



Recognising Signs of Abuse

Signs of abuse

Rarely does one form of abuse take place in isolation. This guidance is designed to help people think about what they may be seeing, hearing or feeling, not to make them experts. The first point of contact for any concern would usually be the Club Safeguarding Officer.

Reporting your concern will allow the experts to determine whether or not there is any further concern or

It is not your responsibility to decide whether what you are witnessing is abuse, simply to alert others to what you are concerned about and allow them to take the necessary steps.

action for them to act on.

Signs which may give you cause for concern include:-

- Unexplained bruising or injury in an unusual place;
- Inconsistent explanation given for injuries;
- Sudden behavioural changes eg withdrawal, emotional outbursts, very quiet or very aggressive;
- Inappropriate explicit sexual comments, language or behaviour;
- Difficulty making friends or being prevented from socialising with other young people;
- Distrust of adults, particularly if there would usually be a closer relationship expected eg with parents, close family/friend or coaches;
- Variations in eating patterns;
- Noticeable loss of or gain in weight;
- Lack of personal hygiene, unkempt appearance, smelly, poor fitting clothes;
- Asking for or stealing food;
- Comments from or about the young person which cause you concern;
- Non-attendance at training or a lack of interest in activities the young person usually enjoys;
- Lack of confidence, increased anxiety or signs of depression;
- Threats of suicide or sounding helpless and hopeless;
- Bullying of other young people, including siblings;
- Reluctance to talk.

This is not an exhaustive list and in most instances more than one sign may be present.

There may be a number of reasons why a child or young person's behaviour changes, and these may not be related to any cause for concern of a safeguarding issue.

- Young people may display these signs as a consequence of personal circumstances, or just as a part of their growing up.
- Parents and coaches should develop a dialogue about and with the young person, so that they can keep each other informed about any issues of concern.
- Parents need to let coaches know if there has, for example, been bereavement or separation in the family, so that the coach can take steps to be sensitive to that young person's mood.
- Young people who are experiencing abuse, or who have, may make disclosures which are partial; they may say something direct; they are very likely to disclose to a friend rather than an adult.
- We all need to listen and to take notice of what is said.

- We need to be able to inform everyone, young people included, as to what to do with their concerns or things that have been said to them.
- Often young people who are experiencing abuse are labelled as “difficult”; they may be suffering from mental health issues, such as depression or self-harm, because of the abuse. They may be all the less able to speak about what is happening to them because of these reactions. Try not to form judgements, just act on the facts you have seen and heard. Young people may well be seeking attention as a means to get help, to be asked if they are alright, so they can be helped.

Young people with additional vulnerabilities may be suffering abuse which they are less able to articulate or recognise as abusive.

For example, those with learning disabilities, or communication problems, those suffering and fearing homophobic abuse, may find it much harder to disclose what is happening, to feel they can trust anyone, and so need treating with greater sensitivity and awareness

The following definitions of abuse have been taken from the government’s Guidance document “*Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*”: -

1. **Neglect** - Neglect occurs when an adult fails to meet a young person’s basic physical and/or psychological needs and this is likely to lead to serious impairment of the young person’s health or development.

Neglect may include:

- failure to provide adequate food, shelter or clothing;
- leaving a young person alone or unsupervised when they are not able to cope;
- failing to protect from physical harm or danger;
- failing to provide access to appropriate medical care and
- failure to give affection and attention.

In sport, neglect may include:

- over-rigorous training regimes;
- exposure to harsh temperatures or
- failing to have regard for a young person’s injury.

2. **Physical abuse** - Physical harm or injury being caused to the young person.

Physical abuse may include:

- hitting, shaking, throwing, burning, scalding or poisoning,
- biting, suffocating or drowning the young person;
- giving or allowing inappropriate drug or alcohol consumption or
- allowing any other person to cause physical harm to the young person.

In sport, physical abuse may include:

- the use of controlled diets or supplements which impact on the young person’s development;
- extreme training regimes or assault with a ball.

3. **Sexual abuse** - Sexual abuse is the use of a young person for the fulfilment of another person’s sexual satisfaction. Both men and women commit sexual abuse, and it may be committed by an adult or another young person.

Sexual abuse can include any:

- sexual act;
- the production or exposure to pornographic images or
- exposing the young person to the performance of sexual activity by others.

