# Triathlon Ireland Anti Bullying Policy

The purpose of this document is to ensure best safeguarding practice and procedures exist to protect vulnerable members as well as facilitate and enhance the operations of Triathlon Ireland (hereafter referred to as TI) and its clubs. The procedures following are produced to ensure all TI staff, relevant volunteers and stakeholders have a clear understanding of the policy and how it applies to their role. This document will be reviewed on a regular basis.

These procedures were submitted and approved by the TI Board. All previous procedures are superseded by this version with effect from *November 2026.*
Any issues arising from the transition between previous procedures and these shall be determined by the CEO, in consultation, where such issues are material, with the President.
This document may be amended from time to time by the Safeguarding Committee. The definitive text of this document in force is the version contained on the TI internal server under *Safeguarding Policies*. Any printed text or electronic copy held elsewhere is only a snapshot of the text at the time it is printed, copied or downloaded.

**Triathlon Ireland has a zero tolerance approach to bullying in our clubs.**

This Anti-Bullying Policy applies to all TI members – young people, parents, coaches, volunteers and any others who help and assist with club activities. It is the responsibility of everyone in the club to put this Anti-Bullying Policy in place to help the club to be a safe, enjoyable place for young people

# What is bullying?

'Bullying is defined as unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time' (Department of Education & Skills 'Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools', 2013). It is the repeated use of power, by one or more persons, intentionally to harm, hurt or adversely affect the rights or needs of another or others.

Identifying bullying behaviour is about being observant to the behaviours of others. Being observant helps in separating bullying behaviour with banter. Banter involves a two-way communication, as between friends or peer individuals, where there is a balance of power between those involved. Banter can become bullying if the behaviour is directed one way with the influence and power being one sided.

# Types of Bullying

The list below is not exhaustive  but gives an outline of some types of Bullying.

- Verbal Bullying: *Teasing, jeering, name calling, slagging, mimicking*. Verbal bullying leave children feeling angry, frightened and powerless. If children are unable to share their feelings with someone else, verbal bullying can leave them emotionally bruised and physically exhausted. Their powers of concentration can suffer, adversely affecting their capacity for learning. Verbal attacks can be of highly personal and sexual nature. They can be directed at the child's family, culture, race or religion. Malicious rumours are particularly insidious forms of verbal bullying.
- Physical Bullying: *Something that is physically done to an individual, or their belongings.* Fighting, hitting, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing. It's often written off as 'horseplay,' 'pretend' or 'just a game' when challenged. While children can and do play roughly, in the case of bullying be aware that these 'games' can be a precursor to vicious physical assaults. Both boys and girls indulge in physical bullying, boys sometimes more so because it's socially acceptable for them to be more physically aggressive, and their games and sports can allow for greater physical contact. There's a misconception that physical bullying has to hurt, it doesn't. It can be the "accidental" bumping into someone, crowding them, invading their personal space. It is something that someone physically does to another.
- Gesture Bullying: *Threatening signs, dirty looks.* There are many different forms of non-verbal threatening gestures that can convey intimidating and frightening messages, for example gesturing a gun to a head or gesturing slitting a throat, or giving a "stare". It's very important to recognise the power of gesture bullying, often adults can be dismissive of a child who reports that another child "is looking at me" but it's a very easy way to maintain a constant level of threat against another child, and it's so subtle it can be happening right under a coach's nose.
- Exclusion Bullying: *Leaving someone out, ignoring them on purpose.* This is particularly hurtful because it isolates the child from his/her peer group and is very hard for the child to combat as it directly attacks their self-confidence and self-image.
- Extortion Bullying: *Getting someone to do something they don't want to do. Threatening, forcing, blackmailing.* Younger children are particularly vulnerable to extortion bullying. Demands for money, possessions or equipment, lunch vouchers or food may be made, often accompanied by threats. Children may also be dared or forced to steal leaving them at the mercy of the bully and open to further intimidation.
- Name calling: *Persistent name-calling directed at the same individual(s) which hurts, insults or humiliates should be regarded as a form of bullying behaviour*. Often name

calling of this type refers to physical appearance, e.g., size or clothing. Accent or distinctive voice characteristics may attract negative attention. Ability can also provoke name calling. This tends to operate at two extremes. There are those who are singled out for attention because they are perceived to be weak and at the other extreme there are those who, because they are perceived as high achievers, are also targeted.

