



BULLYING PREVENTION HANDBOOK

FOR COACHES OF MINOR ATHLETES



February 2026



CONTENTS

- **Introduction** PAGE 2
- **Recognize Bullying Behavior** PAGE 3
- **Prevent Bullying Behavior** PAGE 9
- **Respond to Bullying Behavior** PAGE 17
- **Handouts and Activities** PAGE 22
- **Organizational Resources** PAGE 23
- **References** PAGE 24

About Us

The **U.S. Center for SafeSport**® is an independent nonprofit organization responsible for responding to and preventing emotional, physical, and sexual misconduct and abuse in the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement. The Center also serves as an educational resource for sports organizations at all levels, from recreational sports organizations to professional leagues.

Content Warning

This resource contains information about abuse and misconduct in sport but will not include graphic descriptions or images of violence. The content may be uncomfortable or distressing for some participants.

To talk with someone about abuse you or someone you know has experienced contact RAINN at rainn.org or 800-656-4673. You can report any abuse or misconduct within the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement to uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern.

This resource is for educational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. It does not replace or override the Center's legal documents and policies (e.g., the SafeSport Code). Every participant in the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement is responsible for knowing the information outlined in the [SafeSport Code](#).

This resource was supported in part by grant number 15PSMA-24-GG-03789-KYAS, awarded by the SMART Office, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.





INTRODUCTION

Across the U.S., millions of youth take part in sport each year to have fun with friends, learn skills, and compete. Participation also helps them feel included and increases their self-esteem. This is especially important for youth who have experienced trauma and abuse.¹ Unfortunately, bullying is sometimes part of the sport experience.

In one nationwide study, about 20% of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying nationwide.²

As a coach, you play an important role in creating a safe and inclusive sport environment for all athletes.

This Handbook will give you the foundation to address bullying in your sport. You will learn how to:

RECOGNIZE

Bullying Behavior as defined in the [SafeSport Code](#)

PREVENT

it from happening in your sport

RESPOND

to this behavior when you see it happening among your athletes

This Handbook focuses on conduct prohibited by the SafeSport Code. It is best suited for coaches of Minor Athletes in the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement ("the Movement"). We have capitalized certain terms (e.g., "Sexual Bullying Behavior") that have a specific definition in the Code.

If you are not part of the Movement, get to know your organization's policies and procedures related to bullying, as well as relevant federal and state law.



JUMP TO ► [Recognize](#) ► [Prevent](#) ► [Respond](#) ► [Handouts and Activities](#) ► [Organizational Resources](#)

RECOGNIZE BULLYING BEHAVIOR

Most youth do not tell an adult when they have been bullied.² You need to be able to recognize it without relying on athletes to tell you. In this section, you will learn how the SafeSport Code defines Bullying Behavior, why it happens, how it affects athletes, and which athletes are at higher risk.

Definitions

Bullying Behavior is repeated behavior or a single, severe incident directed at or about someone under age 18. The behavior is intended or likely to hurt, control, or tear down that person emotionally, physically, or sexually. It can be:

PHYSICAL	hitting, beating up, spitting at, or throwing objects at someone; stealing, hiding, destroying, or interfering with someone's property
VERBAL, WRITTEN, OR VISUAL	ridiculing, name-calling, taunting, or threatening to harm someone; using gestures to threaten or intimidate
SOCIAL (including cyberbullying)	spreading rumors or lies to harm someone's reputation; socially excluding them and asking others to do the same; using technology to harass, frighten, intimidate, or humiliate them; posting real or manipulated harmful content online
DISCRIMINATORY	Bullying Behavior directed at someone because of their age, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, national origin, or disability
CRIMINAL CONDUCT	any conduct described as bullying under federal or state law

When done to Adults, this behavior could qualify as other violations of the SafeSport Code, such as Hazing or Harassment.

Bullying does not include petty slights, minor inconveniences, or lack of good manners, unless this behavior is repeated or very aggressive.

Sexual Bullying Behavior is repeated behavior or a single, severe incident of a sexual nature that is:

- Aggressive
- Directed at or about someone under age 18
- Intended or likely to hurt, control, or tear down that person emotionally, physically, or sexually

It also includes bullying related to someone's actual or perceived sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and related medical conditions) or sexual orientation. This is true even if the acts do not involve conduct of a sexual nature.

Sexual Bullying Behavior can be physical, verbal, written, visual, or social. It can happen in person or online.

