life. We end this third section with a set of practical implications and guidelines for action.

Using this guide, together with the other ones available in this site and with specialized support from the technical team through the elaboration of individual interventional programs, enables to address bullying in sports context in an effective manner.

This document has a pedagogic character, it was devised and revised by experts (*see team-link*), and is based on results of a scientific investigation about the theme and on the professional experience of the team’s members.

General information

What can't we call bullying?

Discussions and misunderstandings: Conflicts and disagreements are inherent to human relations and may occur from people having different opinions about a subject or from wanting different things, especially if there is difficulty when considering the perspective of the other, and way of thinking and feelings about certain issues. Generally, conflicts are circumstantial and, in spite of the negative load which is frequently associated to them, these may be constructive by providing opportunities to learn about handling of emotions and negotiating strategies. Bullying differs from discussions and misunderstandings in the sense that it occurs overtime, requires a systematic and abusive attack to certain persons which are deliberately chosen for such aim, and its consequences are invariably negative.

Banter: Provocation and play are activities whose stakeholders recognize and accept their ludic character and serve the purpose of establishing, maintaining and strengthening group cohesion. Although sometimes this type of interaction may lead to feelings of disgust by some of the elements, these situations are incidental and are easily overcome. In these cases, there is a mutual understanding environment, respect and parity in the context of a ludic activity (it has to be fun for everybody).

Indiscipline: It refers to behaviours which **do not comply with the rule**, within a pedagogic relationship (athlete and coach). Aggressiveness constitutes just one of the multiple forms of indiscipline. Coaches tend to know who are the disturbing athletes, but have more difficulty in identifying victims of bullying.

What is bullying?

Studies on bullying started in the school context, between children. Over time and with the increase of knowledge on the theme, other contexts and populations were included. These evolutions led to conceptual reformulations and resulted in modes of interventions increasingly differentiated as a result of a more profound knowledge on the theme. The definition of bullying, similar to what happens with other theoretical concepts of human sciences, is not consensual. Some specialists emphasize some more aspects than others, and boundaries and characteristics of the concept continue to spark discussion between researchers. However, there are common criteria, and overall accepted which constitute a solid base of the definition and a common ground for investigators to work.

Operational definition of bullying:

Bullying consists of an aggressive and anti-social, intentional and repetitive behaviour, characterized by a power asymmetry between bullies and victims.

Bullying is a sub-category of aggressive behaviour, related with other forms of ant-social behaviour. The bully attacks making use of his power, without a reasonable justification and enjoying what he does, resulting in a harmful interaction for the victim. Bullying is a universal phenomenon present in different types of sports modalities, in both sexes, transversal to different countries and cultures. In spite of its extensiveness and historic existence, bullying must not be tolerated because it consists in a violation of individual rights, and may provoke serious nefarious consequences for the persons involved, sports community and for the general society.

Bullying in sports context has particular features that must be considered in the analysis of episodes and subsequent intervention. There is a singular mentality in sport that influences behaviours of the stakeholders and rises new challenges in the study and intervention of systematic abusive relationships in this context. Besides inter-modalities variations, relationships of athletes with parents and coaches must also be considered as integrative part of bullying episodes, not just restricted to relationships between colleagues.

Although bullying has always existed, only just in the last decades it was carried out systematic investigation about the phenomenon, leading to the creation of a concept and to a more in-depth knowledge about the characteristics of bullying, as well as to what concerns modes of intervention to deal with it. Due to these works and to subsequent divulgation, a progressive awareness has erupted, that resulted in a higher consciousness from the general community towards bullying but, equally, concerning several misconceptions and myths widely accepted and of hard demystification.

Myths about bullying

“Bullying is normal and is part of childhood, kids should learn to solve that between them”

Being assaulted is not normal and victims need help. Vulgarization of bullying makes it acceptable and, in spite of being frequent, bullying must not be accepted.

“When I was young there was no bullying, that is a recent invention”

Bullying has always existed, although systematic research about the theme only has a few decades. Bullying is an important theme which needs to be addressed and dealt with, due to the consequences for the stakeholders in it.

“Being a victim helps the child to be prepared for future difficulties and what victims need is to learn to defend themselves and get tough.”

Being victimized hinders a healthy development of the subject and reinforces least adaptive relational strategies, instead of promoting autonomy and growth. It is difficult to grow and mature interpersonal relationship strategies in abusive relations and contexts.

“Being physically different is the main reason to be a victim”

The main reason to be a victim lies in the subject's personality, in spite of physical differences being relevant, it is not the most important. Any athlete, at any given moment, may be a victim or a bully.

“Bullies are bigger than the victims”

Bullies have more power than victims but are not necessarily bigger. This power may derive from the support of a group.

“Bullies don't hurt victims intentionally.”

Bullying is intentional and bullies feel their acts as justifiable.

“As time goes by, bullies stop harassing if we stop giving them attention”

It is not always true that bullies stop harassing over time due to the tendency of behaviours to stabilize. Herein, aggression is used as a means to obtain something.

“The best way to deal with bullying is hitting the bully”

Fighting bullying should be conducted through educational and personal growth measures. Retaliation tends to worsen the situations.

