

Recognition of Poor Practice, Abuse and Bullying

Introduction

Child abuse can and does occur outside the family setting. Even for those experienced in working with child abuse, it is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or has already taken place. The staff and volunteers within Weightlifting, Disability Powerlifting and Weight training whether paid or as a volunteer are not experts at such recognition. However they do have a responsibility to act if they have any concerns about the behaviour of someone (an adult or another child) towards a young person, and to follow the procedures in this document.

There are many forms of abuse, though a child may experience more than one kind of abuse at any one time in their lifetime.

Sometimes a child or young person may not be aware that practice is poor or abusive and they may tolerate behaviour without complaint. An example of this is a child with a disability who is used to being excluded from activities or a bullied young person who is used to being mocked. Children may also be used to their cultural needs being ignored or their race abused. This does not make it acceptable.

Many children and young people will lack the skills or confidence to complain and it is therefore extremely important that adults in the club advocate for the children and young people. Advocating for children and young people who find it hard to speak out is part of creating a safer culture for them.

Poor Practice.

Poor Practice can be split into a number of groupings. These include:

- Practices that may be on the fringe of abuse and/or if repeated again and again, would amount to abuse. Most of the examples are linked to emotional abuse.

Examples include:

- Name-calling
- Excessive monitoring of weight
- Constant criticism of a child
- Exerting excessive pressure
- Forcing a child to do something against their will
- Use of inappropriate language
- Harassment.

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Breaches of BWL Safeguarding policy and procedures:

Examples include:

- No welfare officer within a club/organisation/affiliated body
- Inadequate safeguarding arrangements
- Providing inadequate supervision and/or care
- Failure to respond appropriately to concerns
- Expelling anyone from the club who raises a concern
- Excluding parents from observing or asking questions about training
- Inappropriate use of photographic equipment or materials.

Breaches of recognised best practice in coaching:

Examples include:

- Providing coaching or running a session without another responsible adult present
- Exceeding level of competence and/or qualification
- Employing practices that are inappropriate for the stage of psychological and physical development of the individual
- Excessive training or competition
- Inappropriate/excessive supporting or stretching.
- Practices that may be carried out with the best intentions but that fall into a category of behaviours that are used by people who sexually abuse children to 'groom' their victim:
 - Offering to give a child a lift home alone
 - Giving a child gifts
 - Having unnecessary physical contact with young people e.g. excessive handling/supporting, cuddling, kissing, 'friendly' taps etc
 - Socialising/having friendships with young people outside training.

Practices that are known to be significant risk factors in cases of abuse and can never to be condoned:

- Taking children to your home or other secluded place unaccompanied by others.
- Engaging in rough, physical or sexually provocative games.
- Sharing a room with a child.

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- Allowing or engaging in any form of inappropriate touching.
- Making sexually suggestive remarks.
- Reducing a child to tears as a form of control.
- Allowing children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- Allowing allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Carrying out personal care for a child that the child can do unaided
- Departing from the premises without first supervising the safe dispersal of the children.
- Abusing a privileged position of power or trust.
- Resorting to bullying tactics, or verbal abuse.
- Causing a participant to lose self-esteem by embarrassing, humiliating or undermining the individual.
- Spending excessive amounts of time alone with children away from other adults.

It is essential that everyone challenges poor practice, even where there is a belief that the motives of an individual are well meaning.

Failure to challenge poor practice can lead to an environment where abuse is more likely to remain unnoticed.

Abuse

Abuse can happen wherever there are young people of any age. The effects of abuse can be so damaging and if left untreated, they may follow a person into adulthood. For example, a person who has been abused as a young person may find it difficult or impossible to maintain stable, trusting relationships, become involved in drugs, or prostitution, attempt suicide or even abuse a young person in the future.

Disabled People.

Background

Despite some traditionally negative misconceptions about young people with a disability or hearing impairment, the reality is that the vast majority of deaf and disabled children and young people are ready, willing and able to participate in sport and physical activity when they have access to facilities and appropriately trained staff to support them. The Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) believe that when supporting the inclusion of deaf and disabled children and young people, sports need to also recognise the additional vulnerabilities these young people experience and that *“child protection procedures, guidance and training help staff and volunteers to recognise the additional vulnerability of some children and the extra barriers they face to getting help.”*¹ For these reasons the

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CPSU have made safeguarding deaf and disabled children and young people in sport a priority theme and have established a range of multi-agency groups to carry out work in this area.