When done to Adults, these behaviors could qualify as other violations of the SafeSport Code, such as Sexual Hazing or Sexual Harassment.

Cyberbullying involves the use of technology to bully someone under age 18. It can happen through text messages, email, and social media sites.

Between 2007 and 2025, about 1 in 3 youth reported having been cyberbullied.³

Cyberbullying can be more widespread and harder to avoid than offline bullying because the internet and social media are available 24/7. Sometimes cyberbullying is anonymous, so it is more difficult to tell who is responsible.

EXAMPLES OF BULLYING BEHAVIOR

<p>Jacob is on a youth soccer team. His team captain continuously taunts and yells at him. He calls Jacob lazy and tells him to "lay off the donuts." His captain encourages the rest of the team to gang up on Jacob in the same way.</p>	<p>Ji-Young just joined her youth swim team. Her teammates regularly make fun of her in the locker room and refuse to partner with her at practice. They also spread embarrassing rumors about her online to try to ruin her reputation at school.</p>	<p>Terrence is the youngest member of his youth basketball team. His teammates frequently send him violent and threatening text messages. One day, they corner him in the locker room and beat him up.</p>
--	--	--

EXAMPLES OF SEXUAL BULLYING BEHAVIOR

Katie is the smallest person on her youth lacrosse team. Her teammates always tease her about the size of her breasts when she's changing in the locker room. When Katie asks them to stop, they surround her and call her "Training Bra."

Stefan is the only boy on his cheerleading team. Some of the girls on his team don't like having a boy as a teammate. They accuse him of stealing his position from a "girl who deserved it" and call him homophobic slurs.

EXAMPLES OF BEHAVIORS THAT MAY NOT BE BULLYING

Rude or mean behaviors that may be hurtful (by accident or on purpose) but are not part of an ongoing pattern:
"He's not even that good. How did he make the team?"

A conflict in which people disagree: *"We could have scored more points if you weren't such a ball hog."*

Coaching techniques and behaviors that are professionally accepted: *"Hey, step aside with me for a minute. Looks like you're having some trouble with that fastball. Let's talk it through."*

As a coach, you should still address any inappropriate behaviors even when they do not meet the formal criteria for Bullying Behavior in the SafeSport Code. This promotes a positive team environment and can help prevent behaviors from escalating into Bullying Behavior. You will learn about how to help athletes deal with conflict in a healthy manner and hold them accountable for the harm they cause in later sections of this Handbook.

Bullying Roles

When thinking about bullying on your team, focus on recognizing the behaviors instead of labeling the people involved. The roles athletes play can change in any situation. A child may bully others and experience bullying themselves. When we label an athlete a "bully," we are less likely to believe they can change their behavior, and less likely to notice when they are hurt by others.⁴

DON'T SAY	DO SAY	DON'T SAY	DO SAY
Bully	Child or athlete who bullied	Victim	Child or athlete who was bullied

Bystanders or witnesses to bullying also play an important role. Some join in the bullying, some ignore the situation entirely, and others step in to defend the child being bullied. You will learn more about how bystanders can intervene in a later section.



Factors That May Increase Athlete Risk

Athletes who bully often target those who have less physical or social power than they do.⁵ Some athletes target others based on their identity, such as race or disability. Here are some factors that may increase an athlete's risk of being bullied.

Weight

Youth who have a different body type than most of their peers are often targets for bullying. In one study, about 30% of "overweight" youth reported being bullied in physical education classes and sport activities.⁶ Athletes are sometimes encouraged to lose or gain weight to fit an idealized body type or improve performance. This can put athletes at risk for developing an eating disorder.⁷ As a coach, you can help by promoting body positivity and healthy eating habits.

Disability

You may have athletes with different physical, developmental, intellectual, emotional, and sensory needs. This can put them at greater risk of being bullied.⁸ Athletes with disabilities are two to four times more likely to experience abuse than athletes without disabilities.⁹

Race or Ethnicity

Youth of color in predominantly white spaces, especially Black youth, experience higher rates of bullying than their white peers.¹⁰ However, they are less likely to label their experiences as "bullying."¹¹ Be proactive and look for concerning behavior instead of relying on youth to report incidents to you.

Sexual Orientation

In one study, 82% of participants witnessed or experienced homophobic behavior in sport, including verbal insults and slurs, bullying, physical assaults, and threats of violence.¹²

The SafeSport Code classifies Sexual Bullying Behavior as a type of Sexual Misconduct. If you learn of or suspect Sexual Misconduct, you must report it to the Center immediately, but no later than 24 hours. You may also need to report it to law enforcement. You must also report all known or suspected Child Abuse, including sexual abuse, to the Center and law enforcement **immediately**, even if you became aware of it before you joined the Movement or the victim-survivor is now an adult.