“Colleagues should step aside from bullying situations because they are too in risk of being victimized.”

Colleagues that are bystanders have a great influence. In the case when bystanders disapprove bullying behaviours and support the victim, bullying tends to diminish.

“The consequences are ephemeral and not very serious.”

The consequences of bullying are very serious and are often felt for life (both for bullies, as for victims). In extreme cases, it may culminate in the suicide of the victims.

“Bullying cannot be solved”

Intervention towards bullying is not easy but it is possible to obtain very positive results. To meet such purpose, it has to exist collective will and an intervention sustained throughout time.

Bullying

Types of bullying

There are several categorizations of bullying behaviours considering different aspects. It is common to find an array of types of bullying in different sites and articles on the theme. In this guide, we will stick to the essential and consider the distinction between direct and indirect bullying, as well as 4 types of bullying which seem to us more relevant.

Direct bullying concerns behaviours in which there is an open interaction between the parts, in other words, bullying episodes are carried out in a scenery where bullies and victims find themselves present and interact directly. In the situations of indirect bullying (in particular social bullying), bullies and victims do not share the same space and bullying occurs in a more mediated way, many times not being able to identify the bully, making it more difficult for the intervention to take place. Therefore, these modes of bullying tend to be particularly burdensome and difficult to identify.

Examples of bullying behaviours:

- Verbal bullying- make fun, make jokes, insult, threat/intimidate, humiliate, ridicule.
- Social bullying- exclude, ignore, spread rumours, steal or damage belongings, social manipulation towards a person being excluded or felt unwanted by others.

- Physical bullying-kicks, punches, undesired physical contact.
- Cyberbullying- bullying using technologies. Disseminate videos, photographs or make undesired comments through messages, emails, or social networks.

The differences between different types of bullying are well outlined conceptually however, in real life, bullying generally manifests in combined forms.

Profile of stakeholders:

Bullying episodes are characterized by different stakeholders who carry out distinct roles. The conjugation of these roles and of different forms of participation by each actor are a constituent part of bullying episodes, and such knowledge is essential to comprehend the dynamics which are associated to bullying episodes. In this guide, we consider bullies, victims and bystanders. We provide a typical portrait of the first two and, relatively to the bystanders, we present a division between different types and describe their main characteristics.

Bullies: These actors are characterized by a confronting attitude and by frequent behaviours of exhibitionism. Generally, they are more physically active, better athletes and have a high social statute within the group of peers, which is reflected in high popularity. These subjects tend to have difficulties thinking about the consequences of their actions and to blame to colleagues, especially those who are most vulnerable, for the personal and collective failure.

Victims: These actors tend to be more passive than the other group elements, worse athletes and with a low social statute, which is reflected in their isolation and rejection by colleagues. They are characterized by having a divergent way of thinking and behaviour and not being accepted by the rest elements in the group. Other factors that potentiate victimization are aspects related with the body, such as particular physical features, motor difficulties, lack of coordination, overweight, or the fact of belonging to an ethnical minority, being homosexual or disabled. Sports performance and the image of the perfect athlete are aspects very much appreciated by young athletes. It is frequent that victims are more hardworking than the rest of their colleagues with the aim of bettering sports performance and, consequently, feeling more appreciated by their colleagues and more integrated in the group.

Bystanders: Bullying concerns to the whole group of athletes, it is not restricted to bullies and victims. Bullying tends to occur in group and the assaults of bullies to victims have frequently an instrumental goal, for instance whining popularity between colleagues and feeling power by diminishing and subjugating the victim. Therefore, bystanders become an integrative and essential part of bullying episodes even if they don't participate directly. Research shows that the bystanders' intervention may potentiate or decrease bullying behaviours by bullies, and that they may play a key element in the anti-bullying programs.

There are several types of bystanders, which are characterized by different modes of acting toward bullying:

- Conflict managers: they are generally athletes with high social statute among colleagues, and that act towards mediating relations between bullies and victims;
- Victim supporters: those that observe bullying episodes, defend victims and criticize bullies.
- Withdrawal or observation without interfering: athletes characterized by an attitude of avoidance toward bullying.
- Bully supporters: although they constitute a minority, some bystanders end up potentiating bullying through direct participation, or through tacit approval of bullies' behaviours (e.g. : laughing with bullies' behaviours).

The behavioural profile which were presented correspond to general tendencies. In spite of personal order factors helping to explain bullying, it is necessary to bear group's effects. Any youngster may be a victim of bully in any moment, not adopting a role solely based in individual traces, given that these are also strongly influenced by the expectations of other members of the group.

Besides relations between colleagues, when we refer to bullying in sports training, we must consider athletes' relations with their coaches and parents. This type of relations has specific aspects that need to be analysed. Dysfunctional relations of parents and of coaches with athletes may too be considered as forms of bullying.

Description of bullying episodes in sport¹

Frequency of bullying episodes

The results of an investigation conducted in Portugal² suggest that 1 in each 10 youngsters has been a victim of bullying in sport! These values might even be higher, in part due to a mentality of toughness existing in sport, which contributes to the victims' silence towards bullying episodes, and for some forms of bullying being considered normal and acceptable. Victims tend to early abandon sports practice due to bullying. This fact contributes to a progressive elimination of athletes that don't fit standardized sports patterns.