In sport, sexual abuse may involve:

- inappropriate touching of a young person in a coaching scenario;
- grooming a young person for a relationship with a person in a position of trust, *or*
- the inappropriate taking of photographs or videos of young people in a sport setting.

4. Emotional abuse - Emotional abuse means the ill treatment of a young person which results in severe and persistent adverse effects on their emotional development. Although this form of abuse may occur in isolation, it will also be part of the other forms of abuse, in the majority of cases. It is the most prevalent form of abuse and has the longest impact on a person.

Emotional abuse may involve:

- unrealistic expectations being placed on the young person;
- persistent criticism;
- making the young person feel in danger, threatened or taunted;
- over-protection and not allowing them to develop fully;
- failing to give love and affection or making the young person feel they are only valued for their use to another person, rather than for their own, unique personality.

In sport, emotional abuse may mean the young person is:

- placed under an unrealistic level of demand for performance;
- that there is name calling and belittling
- failure to make reasonable adjustments for the young person's needs.

5. Bullying and harassment – means deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually over a period of time, which puts the young person down. It can be:

- verbal
- written
- physical
- by gossip and spreading rumours, *and be*
- by phone or social media access

Bullying and harassment usually includes:

- name-calling;
- threats and gestures;
- stealing and/or hiding other people's belongings;
- ostracising the young person;
- ignoring them or having unwelcome and unnecessary physical contact, such as barging and shoving.

In sport, bullying and harassment may include:

- a parent shouting at young people on the court;
- a coach who uses personal criticism to put down the young people;
- homophobic name-calling
- making the young person feel physically awkward and victimised due to making the training too hard for their stage of development.

Harassment usually involves the same sorts of behaviours as bullying. It may be identified as a random act or a sustained campaign of intimidation.

Barriers to Reporting a Safeguarding Concern

England Netball recognises that there are extra barriers that some young people may face when they report abuse. It is important that all those working in netball understand that all young people are different and some may also be at more risk of abuse in the first place.

Disabled children

Disabled children have the same rights to protection as any other child in sport. They are particularly vulnerable and at greater risk of all forms of abuse, 3 or 4 times more likely to be abused, and the presence of multiple disabilities increases the risk of both abuse and neglect.

Some of the common factors that can lead to increased vulnerability are learning disabilities and different methods of communication, eg BSL, Makaton etc, a lack of understanding of social boundaries and perhaps a need for assistance with personal care. The latter often leads to a young disabled person becoming more dependant and compliant than a non-disabled person. In addition, the fact that they are perceived as different may make them a target for bullying and abuse.

Anyone working with young disabled people must be especially alert to the signs and symptoms of abuse and have strategies in place to ensure all children are able to raise concerns.

For more reading on the issues relating to disabled children and the identifying and reporting of abuse please see this information from the NSPCC

Gender and Cultural Barriers

There are also cultural and gender differences that may mean that some young people find it harder to talk about an abusive situation.

For example boys may be more reluctant than girls to seek help, they often have less supportive networks around them and are less likely to talk to friends than their female counterparts are. A study of calls to Childline confirmed that boys are less likely to talk about a concern than girls and so often wait longer before admitting they have a problem.

Children who are more isolated in their support networks may also be less likely to talk to someone so a young person with fewer friends may find it more difficult to find the right person to talk to.

Young lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people may also have additional difficulties in disclosing.

What should netball clubs do?

Netball Clubs and organisations should make sure that an inclusive environment is created where all young people are valued for their individuality and the contribution they make to the club, and where they can feel confident that their concerns will be listened to.

The following has been adapted from information taken from the NSPCC website and is useful guidance for clubs to encourage young people to seek help and support:

- Never forget what it's like to need help and support - make it easier for young people to take up the offer of help
- Help to tackle the myths about those who seek help - seeking help is not a sign of weakness; encourage parents to promote this message.
- Help to tackle the myths about young people - be positive about young people.
- Listen to your young netballers - improve your club using their feedback
- Shout about safeguarding in netball - lack of awareness is a significant barrier to young people seeking help
- See the whole person - engage with young people both in terms of their strengths and their weaknesses
- Build trust - treat young people with respect
- Empower young people to find their own solutions