This briefing summarises the key issues around the additional vulnerability of deaf and disabled children and young people which are reaffirmed in statutory guidance².

Disability

“Disability itself is a complex concept, with many impairments included in the definition, It is often represented by the wheelchair symbol, but the majority of disabled people have less visible impairments, including learning difficulties, sight or hearing conditions, mental health issues, and long-term progressive impairments”³. Types of disability can be categorised by severity from mild to moderate or severe. A child with mild autism for example may have impaired social skills but his or her motor skills may be unaffected. Similarly a child with a learning disability or epilepsy will be affected by the severity of the disability not the disability itself

¹ Standards for Safeguarding and Protection Children in Sport. Standard 5.2 (CPSU England and Standard 4 CPSU Northern Ireland) ² Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A Guide to Inter-agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children*. London: TSO. Ch. 6 & 11.

Increased Vulnerability

The available UK evidence on the extent of abuse among deaf and disabled children suggests that they are at increased risk of abuse and that the presence of multiple disabilities appears to increase the risk of both abuse and neglect.

Deaf and disabled children may be especially vulnerable to abuse for a number of reasons:

- increased likelihood of social isolation;
- fewer outside contacts than children without a disability;
- dependency on others for practical assistance in daily living (including intimate care);
- impaired capacity to resist, avoid or understand abuse;
- speech and language communication needs may make it difficult to tell others what is happening;
- limited access to someone to disclose to;
- And particularly vulnerable to bullying.

Sobsey and Doe (1991)⁴ estimated a 78% increased risk to disabled children in comparison to those who did not define themselves as having a disability, due to their exposure to the numbers of service providers alone and identified the following reasons why vulnerability is increased:

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- being viewed as a “safe target” for abusers;
- increased grooming opportunities and the increased power inequality
- children possibly not knowing that the abuse is inappropriate;
- disabled children being less likely to be listened to or believed;
- the denial of the possibility of (particularly sexual) abuse; ;
- young people having learnt to obey in order to survive;
- the assumed lack of credibility as witnesses;
- inexperience of disabled young people in making decisions;
- a belief by deaf and disabled children and young people that their wishes are not heeded;
- Parents being viewed as ‘saints’ coping with the intolerable burden of a disabled child and therefore not considered as potential risks.

Types of Abuse

Deaf and disabled children are up to four times as likely to be abused as non-disabled children. Sullivan and Knutson (2000)⁵ found that children were more likely to be abused under the following categories:

- Neglect – 3.8 times as likely to be abused
- Sexual – 3.1 times as likely to be abused
- Physical – 3.8 times as likely to be abused
- Emotional – 3.9 times as likely to be abused

They also reported that 31% of disabled children had been abused compared to a prevalence of 9% in the non-disabled population.

Deaf and disabled children may be additionally abused in a number of ways. For example:

Neglect – a child could be confined to their room, lack appropriate supervision, or be deprived of visitors;

Sexual – a child could be subject to inappropriate personal care or be abused by someone taking advantage of one to one supervision arrangements;

Physical – drugs given incorrectly to a child, insufficient treatment, misuse of medication or inappropriate restraint of a child;

Emotional – lack of stimulation or over-protection of the child, the child may suffer from a lack of privacy or from too high or low expectations.

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Barriers to Participation

- Some common barriers deaf and disabled children may face with getting involved in sport include⁶:
- lack of early experiences in sport;
- sports lack of understanding and awareness of how to include people with a disability in sport;
- limited opportunities and programmes for participation, training and competition;
- lack of accessible facilities, such as gymnasiums and buildings;
- limited accessible transportation;
- limiting psychological and sociological factors including attitudes towards disability of parents, coaches, teachers and even people with disabilities themselves;
- Limited access to information and resources.

By working towards the lifting of barriers that stop deaf and disabled children from being fully integrated into mainstream life, they can also be more effectively safeguarded from abuse.

'As practitioners we can too easily collude with standards of care for disabled children that we would not dream of accepting for other children'⁷

Ruth Marchant and Marcus Page

The social model of disability argues that people with impairments are disabled by the way society is structured and the way it functions (Morris, 1998⁸; Oliver, 1999⁹). This is illustrated by quotes from young people with a disability:

'How disabled I am depends on where I am and who I'm with.