The frequency of athletes that participate in bullying episodes as bullies is of 11.3%, and nearly 35% of athletes has already participated as bystanders. Bullying in sports training is a worrying, global and generalized phenomenon once it is present in different types of sports modalities and areas of the country.

What happens?

The most predominant type of bullying is verbal, and its main contents are making fun of low sports performance and of the victim's lack of physical ability, or matters related with the body such as overweight, particular physical features, lack of coordination and clumsiness. Calling victims of "gay" or making jokes of sexual nature is very common. The frequency of social bullying behaviours must be taken in consideration,

¹ The findings which are presented next result from a nationwide research conducted in Portugal.

² Nery, M (2016). Bullying no contexto da formação desportiva em Portugal. Estudo exploratório a nível nacional de modalidades individuais, colectivas e de combate. PhD Thesis presented to the Faculdade de Motricidade Humana, Universidade de Lisboa.

and its principal ways are ignoring and excluding victims from the group of peers. Physical bullying is also present, although its incidence is considerably minor.

Physical bullying tends to be present in groups of younger athletes and it is easier to identify. As age increases, it tends to be replaced by other more subtle forms as verbal and social bullying. The culture of some modalities is strongly marked by toughness and by the “law of the strongest”. This leads to some bullying behaviours (especially verbal one), either between colleagues, or from the coach to the athletes, to be looked upon as an integrative part of the modality, and to be considered as standard tests the athlete has to endure and overcome to become more resilient and to achieve sporting success.

Where it happens?

Bullying episodes happen with higher incidence inside the club more specifically in the sports changing room because of being a **less monitored** place, where usually coaches are not present. Places for practice are areas where the frequency of bullying is also high, assaults taking place in a dissimulated manner to escape from the coach’s control. The fact that bullying episodes occur when the coach is not present, and of being dissimulated when athletes and coach share the same spaces, causes coaches to frequently be unaware of the existence of bullying behaviours between athletes of his training group.

Bullying episodes tend to occur in a more circumscribed way, predominantly within verbal bullying, inside the club, and in the practice activity. However, when frequency and duration time of bullying episodes increase, generally the victim goes on to suffering multiple combined forms of bullying, in interior and exterior areas of the club, and in several activities.

Why does it happen?

Bullying behaviours are due to individual reasons and to those concerning group phenomena. Each one of these endows a piecemeal explanation of an extremely complex reality, being necessary to establish an interconnection between different reasons and understand its mutual influence.

There is an acceptable pattern, appreciated in the sports milieu, which defines how youngsters should behave and the ideal body. People who differ from these patterns are at greater risk of being ostracized and of becoming bullying victims. Factors such as overweight, lack of sports ability or lack of coordination, belonging to an ethnical minority, being homosexual or having some disability, increase the risk of becoming a target of bullying.

Characteristics of bullies and of victims help to explain bullying episodes but do not close the explanation. If it is true that some youngsters, due to their features, tend to victimize others, group factors must be considered, and it should not be made a direct correspondence between specific profiles and associated behaviours. Group pressures to act in a certain way, as well as a need to be accepted by the group of peers, especially noticeable in the adolescence, may contribute for some elements of the group to display bullying behaviours and join coercive dynamics, with the aim of feeling accepted by their peers.

Any person may be a victim or a bully at some point, contributing for that personal susceptibility which is, however, strongly influenced by factors in the environment. Bullies will not necessarily be future delinquents, and when intervening directly with victims, it must be considered

how these, through the relation established with colleagues, may be influencing bullying behaviours. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to bullying considering its multiple causes and variables is fundamental to plan an effective intervention.

How do victims react?

Victims show negative feelings towards bullying such as rage, impotence, frustration and humiliation. Although they consider that bullying could be solved through reactive strategies, they tend to use passive strategies of problem resolution focused essentially on the attempt of controlling negative feelings associated to victimization. In this way, ignoring what is going on, or avoiding bullying episodes are the strategies more frequently used by the victims.

Victims tend to remain silent about bullying and suffer alone, often unnoticed by relatives and by adults in the club. The strategies which are used, together with silence against victimization, contribute for the perpetuation of bullying. Victims tend to consider that their interventions were ineffective and that bullying has no resolution.

However, some victims resort to support sources, in which colleagues are pivotal, with whom talk about victimization. The intervention of these actors is usually positive, that is, bullying tends to decrease or even cease.

How do bystanders react?

The response of bystanders is strongly related with their feelings concerning bullying. When feelings towards bullying are of neutrality, or the bystander's attitude is of avoidance, bystanders tend to withdraw from bullying episodes or observe without interfering. In some cases, although it corresponds to a minority, they end up joining the bullies and encouraging and participating in the victims' assault. Bystanders that

express feelings of repulsion against bullying and criticize bullies for their behaviour, tend to act, resorting to more pro-active strategies of bullying resolution than those used by victims, defending and supporting them, as well as talking with bullies towards ceasing of assaulting behaviours. In most cases, bystanders that defend victims, feel that their interventions has had positive results, corresponding to a decrease or ceasing of bullying episodes.

