

Classifications and indicators of abuse

Introduction

Abuse in all its forms can affect a child at any age and the effects can be so damaging that, without appropriate intervention, they may continue to have a negative impact on an individual into adulthood.

An individual who has been abused may:

- find it difficult or impossible to maintain a stable, trusting relationship.
- become involved in drugs or prostitution.
- attempt suicide or self-harm.
- go on to abuse another child.

Children with disabilities may be at increased risk of abuse through various factors such as:

- stereotyping
- prejudice
- discrimination, including ethnic or racial
- isolation
- powerlessness to protect themselves
- inability to communicate that abuse has occurred.

The Children Act 1989 defines four categories of abuse: physical, neglect, emotional and sexual abuse.

Types of abuse

The following information is taken from British Rowing SPC policy; Section 2.4 Indicators of Abuse (which reflects the information given in the “Working Together to Safeguard Children document) and also section 2.5- Bullying.

The following text includes a detailed description of the type of abuse and then how these may translate in a rowing scenario.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s health or development. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child’s basic emotional needs.

In a rowing situation, this could include:

- a coach not keeping children safe by exposing them to undue cold, heat or the unnecessary risk of injury, e.g. allowing rowers under their supervision to train or race inappropriately clothed for the prevailing conditions
- not insisting that life jackets be worn by Under 16’s.
- not providing a Safety boat or similar when children are on the water.
- a parent consistently leaving a child without adequate provisions, e.g. food, water, clothing, sun protection
- poor technique that is ignored as not currently important, causing pain and injury
- not being aware, or responding to, a child’s emotional needs.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of or induces illness in a child.

In a rowing situation, this could include:

- a coach disregarding the individual requirements of each child's growing body or needs when setting a training programme, e.g. allowing 14-year-olds to undertake hour-long, continuous ergos or allowing a child to always row on one side (bow or stroke).
- a coach that uses inappropriate exercises for the age of the group and developmental abilities..

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of, or consents to, what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative acts such as rape, buggery or oral sex or non-penetrative acts such as fondling. It may also include non-contact activities such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities or by encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

In a rowing situation, indicators could include:

- a coach engaging in unnecessary and inappropriate physical contact, e.g. massaging the shoulders of the rowers in a suggestive manner.
- a coach making suggestive comments to their rowers.
- an inappropriately close relationship developing between a rower and a coach. *(NB: care needs to be taken where a coach or cox in a regulated activity is only 17 or 18 themselves. They are in a position of trust and control and should be aware they cannot make a relationship with a 16 or 17 year old in their crew, although this would normally be considered appropriate. If they do, the CWO should investigate to ensure that abuse has not taken place, and the coach/cox must not continue in that role).*
- an individual spending an unnecessary amount of time in the changing area when children are present.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve making the child feel or believe that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying causing children to frequently feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, although it may occur alone.

In a rowing situation, this could include:

- a parent or coach subjecting a rower to constant criticism, name-calling, sarcasm, bullying or racism
- a parent or coach putting a rower under unrealistic pressure in order to perform to high expectations

- the threat of deselecting an individual from a crew if they do not do what they are asked on the training programme.
- consistently ignoring a less favoured individual during an outing, or not giving them a row.

Bullying

Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves.

Bullying can be:

Emotional – being unfriendly, excluding (emotionally and physically), sending hurtful text messages or tormenting (eg hiding kit or equipment, threatening gestures)

Physical – pushing, kicking, hitting, punching or any use of violence

Racist – racial taunts, graffiti or gestures

Sexual – unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments

Homophobic – because of, or focusing on the issue of sexuality

Verbal – name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing

Competitive sports such as rowing are an ideal environment for the bully.

The bully in rowing can be:

- a parent who pushes too hard
- a coach who adopts a 'win at all costs' philosophy
- a rower or cox who intimidates or ridicules a peer
- a club official who places unfair pressure on a person
- a spectator or race marshal who constantly shouts abuse at participants

Sport can make a significant contribution to improving the life experience and outcomes for all children and young people. Every child should be supported to participate and, only in exceptional circumstances where the safety of a child or of other children cannot be maintained, should a child be excluded from club activities.

The following should be avoided as a means of managing a child's behaviour:

- Physical punishment or the threat of such
- Refusal to speak to or interact with the child
- Being deprived of food, water, access to changing facilities or toilets or other essential facilities
- Verbal intimidation, ridicule or humiliation

Indicators of abuse

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. It is not the responsibility of those working in rowing to decide that child abuse is occurring, but it is their responsibility to act on any concerns.

Indications that a child is being abused may include one or more of the following:

- unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injury,
- a child is prone to such injuries or an injury for which an explanation seems inconsistent,
- the child describes what appears to be an abusive act involving him/her,
- someone else, a child or adult, expresses concern about the welfare of a child,

- unexplained changes in a child's behaviours, e.g. becoming very quiet, withdrawn, displaying sudden outbursts of temper or behaviours changing over time,
- inappropriate sexual awareness or use of language or engaging in sexually explicit behaviours,
- distrust of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected,
- difficulty in making friends,
- being prevented from socializing with other children,
- displaying variations in eating patterns including overeating or loss of appetite,
- losing weight for no apparent reason,
- becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt.

Others include

- Loss of enthusiasm for the sport
- Reluctance to attend training sessions
- Being misleading or lying about their whereabouts
- Becoming ill or develop an addiction

Other documents:

CPGA Bullying policy

Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy Section 2: British Rowing

Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy Guideline 11: Receiving, Recording and Reporting suspicions and allegations of abuse CPGA