Impacts of Bullying Behavior

Bullying is a complex social issue with widespread and long-lasting negative impacts on individuals, teams, and communities. It is considered an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), a term used to describe common forms of childhood adversity and trauma, such as abuse, neglect, community violence, and racism.¹³

Bullying, like other forms of trauma, can impact brain development and cause the body's stress systems to overload.¹⁴ This can lead to negative physical and mental health consequences that can last into adulthood.^{15,16}

COMMON EMOTIONAL EFFECTS ¹⁶	COMMON PHYSICAL EFFECTS ¹⁶	COMMON BEHAVIORAL EFFECTS ¹⁷
<p>Anger</p> <p>—</p> <p>Depression</p> <p>—</p> <p>Loneliness</p> <p>—</p> <p>Fear</p> <p>—</p> <p>Anxiety and panic attacks</p> <p>—</p> <p>Suicidal thoughts and feelings</p>	<p>Stomachaches</p> <p>—</p> <p>Dizziness</p> <p>—</p> <p>Headaches</p> <p>—</p> <p>Exhaustion</p> <p>—</p> <p>Muscle pain or other chronic pain</p> <p>—</p> <p>Digestive issues</p> <p>—</p> <p>Insomnia or oversleeping</p>	<p>Withdrawal from normal activities</p> <p>—</p> <p>Decreased school performance</p> <p>—</p> <p>Decreased athletic performance</p> <p>—</p> <p>Loss of interest in activities where bullying occurs</p>

Everyone responds to bullying differently. Not everyone who shows these signs has been bullied, and some who have been bullied may show no signs. It is helpful to look for unexplained emotional, physical, and behavioral changes instead of specific signs.



KEY POINTS

- **Bullying is common in youth sports.**
- **Bullying can be physical, verbal, social, sexual, or involve criminal conduct.**
- **Not all rude behaviors or conflicts meet the definition of Bullying Behavior in the SafeSport Code.**
- **Addressing inappropriate behavior can prevent it from escalating into Bullying Behavior.**
- **Some athletes are more likely to be targeted for bullying because of characteristics like race, body type, disability, and sexual orientation.**
- **Bullying can impact brain development and affect physical and mental health.**



JUMP TO ► [Recognize](#) ► [Prevent](#) ► [Respond](#) ► [Handouts and Activities](#) ► [Organizational Resources](#)

PREVENT BULLYING BEHAVIOR

Sport should be a safe and inclusive space in which every athlete feels they belong. Athletes perform better and have more fun when they are not worried about bullying.

In this section, you will learn how promoting a culture of respect can prevent bullying. You can do this by creating a positive sport environment, encouraging athletes to be active bystanders, coaching in trauma-sensitive ways, and putting effective policies into action.

Creating a Positive Environment

As a coach, you have the power to create a culture of respect and belonging. Your words, behaviors, and expectations can discourage bullying and other forms of abuse. They can also inadvertently promote it.

Helping athletes use their power to include not exclude is one of the best ways to prevent bullying. Address exclusive behavior before it escalates into bullying.

EXCLUSION

INCLUSION

<p>Bullying behaviors exclude and hurt others.</p>	<p>Inclusive behaviors build up others and make them feel welcome.</p>
<p><i>Example: Several team members repeatedly post videos on social media mocking an overweight teammate.</i></p>	<p><i>Example: Several team members post videos on social media promoting body positivity and showing successful athletes with differing body types.</i></p>

These principles will help you establish a positive sport environment.

Set behavioral expectations upfront.

Make sure that everyone understands your expectations and the consequences of not following them. Let athletes help you with this process. You should let athletes know what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable. Be clear that you will not allow bullying. Be sure your expectations and consequences are age- and developmentally appropriate.

Example: “Part of being a great team is setting clear expectations about how we treat each other. We do not tolerate bullying on this team. We are respectful to each other even when we disagree. We cheer for and support our teammates. Do you have any other ideas for team expectations?”

Model appropriate and respectful behavior.

Do not engage in conduct that disrespects or may be hurtful to others, whether emotionally or physically. When you mistreat someone, it sends the message to athletes that those behaviors are okay for them to do as well.