What are the consequences?

Bullying may cause several serious consequences for the victims such as:

- Increase of stress.
- Decrease of concentration.
- Decrease of motivation and of energy.
- Decrease of sports performance.
- Avoidance of sports changing room.
- Contribute to a low self-esteem.
- Aggressive retaliation behaviours.
- Panic attacks and generalized anxiety.
- Isolation and social exclusion.
- Early abandonment of sports practice.
- Change of club and/or of practised modality, searching more inclusive spaces as a way to avoid bullying, are also frequent.

These consequences are a result of long term and systematic exposure to aggressive behaviours, contradicting values of equality, inclusion and respect that rule sport.

Practical implications

Generic information

Bullying in sports has specific characteristics. Research on the incidence of bullying in this context strongly recommends parents to be aware of the following topics:

- Youngsters talk less with parents about bullying episodes that occur in sport clubs than they do about bullying in school.
- It is important to detect possible signs of the athlete that is being victimized which are expressed by changes of mood and behaviour, and by a sudden negative attitude towards the club and the sports practice.
- In the periods corresponding to the advancement to a higher step and when an athlete changes of club or modality (integrating a new group), the probability of being victimized increases. When the integration takes place in a group of older athletes, a redefinition of social roles occurs and new elements tend to lose the references they had in the previous group, becoming more exposed to victimization. The fact of being younger may also potentiate victimization on behalf of older athletes and with higher social statute.

What to do?

The decrease of bullying behaviours in sports is only possible resorting to an intervention with pedagogical character that considers several contexts and stakeholders. It is necessary to make a correct and profound assessment at the clubs' level, followed by a direct intervention with athletes, coaches, parents and sports leaders. All stakeholders must have an active role that is fundamental for the success of the intervention. Measures of organizational character and of monitoring of spaces must be also contemplated. The interventional strategies presented in this guide are general lines of intervention targeted at parents. Anti-bullying programs ought to be designed by specialized technicians as a result of a previous evaluation. Specialists should intervene close to parents, athletes and sports agents, monitoring programs and providing consultancy in specific situations.

Preventive measures:

Show yourself interest in the sports life of your child. Talk regularly with your son about his sports life and try to keep informed about what happens on at the club. Asking your child directly if he/she is being a victim of bullying may not be the best option, although some indirect information might provide you with an insight of how he is incorporated in the club and possible victimization. Tips for questions:

- If you son enjoys being at the club and making part of the team (or group of athletes, in the case of individual modalities).
- How training and competitions are being organized.
- If there are close friends in the group of athletes and who they are.
- If he has ever seen someone being a target of bullying behaviours or being teased/mockd at.

- Who the coach is.
- Characteristics of the coach.
- If he is happy about the relation with the coach (if not, ask why).

Your involvement in the sports life of your son creates proximity and opens space for the sharing of experiences. In the case of suspecting that your son may be being a victim of bullying, be aware to the signs and do not ignore the situation! Ask him about the relation with his colleagues and create conditions so that silence can be broken.

How to identify that your son may be being a victim of bullying?

It might be difficult for parents to deal with sports bullying in case their sons are involved in it. The first reaction may be of direct involvement, however, this type of actions may not be beneficial on the long run.

Signs that young athletes may be suffering from bullying in sports:

- Sudden behavioural changes without apparent explanation;
- The athlete is more irritable than normal or is feeling sad/apathetic;
- The athlete no longer wants to participate in sports activities of the modality he likes, displaying a sudden lack of interest of the club or of the modality;

- The athlete doesn't want to be with his colleagues and friends of the club, or with some of them in particular;
- The athlete presents complaints such as stomach-aches or head-aches, upsets, etc., or makes excuses not to be involved in the activities when the time for training or for participating in the club's initiatives takes place. They may refer to feeling unwell or showing anxiety when it is time to go to the club.

Parents don't like to think that their sons might be involved in bullying episodes. However, the percentage of young athletes who have already been involved in bullying episodes in the role of victim, bully and/or bystander is considerable. Therefore, this is a theme which is necessary to be aware of, since it tends to occur in dissembled way and victims tend to keep silence about the topic.

How your child may feel

Sports practice should be based in having fun and victimization may lead to demotivation through practice and culminate in sports abandonment, even if the athlete likes the activity. Sometimes, even the most determined athletes are left a side, privileging others who are less hardworking. On the bottom of this it is frequently found low performance of an athlete. Nevertheless, this is not a justification for being mistreated.

It is not desirable that sports starts to be felt as an obligation or task. In these cases, it is necessary that parents talk with young athletes about possible solutions, emphasising that they have not done anything bad, that they should not blame themselves and that they don't deserve to be mistreated.

Parents may speak with someone in charge at the club, they should try to keep calm and think about the impact this may have on their son future wise. Try to find out, together with your son, how he would feel if he was to have a conversation with his coach. Often, athletes don't break silence for being ashamed and feeling weak doing it, for being afraid of retaliations from their colleagues or from their coach, or for disbelief in the capacity of the club and of those in charge of it to help overcoming the problem, considering victimization as inevitable.

