

## **The Gaelic Games Council of Britain**

### **Signs of Child Abuse**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Abuse can happen on any occasion or in any place where children and young people are present. Child abuse is any form of physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that leads to injury or harm. It commonly occurs within a relationship of trust or responsibility and represents an abuse of power or a breach of trust. Abuse can happen to a child regardless of their age, gender, race or ability.
- 1.2 Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. Children can be abused by adults either male or female, or other children.
- 1.3 Any allegations or suspicions of abuse, poor practice or bullying need to be responded to and reported in line with the club/organisations reporting procedures.
- 1.4 There are four main types of abuse: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. Children and young people can also be harmed through poor practice and bullying within a sport setting. Here we look in detail at the types of abuse and some signs to look out for if you are concerned about abuse within a sports setting.

#### **2. Neglect**

- 2.1 This is when adults consistently or repeatedly fail to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs which could result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development e.g. failure to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing; failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger; or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include refusal to give love, affection and attention.
- 2.2 Neglect in sport could include a coach or supervisor repeatedly failing to ensure children are safe, exposing them to undue cold, heat or extreme weather conditions without ensuring adequate clothing or hydration; exposing them to unnecessary risk of injury e.g. by ignoring safe practice guidelines, failing to ensure the use of safety equipment, or by requiring young people to participate when injured or unwell.

#### **3. Physical abuse**

- 3.1 When someone physically hurts or injures children by hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, biting, scalding, suffocating, drowning or otherwise causing harm. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes, ill health to a child whom they are looking after e.g. Munchausen's Syndrome by proxy.
- 3.2 Physical abuse in sport may be when the nature and intensity of training or competition exceeds the capacity of the child's immature and growing body; where coaches encourage the use of drugs or harmful substances to enhance performance or delay puberty; if athletes are required to participate when injured; or when sanctions used by coaches imposed involve inflicting pain. when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes, ill health to a child whom they are looking after e.g. Munchausen's Syndrome by proxy.
- 3.3 Physical abuse in sport may be when the nature and intensity of training or competition exceeds the capacity of the child's immature and growing body; where coaches encourage the use of drugs or harmful substances to enhance performance or delay puberty; if athletes are required to participate when injured; or when sanctions used by coaches imposed involve inflicting pain.

#### **4. Sexual abuse**

- 4.1 This is where children and young people are abused by adults (both male and female) or other children who use them to meet their own sexual needs. This could include full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, anal intercourse, kissing and sexual fondling. Showing children pornographic material (books, videos, pictures) or taking pornographic images of them are also forms of sexual abuse.
- 4.2 Sexual abusers groom children, protective adults and clubs/organisations in order to create opportunities to abuse and reduce the likelihood of being reported.
- 4.3 In sport, coaching techniques which involve physical contact with children can create situations where sexual abuse can be disguised and may therefore go unnoticed. The power and authority of, or dependence on, the coach if misused, may also lead to abusive situations developing. Contacts made within sport and pursued e.g. through texts, Facebook or Twitter have been used to groom children for abuse.

#### **5. Emotional abuse**

- 5.1 Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child so as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.
- 5.2 It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children or even the over protection of a child. It may involve causing children to feel frightened or in danger by being constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted which may make the child very nervous and withdrawn.
- 5.3 Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child.
- 5.4 Emotional abuse in sport may occur if children are subjected to constant criticism, name-calling, sarcasm, bullying, racism or pressure to perform to unrealistically high expectations; or when their value or worth is dependent on sporting success or achievement.

#### **6. Poor practice**

- 6.1 Poor practice is behaviour of an individual in a position of responsibility which falls below the organisations' required standard (typically as described in the club/organisations' Code of Conduct). Poor practice may not be immediately dangerous or intentionally harmful to a child, but is likely to set a poor example.
- 6.2 Poor practice is potentially damaging to the individual, the organisation and to children who experience it. For example, coaching with alcohol on the breath, smoking, swearing in front of children, or not paying due care and attention to participants all constitute poor practice.
- 6.3 Poor practice can sometimes lead to, or create, an environment conducive to more serious abuse. It may also lead to suspicions about the individuals' motivation, even where no harm is intended. For example, if a coach is giving one child too much attention, regularly transports children in their car, or encourages physical contact with children without obvious justification.

#### **7. Bullying**

- 7.1 Bullying by peers can occur whenever children and young people come together, including within sport situations. Bullying can take many forms, and is harmful to the victim. It may be physical e.g. hitting; online or cyber e.g. abusive messages, comments or images on social media; involve damage or theft of property; based on someone's gender, ethnicity, sexuality or disability; or about their sporting ability.