When I'm with my deaf friends I'm not disabled because we all sign. But when I'm in the outside world I'm disabled.'

'If I could change one thing about the way disabled young people are treated I would change the fact that they have to fight for their rights, equipment and some facilities'¹⁰

Taken from the CPSU BRIEFING Safeguarding deaf and disabled children and young people

²English Federation of Disability Sport (2010) *Engaging disabled people in sport - A resource to help the sports sector increase participation*

⁴Sobsey, D. & Doe, T. (1991). Patterns of sexual abuse and assault. *Sexuality and Disability*, 9 (3), 243-259.

⁵Sullivan PM and Knutson JF (2000) Maltreatment and Disabilities: a population based epidemiological study. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 24 10 1257-1273.

⁶International Platform on Sport & Development, (2011). *Barriers to Participation* [online] Available at:

http://www.sportanddev.org/learnmore/sport_and_disability2

⁷Marchant, R. and Page, M. (1993) *Bridging the gap: child protection work with children with multiple disabilities*. London: NSPCC.

⁸Morris, J (1998) *Accessing Human Rights: disabled children and the Children Act*. Ilford, Essex: Barnardo's.

⁹Oliver, M (1999) *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach* Macmillan, London

¹⁰Quoted in Ruth Marchant - What is disability? (2010, unpublished)

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Race and Racism.

Young people and vulnerable adults from ethnic minority groups (and their parents) are more likely to have experienced racial harassment, racial discrimination and institutional racism. The effects of racism differ for different communities and individuals and should not be assumed to be uniform. Evidence from research and previous abuse enquiries suggests particular issues for children of mixed parentage and refugee children. Although racism causes significant harm it is not in itself, a category of abuse. All organisations working with young people, including those operating where ethnic minorities are numerically small, should address institutional racism, defined in the McPherson Inquiry Report of the death of Stephen Lawrence as *“the collective failure by an organisation to provide appropriate and professional service to people on account of their race, culture and/or religion”*.

Children and young people from minority ethnic groups

Children and young people from minority ethnic groups are additionally vulnerable because they may be:

- Experiencing racism and racist attitudes
- Experiencing racism being ignored by people in authority
- Afraid of further abuse if they challenge others
- Subjected to myths, e.g. all people of a particular culture are good with or hit their children
- Wanting to fit in and not make a fuss
- Using or learning English as a second language.

Children and young people who take on leadership roles

Taking on a leadership role within lifting is intended to be an enjoyable and positive learning experience. However, coaches, club officials, lifters, parents/spectators in both adult and junior lifting often lose sight of the fact that an individual in a leadership role who is under 18 is still legally a child. As a consequence young coaches and referees are open to experiencing abusive behaviour verbally, physically and emotionally. This behaviour is not acceptable in adult or youth lifting.

The increased potential harm that verbal, physical and emotional abuse can cause to children and young people in these roles needs to be recognised. It is important that clubs acknowledge their role in ensuring that club officials, lifters and spectators behave appropriately towards young people who take on such roles. It is necessary to recognise that, like adults, children and young people can and do make mistakes when they are learning, and overly critical and unsupportive responses may

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Reducing the potential for vulnerability

Bearing in mind that children and young people can be and are disadvantaged by these and other experiences, it is important for all clubs, and affiliated organisations to be extra vigilant in creating a safe culture, including:

- Finding ways of understanding and communicating with all children and young people
- Ensuring best practice at all times in physical and health care
- Developing knowledge of the diverse cultures they serve
- Respecting cultural differences
- Building relationships with parents and carers and including all families in club activities
- Observing carefully changes in mood, appearance and behaviour and discussing those concerns with families, carers or the designated person if suspicions or concerns are significantly aroused about the care of the child or young person
- Acknowledging that disabled children and young people are additionally vulnerable and that vigilance is essential
- Acknowledging that abusive behaviour directed towards a minor whilst they are carrying out a leadership role is not acceptable and will be reported to the appropriate designated person as poor practice and or abuse
- Implementation of a club code of conduct for spectators and players
- Acceptance of the special role club officials have in setting a good example of the way in which people should behave towards children and young people in leadership roles.