In case you consider that such club is not the appropriate place for your son's sports practice, you may find if there is another club that has a less competitive strand, or even in another modality the athlete might like and that is more in line with his characteristics and personal tastes.

Direct intervention with victims. At home:

- Listen: if your son has told you that he is being a victim of bullying, it is important that you listen without judging him or becoming annoyed, and allow him to have his saying on the action to be taken. Understand and respect his concerns and fears that are real for them and need a sensitive and adequate response. Show him that you listened to what was said by repeating what you just heard. If asked, it is important to give some time, but not postponed the answer too much, since over time, the problem tends to aggravate. Victims may be concerned about what is going to happen, as, for example, being afraid of carrying on being victimized, being expelled of the team or continuously substituted;

- Collect information: make a detailed register about the frequency of episodes, what happened and where, whom was involved, and your son's reaction. Try not to make moral judgements and be precise.
- Support: when victims talk about what they are going through, they tend to feel more able to deal with the problem. The adults' reply may be very effective, but only if it is cohesive, therefore, if your son complains, don't underestimate and act in a consistent way. It is important that you support your son throughout this process, giving attention and listening to him, creating a secure space for him to express and share his feelings. Reinforce that your son is not to blame: there is a prevalent idea that bullying victims are to be blamed for what is happening and these usually feel ashamed. This aspect links to yet another very much present false-belief, which consists in considering that being a victim is a sign of weakness, while being a bully is a sign of strength. It is important to demystify these myths.
- Discuss a solution: in case your son is being a bullying victim by a colleague or by his coach, think together in a solution, instead of wanting to solve everything yourself, even if you think that is what a responsible adult would do. This last solution may contribute for youngsters to become even more anxious and worried than what they are already. In case your son tells you to not become directly involved in the issue, discuss with him which strategies does he think might help to solve the problem. In this way, you will be fostering the learning of how to handle adversity, and you are helping him to think with his own ideas. Monitor with him the situations' evolvement and checking if everything is well. Generally, bullying has an instrumental character, that is, bullies' behaviours tend to have as goal the achievement of something, as, for example, a feeling of power towards the victim's reaction (e.g.: cry, annoyance). Try to understand and help your son thinking about what is happening and why, and in what way he may change his behaviour to deal more effectively with the situation. If the situation aggravates and becomes intolerable, then it is time to intervene directly: talk to your son about this issue and decide how it should be done.

- Contact the project: the technical manager of the interventional program in the club where your son's inserted is who best can assess the situation, and act accordingly, directly or through an intervention on the club's structural level (space, technical team, rules of procedures). Sometimes, a neutral technician may be an asset in the mediation of the relation with the coach and with others in charge, as well as providing counselling to specific situations.

What to avoid

When sons tell parents that they are being victims of bullying, there is a set of parental frequent reactions that must be avoided. Even if these behaviours are based in good intentions, they tend to be counterproductive and aggravate the situation.

- It is normal that you may feel rage, guilt or helplessness when your son talks with you. However, think before you act, if not your action may become an obstacle instead of a help;
- Do not demand to confront the coach or talk to the bullies' parents immediately. This reaction is often feared by victims and excludes them from the resolution of the problem;
- Do not advise replying in the same way when your son is being attacked. Victims tend to lack confidence and your reaction may potentiate bullying behaviours;

- Do not underestimate what your son is telling you. Usually, victims don't tell anyone about what is going on. If, when doing it, they get to be disregarded or let alone own to deal with the problem (e.g.: parents say that bullying is play and that it is part of growing up), then your son will receive the message that bullying should be tolerated instead of being ceased;
- Don't feel bad if your son looks for other people with whom to talk (psychologists, friends, and other adults) or if he seeks help to solve a problem he might find difficult to handle. This demand doesn't make you a bad father or mother and sometimes it is easier for youngsters to talk with someone out of the family, not meaning that they don't like or that they don't trust you.

Support from the club

Beyond the measures at home and taken together with your son, others can be carried out at the club helping to deal with the situation. Nevertheless, before you talk to the coach or to other managers, bear in consideration the following points:

- Before you head to someone in charge at the club, collect detailed information about what has happened, who has been involved, when it occurred, who witnessed, something your son may have done that may have provoked the incident, independently of having been something isolated or a series of events;
- Do not show at the club without warning: settle a meeting with the coach and/or the sports manager;
- Focus on wanting to deal this matter with the club, making clear that you are looking for the club's help to find a solution;

- Avoid accusations. Remember that generally coaches don't know what is going on, since bullying tends to occur away from their look or in a dissimulated way.
- Be patient and allow for the club to act towards the problem, keeping in touch with those in charge, and set a subsequent meeting to know how the question is being dealt.