Use language that is intentionally inclusive, especially of athletes who commonly experience discrimination. For example, use “athletes without disabilities” instead of “normal athletes.” You do not want to imply that athletes with disabilities are not normal. Highlight positive and inclusive behaviors by athletes.

Example: “Jaden, I really like how you asked Brady to be your warmup partner when you noticed he didn’t have one.”

Call people by the name they want to be called.

Learn to pronounce names that you find difficult. Do not shorten names just to make them easier for you. It is better to ask an athlete how to pronounce their name than to keep saying it wrong. If you use nicknames for any athletes, make sure they are not offensive or hurtful.

Example: “Part of respecting each other is calling everyone by the name they want to be called. This includes learning to say everyone’s name correctly. No one’s name is too hard to say.”

Keep the age and developmental level of athletes in mind when talking to them.

Teen athletes may understand that a raised voice is not always the same as yelling in anger, but younger athletes may not. If you need to, simplify language when communicating with athletes who have cognitive disabilities. Be sure to choose language that is not condescending. You can do this by keeping instructions linear and avoiding unnecessary details or explanations.

Example: “The whiteboard shows our practice plan for today: warmup, drills, scrimmage, cooldown.”

Pay attention to athletes who are more at risk for bullying.

Make it clear that you do not tolerate racist, homophobic, and ableist conduct. This includes hurtful or offensive behavior that does not meet the definition of Bullying Behavior in the SafeSport Code. Immediately address harmful behavior and other misconduct from competitors or fans.

Example: "I do not tolerate making fun of, insulting, or mistreating anyone because of their identity. On this team, we support each other."

Reinforce that while winning matters, their growth and well-being are more important.

Show athletes you are invested in them as people and athletes. Let them know they are welcome on your team just as they are.

Help them turn mistakes and losses into learning opportunities and remind them that no one wins every time. Focus constructive feedback on specific behaviors or skills, not criticizing their personal characteristics. Do not let teammates use mistakes or poor performances as an excuse to bully someone.

Example: "That was a great effort! Next time give this a try, and you might see improvement."

Hold people accountable to expectations and policies.

Make sure you are clearly connecting behaviors to consequences. Promote accountability, not just punishment. Enforce policies consistently and with a focus on what is best for the athlete who was bullied. Treat a star athlete who bullies a teammate the way you would any other athlete, even if it makes it harder to win.

Example: "Your behavior today did not reflect the core values we talked about at the beginning of the season. Take some time to think about what happened, and then we can talk about next steps."

Respond to misconduct immediately and consistently.

Promptly address all forms of misconduct. If you address one incident but ignore another, you send mixed messages about what behaviors are acceptable. Refer to the section on **How to Report Bullying Behavior** for information on reporting to your organization and/or law enforcement.

Example: "Malik, I am glad you told me about what happened. It is not acceptable. I am going to address the issue with the whole team so it does not happen again."

Talk to athletes about bystander intervention and model it in your own behavior.

Model positive ways to say or do something when you see abusive behaviors. Use the [**Bullying Behavior Discussion Guide**](#) handout to discuss bystander intervention with your team. Show leadership by clearly addressing concerning behaviors you notice between athletes. Intervene when you witness inappropriate behavior by coaches, parents, or fans.

Example: “Parents, stop insulting athletes from the other team. That behavior is inappropriate and disrespectful.”

Trauma-Sensitive Coaching

Trauma can have a long-lasting impact. You can support athletes who have been bullied by helping to increase their self-esteem. Trauma-sensitive coaching practices can:¹⁷

- Help prevent bullying
- Help athletes develop meaningful relationships
- Create a supportive and structured environment

A trauma-sensitive approach helps you respond with proper balance to athletes who engage in bullying but have also experienced trauma. For example, you can hold them accountable for their actions while recognizing that prior experiences may drive their inappropriate behavior.

You can become a more trauma-sensitive coach by:¹⁷

- Using a calm tone, especially in highly stressful or emotional situations
- Encouraging athletes to express their feelings in safe and productive ways
- Explaining what you are doing and why you are doing it
- Helping athletes learn to respond to overwhelming or triggering situations in ways that help them feel safe and do not harm others
- Asking an athlete who has behaved inappropriately what they were thinking and feeling before you decide how to address the situation

Effective, trauma-sensitive coaching techniques can have a positive effect on all athletes, including those who have experienced trauma.¹⁸ Everyone performs better when you prioritize positive relationships, have a consistent structure, and care about athlete well-being.

