



1.1 Info sheet: Definitions of abuse and harm. Recognising signs and symptoms

Most children benefit greatly from their involvement in games. Nevertheless, in football, as in any other sport, children may be abused or harmed, irrespective of their age, gender, race, culture, religion, ability or sexual orientation.

Although football child abuse scandals reported in the press have focused on sexual abuse, it is important to understand that this is not the only form of abuse that children may experience.

This information sheet sets out the different types of abuse and gives examples of how they might be recognised in a football setting. It also outlines some signs that may indicate a child is experiencing abuse.

REMEMBER: Each country has its own laws relating to child abuse, including definitions of abuse. The types included in this sheet are commonly recognised internationally and are included for general guidance.

For tournaments and matches taking place abroad, it is important to check local laws on child abuse, as any safeguarding actions must be legal in the country where they are taken.

Categories/types of abuse

There are four main categories of child abuse.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is often the most easily recognised form. Physical abuse can be, but is not limited to, any kind of hitting, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, beating or other action that causes physical injury, leaves marks or causes pain.

Examples in football:

- Slapping a child because they are provocative, not listening or disturbing the training
- Forcing a child with an injury to play
- Encouraging children to deliberately play aggressively, without regard to the risk of injury to themselves or others

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is any type of sexual contact between an adult and anyone younger than 18 years old; between a significantly older child and a younger child; or if one person overpowers another, regardless of age. It is also abusive to take indecent photos of children, involve children in watching sexual images or activities, or encourage children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Making unwanted comments, particularly those that are sexual in nature, is also a form of sexual abuse, often called sexual harassment. Even if someone under 18 years old consents to a sexual relationship, this is still considered sexual abuse.

Examples in football:

- Taking photos of children naked while they are showering
- Starting a sexual relationship with a player
- Commenting on how 'well developed' a girl football player is physically
- Requiring abnormal physical contact claiming it is for the well-being of the player



Emotional, psychological or verbal abuse

Emotional abuse happens when a significant adult in a child's life constantly criticises, threatens or dismisses them until their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth are damaged. Always joking about someone can also be abusive.

It is not that children should not be criticised, or that jokes should not be made. Criticism is important for children to learn and improve. Similarly, jokes and laughter help form bonds between people and can create a sense of team spirit. However, the difference is that emotional abuse goes too far. Criticism stops being motivational, and jokes are not funny. Emotional abuse can hurt and cause damage, just as physical abuse does.

Examples in football:

- Shouting at a child and constantly calling them a 'loser' for not performing well during a match or for missing a penalty
- Constantly laughing at a child, and encouraging other players to laugh, if a child is unfit
- Showing favouritism in the team so that some children feel excluded

Neglect

Neglect occurs when an adult does not provide enough emotional support or deliberately and consistently pays very little or no attention to a child. Neglect also occurs when a child is not given adequate food, housing, clothes, medical care or supervision.

There are other forms of abuse, such as discrimination, exploitation and violence, but these fall under the four main categories of abuse.

Examples in football:

- Not being aware of where children are during football summer camps or away trips
- Not providing water, or allowing children to break for water, in hot weather during training
- Using transport that is not safe and roadworthy to take children to matches

Bullying

Although abuse is typically thought of as being something that an adult does to a child, peers can also perpetrate abuse. Child-to-child abuse is often called 'bullying'.

Bullying can take many forms. It can include physical acts such as hitting; online activity, such as abusive messages, comments or images posted on social media; damage or theft of property; and name calling. Bullying may be based on someone's gender, ethnicity, sexuality or disability; or their sporting ability.

Adults sometimes try to minimise bullying, thinking it is less serious because it occurs between children. However, bullying can and does cause harm. It also tends to get progressively worse. For this reason, it is important to create an atmosphere where everyone knows that bullying is not tolerated, and to stop it as soon as it starts.

Recognising signs and symptoms of abuse

Recognising abuse is not always easy. Occasionally, the abuse is witnessed or disclosed, i.e. the child or another child/adult reports it. More often, there are 'clues' – signs that something may be wrong. This does not necessarily mean that something IS wrong, but they are indications and should be followed up.



Typical signs include the following:

When children:	When adults, such as club staff and parents:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· have unexplained physical injuries, including bruises and wounds, such as cigarette burns, or signs of self-harm, such as scars from cutting, or pain when walking;· have unexplained/constant illnesses, e.g. stomach upsets, difficulty eating;· suddenly change behaviour or mood, such as becoming aggressive, withdrawn or shyer;· avoid certain situations or people;· become very secretive, e.g. stop sharing what is happening in their lives or suddenly stop talking when adults walk in;· constantly put themselves down, e.g. say that they are worthless, or useless;· seem to be isolated/do not mix with others in the team;· attempt suicide;· say they or their teammates are being abused or harmed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· seem to single out one or more children for 'special treatment', either as favourites or for punishment;· seem to care more about the result, than if the child is happy and having fun;· are negative and critical about a child;· use language that is not appropriate, e.g. discuss girls' physical appearance in a sexual way;· do not respect children's privacy, e.g. in changing rooms;· are not concerned about the children, what they are doing or where they are;· do not abide by guidelines and codes of conduct;· say they have seen a child being abused or harmed or are concerned about a situation.