The coach is the adult who is responsible for managing the group of athletes, and has an important role on the creation of a safe sports and inclusive environment. His action is decisive to intervene towards bullying between athletes. In case your son is being victimized, schedule a meeting with the coach where you can expose the situation. Explain him that such banter may be positive for the group, but it became persistent and harmful for your son, reflecting too in an increase of his anxiety. Be assertive and don't let the coach underestimate the situation. Ask the coach a copy of the club's anti-bullying policy, tell him to speak with other club members, so that they become aware of the situation and ask for the matter to be fixed with discretion.

If my child is a bully?

When parents are told their son get involved in bullying episodes has a bully, they usually feel negative feelings like rage, shame or guilt. Bullies are usually seen as bad, which goes against the way parents like to see their child. It's important to know that every child may be a bully at some point and bullying is explained by many factors. The most important thing is to know what is going on and how to manage the situation.

What to do?

- Collect as much information as possible and know what is going on. Sometimes, there are other things going on like isolated conflicts instead of bullying. Avoid to criticize or make accusations and focus your efforts in clearly understanding the situation;
- Find out why is your child involved in bullying episodes and what role does he/she perform (e.g.: bully or bystanders who supports bullying?). It is usual for a youngster to diminish or even deny their involvement. Find out what is going on and understand the reasons for your child to get involved in bullying episodes;
- Don't allow your child to devalue the situation. Bullies commonly consider the interaction was just banter instead of bullying and it doesn't have any consequences to the victims. Explain clearly that you don't tolerate bullying behaviours and talk about the differences between bullying and banter;
- Try to make your child think about what the victim may be feeling (fear, humiliation) and ask him/her if he/she would like others to make him/her feel the same way;
- Condemn bullying behaviours is not the same to condemn your child. Explain that you don't approve bullying behaviours but you support your child in changing behaviours and finishing bullying episodes;
- Think together how to change your child's behaviour and allow him/her to establish more positive relations with peers and to achieve a better social position without the necessity to engage in bullying episodes;
- Teach your child to respect peers and their differences;
- Be aware of the behavioural changes and support the non-involvement in bullying episodes instead of only focusing your attention on the negative side and in punishment;

- Think if your child may need more adult supervision, which may reflect in the establishment of new rules and to be aware of its location, activities and with whom;
- Explain that if bullying continues, it may have consequences to your child. Punishment should never be physical; these are an abusive behaviour and may increase bullying. Accept your child but not his behaviour.

Abuse by the coach³

Introduction

The relation between coach and athlete is of the utmost importance and has a strong influence on the quality of the sports experience of the young athlete. The concerns of coaches should go beyond training, they ought to be concerned with aspects about interpersonal relations and with developmental ones, and contribute to provide a fun and healthy sports experience to young athletes. Coaches need to assume themselves as positive models, monitor interactions between athletes and not tolerate any type of bullying behaviour, but, however, some of them end up becoming a source of conflict instead of a means to solve the problem.

Bullying by coaches towards athletes is very much present in sport and tends to be trivialized by athletes, which consider forms of abuse as an integrative, normal and acceptable part of the path to reach success. Coaches may be well intentioned in their abusive styles and have no idea of the harmful effects of their actions. Many adopt an autocratic style based on the difference of power between themselves and the athletes, resorting to insults and to screaming as a way to “toughen” athletes and supposedly increase their resilience. In reality, this style is often found to be connected to a higher rate of burnout among athletes.

³ There are many definitions of abuse by the coach. In this document we consider the existence of training practices which are emotionally aggressive and/or a pattern of behaviour experienced by the young athlete within a relationship with the coach with potential to cause damage to the athlete’s emotional welfare.

Risk factors

- The increasing involvement of parents and sons in sports world may result in the acculturation of the “toughness” and “winning at any cost” mentality very much installed in sports. The way of thinking is often used to create intellectualized justifications around bullying behaviours by some coaches.
- Coach perceived as a vehicle for success. Athletes adopt an attitude of submission and coaches’ unsuitable behaviours are ignored because he is seen as a means to reach the primary goal: sports success.
- Coach’s age, knowledge of modality and past successes. The coach being older and being linked to the modality at a longer time may contribute for him to become an unquestionable authority, and for his methods and the way he relates to athletes never to be questioned. If past sports successes, that grant a quality statement to the coach, are added to this statute, his power is even more reinforced.
- Gender. This aspect is especially striking in male coaches that train girls, where sexual abuse or harassment may be present.
- Legitimized authority: The coach is given power to make decision, compensate and punish; the bad use of this power may be reflected in forms of abuse of athletes by a figure of power.
- Close proximity between coach-athlete and greater distance from parents. The relationship of great proximity between the coach and the young athlete may result in a much greater control from the former over the latter. This closeness, conjugated with a

distance in relation to parents (many athletes spend more time with coaches than with parents), may contribute to leave the athlete more isolated and to the mercy of a bully coach.

It is often, coaches say that they are working based on the interests of the young athlete but, frequently, depend on the results of this one as a way to prove their success, putting their priorities in front of the athletes' well-being. Many times, the power of the coach extends to other domains of the athlete's life (nutrition, weight, sleep, personal relations). In these cases, they present themselves as doctors, psychologists, nutritionists and exert a strong influence in the life of the young athlete.