Helping Athletes Understand Bystander Intervention

Trauma-sensitive coaching practices can help prevent many incidents of bullying. Despite your best efforts, some athletes on your team may still engage in bullying. They often do this when adults are not around, and those witnessing it may not intervene. Some bystanders are afraid of becoming a target themselves or experiencing negative social consequences.¹⁹

Deciding to intervene is a hard—but important—decision. Research indicates that when peers are taught how to intervene, bullying is reduced significantly.²⁰ Athletes may choose to intervene in different ways based on their relationship to those involved, social or physical power differences, or their personality.

Talk to them about the 5Ds of bystander intervention: Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Be Direct.²¹

Distract: Create a diversion, like asking someone involved to help you with something. You can also help deescalate the incident by encouraging people to walk away and not give the person who is bullying an audience.

Delegate: Get a coach, parent, or teacher to address the concern. If your teammate wants to talk to the coach or another trusted adult, offer to go with them.

Document: Write down the date, time, location, information about people involved, and a summary of what happened. Give the information to someone with more power to act.

Delay: Walk away until you feel it is safer to intervene. If you are friends with the person who is bullying, have a private conversation with them to ask if they realize their words or actions are hurtful. Talk to the teammate being bullied in private to let them know what happened is not their fault and that you support them.

Be Direct: Minimize the impact of the incident by standing up for your teammate. If you feel comfortable, say something in the moment like “That’s not cool.” You can tell the person who is bullying that their behavior is not okay or ask the person being bullied if they want to leave.

Let athletes know there is no one right way to intervene in a situation. Sometimes a combination of responses is appropriate. But doing something, even after the incident has happened, is more helpful than ignoring the situation. No matter what anyone chooses to do, remember that no one can do everything, but everyone can do something. The [**Bullying Behavior Discussion Guide**](#) handout can help you talk through intervention options with your team.

Remember that once you are aware of a bullying situation, you need to report it. Refer to the section on [**How to Report Bullying Behavior**](#) for information on reporting to your organization and/or law enforcement.



Effective Prevention Policies

Bullying prevention policies should demonstrate that you take athlete safety and well-being seriously. Publicizing these policies discourages athletes from engaging in bullying. It also encourages athletes and parents to report any bullying that does happen. Your policy should:¹⁵

- **Specifically prohibit bullying.** Clearly define bullying and outline behaviors that violate the policy. Specify how athletes and parents can report incidents and explain the consequences for bullying. In-Movement organizations' policies should also address how problem behavior is handled when it does not rise to the level of Bullying Behavior in the SafeSport Code.
- **Minimize bullying opportunities.** Create guidelines that address behavior standards, expectations, and supervision during athletes' unstructured time. Pay particular attention to high-risk locations like locker rooms, parking lots, buses, and hotels.

Besides team policies, you can also advocate for an organization-wide bullying prevention policy. Organizational policies should:

- Require training for coaches, administrators, and adult volunteers on recognizing and responding to bullying.
- Standardize a protocol for how they will address bullying to ensure situations are handled appropriately and consistently.
- Include clear direction about mandatory reporting obligations. Refer to the section on **How to Report Bullying Behavior** for information on reporting to your organization and/or law enforcement.
- Address the behavior of fans, volunteers, and others near your athletes. For example, some organizations have a code of conduct that prohibits discriminatory language or actions toward all individuals.

Tips for Preventing Bullying of At-Risk Athletes

You should also take specific steps to prevent bullying of athletes most at risk.

Weight

- Limit weigh-ins and weight discussions to only sport participation needs, such as qualifying for a wrestling weight class. Conduct them in private with another adult present.
- If you are concerned about an athlete's weight, refer them to a medical professional. Do not give nutrition or training advice you are not certified to give.
- Be considerate when choosing uniforms. Select colors, styles, and fits that are inclusive of a wide range of body types. Check in with athletes and/or parents about size preferences before ordering.

Disability

- Have athletes with and without disabilities practice and train together to reduce isolation.
- Reject stereotypes about athletes with disabilities and teach athletes without disabilities to do the same. Disabled athletes often compete at elite levels. They are able to ask for the help they need to compete.

Race or Ethnicity

- Involve athletes and coaches in open conversations about race. Do not rely on athletes of color to educate everyone. If you do not feel comfortable leading the conversations, find someone to help.
- Plan practices and team events around religious and ethnic holidays. Try to avoid scheduling games and competitions on those days.

Sexual Orientation

- Some athletes may be bullied in locker rooms and changing areas because of their sexual orientation. Follow your organization's policies for monitoring these areas. Stay alert to harmful behavior and give athletes access to private spaces when they ask for them.