It may be necessary to ask other specialist agencies for help and advice in including some children and young people in lifting. It should be seen as a strength of the club to approach families, Education, Health, Social Services, voluntary agencies and community groups for advice on including and protecting particular children. The mentoring of young officials is particularly helpful in supporting individuals if they are faced with abusive behaviour and indeed preventing the continuation of such behaviour.

Abuse and Neglect

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a young person by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Young people may be abused in a family or in an institution or community setting by those known to them, or even more rarely, by a stranger for example, via the internet. They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

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Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a young person's basic physical and or/psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the young person's health or development- e.g. failure to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a young person from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure adequate supervision (including the use of adequate care-givers), access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include refusal to give young people love, affection and attention.

Neglect in sport could also include a Coach or Instructor not ensuring that the young people in his/her care is kept safe, exposing them to undue cold, heat or to unnecessary risk of injury.

Physical abuse

Where adults physically hurt or injure young people by hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, and burning, biting, scalding, suffocating, drowning or otherwise causing harm to a young person.

Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or induces illness in a child.

Physical abuse in sport may be when the nature and intensity of training and competition exceeds the capacity of the young person's immature and growing body: where drugs are used to enhance performance or delay puberty, or failure to do a risk assessment of pre-existing injuries or medical conditions

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).

Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

In sport, coaching techniques, which involve physical contact with young people, could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed. The power of the Instructor/Coach over young performers, if misused, may lead to abusive situations developing. This could include,

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exposure to sexually explicit inappropriate language and/or jokes, having any sexual activity or relationship, creating opportunities to access young people's bodies, suggestions that sexual favours can help or refusal can hinder a career.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the continual emotional maltreatment of a young person such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the young person's emotional development. It may involve conveying to young people that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.

It may feature age or development inappropriate expectations being imposed on young people. These may include interactions that are beyond the young person's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the young person participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another.

It may involve serious bullying causing the young person to frequently feel frightened or in danger, or the exploration or corruption of young people. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a young person, though it may occur alone.

Emotional abuse in sport may occur, if young people are subjected to constant humiliating, sarcasm, taunting aggressive behaviour or tone, demeaned in his / her efforts by continuous negative feedback, Placed under unrealistic pressure to perform to high expectations constantly by the coach, club officials or parents, undermined / challenged in his / her self-confidence and there is a failure to intervene.

THE ABOVE DEFINITIONS ARE ADAPTED FROM THE HM GOVERNMENT'S WORKING TOGETHER TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN 2010 A GUIDE TO INTER-AGENCY WORKING TO SAFEGUARD AND PROMOTE THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN- EVERY CHILD MATTERS CHANGE FOR CHILDREN 2004 THE OVERALL STRATEGY DETAILING GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION, GUIDANCE AND PLANS.

Financial Abuse

This is sometimes referred to as material abuse and/or financial exploitation. Typical examples of behaviour are theft or misuse of property, possessions and insurance, blocking the access of a person to their assets and extortion. Typical examples of effects are having inadequate money to pay bills including rent, having a 'disappearing income' and losing control of one's financial affairs.

Financial abuse in sport could happen when a young person's funding is used in an inappropriate way e.g. to pay a mortgage for their parents.

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Social Abuse

This abuse occurs when young people are confined either in a room on their own or are prevented from seeing friends and relatives or having other social contact, they are denied access to services and refused transportation.

Indicators of Abuse

Indicators that a young person may be being abused include the following:

- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly situated on a part of the body not normally prone to injury
- An injury for which the explanation seems inconsistent
- The young person describes what appears to be an abusive act involving him/her
- Someone else(a young person or adult) expresses concern about the welfare of another young person
- Unexplained changes in behaviour-withdrawn, depressed, becoming very quiet, sudden outburst of temper, crying
- Inappropriate sexual awareness
- Encouraging sexually explicit behaviour
- Distrust of adults, particularly those whom a close relationship would normally be expected
- Has difficulty making friends
- Is prevented from socialising with other young people
- Displays variations in eating patterns, including overeating and loss of appetite
- Loses weight for no apparent reason
- Becomes dirty or unkempt

It should be recognised that this list is not exhaustive and the presence of one or more indicators is not proof that abuse is actually taking place. A good working relationship with the parent will help to identify any concerns that a young person maybe experiencing e.g. family bereavement.

BRITISH WEIGHT LIFTING