Athletes and their parents tend to accept the abusive behaviours by coaches, trivializing and excusing him, especially during the athletes' competitive careers and when their sports performance is high.

Examples of abuse behaviours

In the highly competitive sports environment where victory is the top priority, the coach's figure as absolute master and as means to accomplish sport success, grants him an increase of power over young athletes and their parents. In cases where power awarded to coaches is not put to service athletes' healthy development, new ways may be open for establishing a prolonged and continued relationship of abuse of a person with more power over another one more vulnerable.

Examples of coach's abuse behaviours over athletes:

- Scream
- Humiliate
- Threaten
- Insult and offend
- Physical aggression
- Making the athletes feel incompetent, below their expectations and depreciated.
- Exclude, ignore and deny assistance when necessary
- Harassment or sexual abuse

Forms of dissimulation

In sports environment, bullying by coaches to their athletes is common. The coach's authority over the athletes may be used in a perverse and abusive manner. However, the intervention is not always easy, given the difficulty knowing in which border the coach crossed accepted limits,

since differences between training criticisms and bullying may be slight. Bullying depends on the victim feeling victimized, and what in some circumstances may be considered bullying, in others may not be the case. There is a difference between a guiding and constructive feedback toward the performance's success and an insulting criticism. The former has in consideration the athlete's subjectivity, based on a relation of respect toward him and responds to a formative goal; while the latter consists of an aggressive behaviour that envisages attacking the athlete and has no formative goal. The limit may be defined by the existence of a persistent pattern of behaviour grounded on the abuse that must not be tolerated.

There are still some strategies used by coaches to excuse their own improper behaviour:

- Moral justification: display a behaviour as being socially acceptable, making it a pair with common and acceptable: "All coaches lose their rag once in a while" or "We have always done like that and we have sports success". If the culture of bullying is accepted in the club, then bullying behaviours tend to be accepted and considered normal.
- Reversed apologies: minimizes the impact of his behaviour on the victim and justifies it in the name of a supposed greater good "I am sorry I lost a bit of my temper, but it had to be like that if we wanted to win". This apology is part of the bullying behaviour consisting in a game of power that underestimates the victim.
- Unappropriated comparisons: Justify inadequate behaviours by comparing them with others more serious. "I screamed at the athletes but I never lay a finger on them". This technique has as goal to diminish the seriousness of the behaviour.

- Escalation: increase the pressure until the person gives up complaining. “if you don’t like my methods, you may leave”. This is a very much used tactic to force athletes and parents to accept the abuse, being intimidated and pressed to stay quiet, afraid of consequences, such as not being able to participate in the activities or being ostracized.

Reasons for the victims’ silence

There are several reasons for athletes to remain silent about bullying behaviours by coaches:

- Being afraid of the coach;
- Being afraid of consequences for sports life;
- Trivialization of abuse (e.g.: watching colleagues accept the coach’s behaviours);
- Coaches not allowing athletes talk to parents about what’s going on at the club;
- Intimidation against parents and athletes by the coach;
- Considering the coach’s levels of knowledge and his reputation, athletes fear of having no one believing them;

- Culture of toughness existing in sport (acceptance of negative strategies) places emphasis on sports performance and contributes to the collective silence around bullying (athletes, parents and coaches). Parental non-intervention towards bullying by coach makes them passive bystanders and reinforces the coach's behaviour.

Consequences

Youngsters that practise sports, tend to develop strong bonds and a trusting relationship with their coaches. In case the power of the coach is abusive, youths may suffer long term psychological damage. Over time, the youngster internalizes what adults say of him, thus, if the abuse by parents or by the coach is chronic, it may destroy the child's motivation and produce a profound impact on his self-esteem. Therefore, abusive remarks with the aim of bettering sports performance might have the opposite effect.

Bullying on its verbal and psychological mode may cause long term devastating effects on the victims, with consequences on their social and emotional development. Harmful effects are often reported as an outcome of the athletic competition, and not being as obvious as physical or sexual abuse, tend to be minimized.

Children are more sensitive to criticism than adults, and might be deeply affected by negative remarks from parents, coaches and from other adults that they respect. When shouted at regularly, they tend to react in self-protecting way. On such moments, this technique may be adaptive, but it may become maladaptive and distressing in their capacity of developing in a healthy way over time.

A more anxious child or sensitive may have less tolerance to be shouted at and quit sports practice. It may also occur that the child bears the screaming without telling nothing to his parents or standing up to the coach for fear of repercussions, which might result in consequences at the level of his psychic construction.

A more confident child may be less vulnerable to this reaction and be able to find a way to self-abstract from screaming and negative remarks by the coach but at the expense of his emotional sensitivity. As the child becomes less sensitive to his own fears, the child may become less sensitive towards the feeling of others, leading to a diminution of empathy. The child will also become less sensitive to positive emotions.

Practical advices/ Practical implications

Hints for parents

Be aware: pay attention to how your son's coach strategies, find out about what is going on in the sports changing room and observe the behaviour of the coach during the games, so that you can assess the negative emotions and the prevalence of bullying behaviours.