KEY POINTS

- **As a coach, you can help prevent bullying in your sport.**
- **Intentionally creating a positive and inclusive environment for athletes at risk of being bullied improves the sport experience for everyone.**
- **Trauma-sensitive coaching promotes a safe environment to help athletes grow.**
- **Athletes can help stop bullying by standing up for teammates who are being bullied.**
- **Strong organizational policies can prevent bullying from happening. They can also help you effectively respond to it when it occurs.**



JUMP TO ► [Recognize](#) ► [Prevent](#) ► [Respond](#) ► [Handouts and Activities](#) ► [Organizational Resources](#)

RESPOND TO **BULLYING BEHAVIOR**

When you quickly recognize and appropriately respond to bullying situations, you can stop problem behaviors from continuing and help prevent future bullying. The presence of a caring, engaged, and responsible adult can reduce the negative impacts of bullying.²² Your response matters.

In this section, you will find tips on responding to bullying situations, including how to talk with those involved. You will also learn your reporting responsibilities under the SafeSport Code and how to address potential Retaliation.

Tips for Responding

You prepare for competition in several ways, including practice plans and scouting. It is just as important to prepare in responding to bullying. Consider these points to help you respond appropriately and effectively.

Knowledge: Know and understand your organization's policies. Learn what behaviors to look for, how you should respond, and how to report.

Preparation: Discuss acceptable and unacceptable behaviors with athletes at the start of each season to set expectations. Follow up with them throughout the season to hold them accountable.

Time: Respond quickly to prevent behaviors from escalating and harm from continuing.

Consistency: Respond consistently to bullying you learn about. Responding to some situations and not others may reduce athletes' confidence in the process and can lead to more inappropriate behavior.

Appropriateness: Consider the age and developmental level of those involved. Acceptable behaviors and appropriate responses may vary.

Here are some tips for responding to bullying. Do not ignore bullying or assume someone else is taking care of the situation. Do something about it!

- If you witness bullying directly, intervene immediately by separating everyone involved. Ask for help from another coach or adult if necessary. Make sure everyone is safe and no one needs medical attention.
- Remain calm and respectful. This shows you can control your emotions and teaches athletes to do the same.
- Talk with each person separately—those who bullied, the targets, and any witnesses. This way, you can evaluate what happened with minimal bias. Make sure you speak in an area where you can be observed and interrupted by others.
- Praise team members who stand up to unacceptable behavior and report it to you.
- Follow your organization's policies and report the situation. See details about the SafeSport Code reporting steps below.
- Use the scenarios handout at the end of this Handbook to reinforce expectations for appropriate behavior.
- Check in regularly to ensure the behavior has stopped.
- If you need additional support, seek help from a professional. If you work at a school, talk to a school counselor or social worker. If not, contact an organization that focuses on bullying and violence prevention.

How to Report Bullying Behavior

Report to your organization or the U.S. Center for SafeSport if:

- You learn of an incident of Bullying Behavior prohibited in the SafeSport Code
- You suspect Bullying Behavior prohibited in the SafeSport Code

Your organization could be the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC), a **National Governing Body (NGB)**, or a Local Affiliated Organization (LAO).

Report to the U.S. Center for SafeSport if:

- The incident was sexual in nature
- The incident was related to someone's actual or perceived sex or sexual orientation

Report to the U.S. Center for SafeSport and law enforcement if:

- The incident involves Child Abuse of Minor Athletes under the age of 18—even if the abuse happened in the past, you knew about it before joining the Movement, or the victim-survivor is now an adult.

You must also follow any reporting requirements under state law.

Report online: uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern/
Call to report: 833-5US-SAFE (833-587-7233)

Note: The SafeSport Code does not require anyone who has experienced Child Abuse or other misconduct to self-report.

Remember that incidents which are sexual in nature are a type of Sexual Misconduct in the SafeSport Code, which is separate from Bullying Behavior.

The Steps for Reporting Abuse and Misconduct handout outlines these reporting requirements and guidelines. Keep it on hand for easy reference when you learn about or suspect Bullying Behavior. Be aware of any other reporting requirements in your state that may apply to bullying incidents. If you are not part of the Movement, report according to your organization's policies and procedures related to bullying.



Dealing with Retaliation

Athletes (and their parents and guardians) are often afraid to report bullying because they fear Retaliation from a coach, organization leaders, or peers. Coaches may also fear Retaliation for reporting bullying, especially if it involves someone with power over them.