Be objective: in case you want to express that you are displeased by the behaviour of the coach, make sure you focus on the actions that need to be identified as a problem, so that you avoid that the coach engages into a defensive attitude (often supported by the club).

Know the regulations: make sure that the coach and the sports managers are under a code of conduct, in the circumstances that athletes are.

Write a report: file a written complaint about the bullying behaviours to the club managers. The coaches should be held accountable for their unappropriated conduct, given that this type of behaviours have an impact on the emotional balance of the young athletes.

Action guidelines:

The parents should actively participate in the routines of the sports club in which their son is enrolled. Once you better understand the bullying behaviours of the coach, you can better tackle the problem directly. Alternatively, you can address the club managers in order to push forward the implementation of an anti-bullying policy where several initiatives should happen to prevent bullying behaviours from the

coach. Involving the club managers is also important so that an appropriate context is created in order to generate an appropriate answer when bullying and abusive behaviour is taking place by the coaches.

The parents should stop behaving as passive observers when their sons are victims of bullying behaviours by their coaches.

It is necessary to generate the appropriate conditions to enable the parents to file complaints and to go through investigation procedures which insure confidentiality if the preventive and educational measures are ineffective.

To tell stories of successful coaches that developed positive relationships with the athletes.

Change the prevalent frame of mind in sports that considers victory more important than the athletes' well-being.

An ethical conduct should be fostered during the training and competitive activities.

It is necessary to create a sports culture that condemns the abuse, using an approach that is centred on the athlete, in his development and health in general.

The approach centred in the athletes focuses on their needs and rights while undergoing their sports experiences. Instead of evaluating coaches solely on the basis of their success, the evaluation should focus on:

- Companionship

- Fair-play
- Fostering an healthy development of the athlete

Dilute the totalitarian power of the coach by integrating other technicians on the same level of power equality (psychologists, nutritionists, physiotherapists), making it easier to scrutiny cases of abuse;

The athletes tend to be afraid or to trivialize abuse. This way, it is positive e to encourage contacts out of the club, since it enables athletes to have other references/models out of the club and out of sport, and in these cases, the coach figure as “all mighty” would lose strength (reinforcing simultaneously the need for parents to be present);

Exam the power of the coach and the ways to mobilize him for the personal development of athletes;

Reduce spaces where coaches find themselves alone with athletes (training and travels);

Increase parents’ participation;

Monitor training session (parents and others);

Take accompanying passengers near athletes and coaches when travelling;

Create defenders of athletes, which should be neutral persons and entities, not affected by sports structures, and whose mission is to defend the athletes' well-being and mediate relations with others;

General measures to prevent abusive behaviours from coach:

- It is necessary to list the unappropriated and unadjusted behaviours by the coaches, making this information available to the general public (e.g.: sites of sports of organizations)
- It would be beneficial to explore the correlation between abusive behaviours and the athletes' performance. Even though this is largely accepted, there is no scientific knowledge that shows that athletes perform better if they are submitted to systematic abuse and to inflict suffering by their coaches;
- To have sports psychologists willing to mediate the relationships between the parents and the coach and between the coach and the athletes;

- It is evident the need for training coaches, parents, athletes, and sports managers on power dynamics within relationship in sport, helping to balance the power dynamic of the coach towards the athletes. The abuse usually takes place around questions related with power;
- Create entities for protection and for the prevention of abuse and intervention when this one occurs in the context of sports training. The athletes have the right to report abuses to these entities, breaking the silence around these episodes. On this matter, policies for the protection of athletes and codes of conduct should be devised as to socially influence sports environment, making it an environment that does not tolerate bullying.

Contacts: online support and telephone

If your child is involved in bullying behaviours or suffers from abusive behaviours inflicted by his/her coach and you have doubts about what to do, you may contact the “Sport without Bullying” team. Go to our website and send a message or use the support number.

Website message

Before sending a message to our team, you are going to have the option between private message or open message. If you want confidentiality, choose private message. In this case, solely our team will have access to your text and you will have an individual answer (send to your email). If you want the message to be shared with the other website visitors, you may choose an open message, which means its content, as well as the answer given by us, will be available for other website visitors to see.

Support line

If you need to talk with somebody and feel it's urgent, you may call the support line of Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima (+351 116006). Some people who work in this institution have made an advanced course in interpersonal violence in youth sport training and know how to help you: to think about the situation and help you to decide what to do.

Final Notes

The strategies presented in this document are general intervention guidelines. The anti-bullying programs should be designed by professionals, starting by a specialized evaluation. Professionals should also educate athletes, parents and sport agents about interpersonal violence in youth sport training, to supervise and coordinate the programs and to give advice in specific situations.

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Summary table

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Definitions	Parallel concepts (indiscipline, conflicts, banter), definition of bullying, myths about bullying
Bullying between athletes	General information: types of bullying, profile of stakeholders. Description of episodes: frequency, types, places, reasons, reactions of victims and of bystanders, consequences. Practical implications: hints and action guidelines for parents.
Bullying by coaches	General information: risk factors, examples of behaviours. Description of episodes: dissimulation of coach, silence (athletes and parents), consequences. Practical implications: hints and action guidelines for parents.
References	References and support documents