Defining Retaliation in the SafeSport Code

Retaliation is taking (or threatening to take) any adverse action related to an allegation, a report, or an investigation into misconduct. It can happen before, during, or after someone participates in the Center's process. It can involve other relevant organizations under the Center's jurisdiction.

The SafeSport Code prohibits Retaliation. It is a form of misconduct.

Retaliation can come in different forms, including:

- Threatening, intimidating, or harassing the victim, witness, or those that support them
- Coercing someone to drop a complaint or refuse to cooperate with an investigation

EXAMPLES OF RETALIATION

An Athlete on a youth team has been the target of Bullying Behaviors by his teammates. He reports them to his organization. His teammates send messages on social media threatening to physically hurt him for reporting.

The father of an Athlete on a youth team thinks his daughter is being targeted for her sexual orientation. He reports to the U.S. Center for SafeSport because this could be a type of Sexual Misconduct. The coach is angry and benches the girl, even though she had started every game before her father made the report.

Reporting Retaliation

- If you learn about or suspect Retaliation, report directly to the U.S. Center for SafeSport.
- Other organizations outside of the Movement may also have policies that prohibit Retaliation. If you are not part of the Movement, report directly to your organization.

Supporting Athletes' Mental Health

Everyone deals with bullying differently. Everyone heals on their own timeline as well.

Positive relationships with coaches like you can improve athlete mental health and decrease thoughts of suicide among youth.²³ Here are some ways you can support athletes in crisis:

- ▶ Talk to them about how they are feeling and ask how you can help.
- ▶ Refer them to 24/7 support services, including:
 - » 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988lifeline.org or 988
 - » National Sexual Assault Hotline: rainn.org or 800-656-4673
 - » National Domestic Violence Hotline: thehotline.org or 800-799-7233
- ▶ Let their parents or guardians know when you are worried about their mental health. Encourage them to seek the advice of a mental health professional to make sure they are getting the help they need.

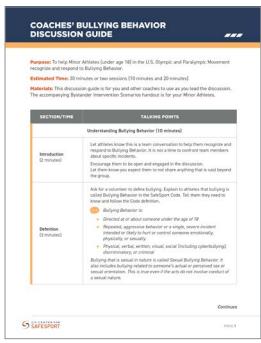


KEY POINTS

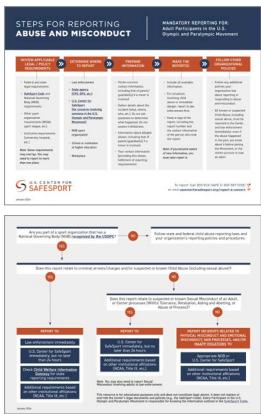
- ▶ Caring, engaged, and responsible coaches can reduce the negative impacts of bullying on athletes.
- ▶ You can respond more effectively to bullying if you have a plan based on your organization's policies. It should include how you would address affected individuals and the team.
- ▶ If you are a coach with the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement, you must report Bullying Behavior to your organization. All Adult Participants must follow the SafeSport Code's reporting requirements related to bullying of a sexual nature and Child Abuse, including sexual abuse.
- ▶ If you are not part of the Movement, ask your organization what reporting requirements apply to you.



► Bullying 101



► Coaches' Bullying Behavior Discussion Guide & Bystander Intervention Scenarios for Athletes



► Steps for Reporting Abuse and Misconduct

ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES



From the U.S. Center for SafeSport

- ▶ **Emotional & Physical Abuse & Misconduct Toolkit**: Tools to help coaches address emotional and physical abuse and misconduct in sport.
- ▶ **SafeSportTrained.org**: Abuse awareness and prevention courses for coaches, parents, athletes, health professionals, and volunteers. In addition to the SafeSport® Trained Core, we recommend the Understanding Mandatory Reporting course for information about your legal requirements for reporting child abuse and neglect. Check with your NGB to confirm how you should access SafeSport training.
- ▶ **SafeSport Code**: Outlines forms of prohibited conduct and abuse, including Bullying Behavior.

For More Information

- ▶ **Play Like a Champion Today**: Resources to help coaches learn how to be more trauma sensitive.
- ▶ **Positive Coaching Alliance**: National organization providing training and resources to ensure every child has access to a positive youth sports experience.
- ▶ **Project Play**: Resources for coaches to help their youth athletes develop social and emotional skills.
- ▶ **Up2Us Sports and Edgework Consulting**: Playbook to help coaches implement trauma-sensitive practices to help youth heal from trauma.

For Help and Support

- ▶ **RAINN**: Get crisis intervention, referrals, and emotional support at rainn.org or call 800-656-4673.
- ▶ **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**: Get 24/7 free and confidential support at 988lifeline.org or call 988.

REFERENCES



1. Bergholz, L., Stafford, E. & D'Andrea, W. (2016). Creating Trauma-informed Sports Programming for Traumatized Youth: Core Principles for an Adjunctive Therapeutic Approach. *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychotherapy*, 15 (3), 244-253.
2. National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). **Student Bullying. Condition of Education**. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.
3. Patchin, J. W. (2025). **Summary of Our Cyberbullying Research (2007-2025)**. Cyberbullying Research Center.
4. PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. (n.d.). **Why do we use "target" vs. "victim" and "child who bullies" vs. "bully"**.
5. PACER'S National Bullying Prevention Center. (n.d.). **How is Bullying Defined?**.
6. Peterson, J. L., Puhl, R. M., & Luedicke, J. (2012). An experimental investigation of physical education teachers' and coaches' reactions to weight-based victimization in youth. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 13, 177-185.
7. Copeland, W. E., Bulik, C. M., Zucker, N., Wolke, D., Lereva, S. T., & Costello, E. J. (2015). **Does childhood bullying predict eating disorder symptoms? A prospective, longitudinal analysis**. *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 48 (8), 1141-1149.
8. Swearer, S., Wang, C., Maag, J., Siebecker, A., Frerichs, L. (2012). **Understanding the Bullying Dynamic Among Students in Special and General Education**. *Journal of School Psychology*, 50 (4). 503-540.
9. Tuakli-Wosornu, Y. A., Sun, Q., Gentry, M., & Kirby, S. (2020). Non-accidental harms ("abuse") in athletes with impairment ("para athletes"): A state-of-the-art review. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 54, 129-138.
10. Gage, N. A., Katsivannis, A., Rose, C. et al. (2021). **Disproportionate Bullying Victimization and Perpetration by Disability Status, Race, and Gender: A National Analysis**. *Advances in Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, 5, 256-268.
11. Lai, T., & Kao, G. (2018). Hit, Robbed, and Put Down (but not Bullied): Underreporting of Bullying by Minority and Male Students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47, 619-635.
12. Denison, E., Bevan, N. & Jeanes, R. (2021) **Reviewing evidence of LGBTQ+ discrimination and exclusion in sport**. *Sport Management Review*, 24 (3), 389-409.
13. Kaiser Permanente. (2024). **Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**.
14. Rossouw, P. J. (2013). The effects of bullying on the developing brain. Strategies for effective interventions. PJ Rossouw (Ed.), 2, 102-112.
15. Shannon-McCallum, C. S. (2013). **Bullying in Recreation and Sport Settings: Exploring Risk Factors, Prevention Efforts, and Intervention Strategies**. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 31, 15-33.
16. PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. (2018). **How does bullying impact a student's health?**
17. Bergholz, L., Stafford, E., & D'Andrea, W. (2016). **Creating Trauma-Informed Sports Programming for Traumatized Youth: Core Principles for an Adjunctive Therapeutic Approach**. *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 15, 244-253.



18. Hansen, M. A., Turner, B., & Davis, A. (2021). Trauma-Sensitive and Responsive Coaching. *Strategies and Methods for Implementing Trauma-Informed Pedagogy*, 144.
19. Thornberg, R., Tenenbaum, L., Varjas, K., Meyers, J., Jungert, T., & Vanegas, G. (2012). **Bystander motivation in bullying incidents: to intervene or not to intervene?** *The Western Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 13 (13), 247-252.
20. Polanin, J. R., Espelage, D., Pigott, T. D. (2012). A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Bullying Prevention Programs' Effects on Bystander Intervention Behavior. *School Psychology Review*, 41, 47-65.
21. Right to Be. (2024). **The 5 Ds of Bystander Intervention**.
22. David-Ferdon, C., Vivolo-Kantor, A. M., Dahlberg, L. L., Marshall, K. J., Rainford, N., & Hall, J. E. (2016). A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
23. Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2020). **A Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention**.

*This handbook is adapted from the 2017 "Preventing Bullying: What Great Coaches Need to Know" resource co-published with the Center and **Prevent Child Abuse America**—the nation's oldest and largest organization committed to preventing child abuse and neglect before it happens.*