- Damage to property: *Personal property can be the focus of attention for bullying behaviour.* This may result in damage to clothing, mobile phone or other devices. Items of personal property may be defaced, broken, stolen or hidden.
- Cyberbullying: *Bullying which utilises web pages, online gaming, emails and messaging to abuse. Through these they can* intimidate and attack others, either directly or indirectly (for example spreading rumours, or exclusion).
- Prejudice based bullying *such as homophobic or racist.* The behaviours can be any of the above but the motivation differs.

# Why should bullying be challenged?

It is vitally important that a child who is being bullied understands what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour. Helping them to see that what someone is doing to them is not "a joke" or to be tolerated, that it is in fact bullying is vital to their self-esteem.

Individuals who are being bullied are being treated unfairly and should be treated with respect. Bullies generally do not pick on an individual for a specific reason; usually they choose a target who they believe will not stand up for themselves. A lot of people who bully tend to do so as an attempt to hide their own unhappiness and a lot of times people who bully are likely to feel:

- Rejected by someone else
- Jealous of others talent
- Different or inadequate
- Overcome by stress or pressure

There is also the potential that their behaviour indicates a more serious problem such as they:

- Are being bullied themselves
- Have a lack of positive role models within their life
- Are exposed to individuals who see violence positively
- Are excessively punished at home.

# Signs and Symptoms of Bullying

It is likely that children will indicate signs that they are being bullied and so it is important to be aware of these and investigate if a child or young person:

- No longer wants to attend training sessions or club events and makes excuses
- Is afraid of walking to or from training sessions
- Becomes withdrawn or demonstrates a lack of confidence
- Demonstrates a dip in training or race performance
- Attempts suicide or runs away
- Repeatedly asks for money, or starts to steal money
- Has unexplained injuries
- Starts to become aggressive, disruptive or argumentative
- Has taken to bullying other children
- Doesn't want to talk about why their behaviour has changed
- Appears nervous when using the internet or their mobile phone

While the above are potential indicators of bullying it is also possible that they could indicate another issue. However, it is important to consider bullying as a reason.

# Impact of Bullying Behaviour

Children who are being bullied may develop feelings of insecurity, humiliation and extreme anxiety and thus may become more vulnerable. Self-confidence may be damaged with a consequent lowering of self-esteem. While they may not talk about what is happening to them, their suffering is indicated through changes in mood and behaviour. Extreme cases of bullying may result in suicide. It is, therefore, essential to be alert to changes in behaviour as early intervention can be very effective. Children who witness bullying may also be affected and may suffer in similar ways to those who are bullied. For example, children who witness identity-based bullying and share that identity can experience anxiety and feel under threat themselves. Children can also feel guilt or distress at not being able to help the person being bullied.

There are also consequences for individuals who engage in bullying behaviour who can be at higher risk of depression. Other possible long-term consequences may include an increased risk of developing an anti-social personality, anxiety disorders, a likelihood of substance abuse and law-breaking behaviour in adulthood and decreased educational and occupational attainment.

# Responding to Bullying in your club

Helping children and young people to examine their behaviour, and how IT is hurting someone else is the first step in tackling bullying. All allegations of bullying relating to athletes under 18 years of age should be reported to the Club Children's Officer and all reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with. In that way juniors will gain confidence in 'telling'. This confidence factor is of vital importance. It should be made clear to all juniors that when they report incidents of bullying they are not considered to be telling tales but are behaving responsibly. The primary aim in investigating and dealing with bullying is to resolve any issues and to restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved.

How the club responds will depend on a number of factors.

For example if the bullying is witnessed or if it is reported later. If the bullying is child to child or adult to child or if the bullying is perpetrated by one person or a group and a culture of bullying behaviour needs to be tackled. Below are some examples of how your club my deal with these situations.

### Isolated Incidents

Isolated or once-off incidents of intentional negative behaviour including a once-off offensive or hurtful text message or other private messaging do not fall within the definition of bullying as outlined in this policy but should be dealt with. A single incident can have a serious effect on a child and may also constitute harassment which is legally prohibited under equality legislation. Harassment is any form of unwanted conduct related to any of the nine discriminatory grounds (gender including transgender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community). (Department of Education & Skills 'Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools', 2013).

### Bullying involving juniors (under 18) witnessed by a coach/leader

If bullying behaviour is witnessed by a Coach/Leader or reported during a session then the coach should seek to resolve it immediately. It may be that it is an isolated incident and could be prevented from progressing into bullying behaviour. By nipping it in the bud it may be possible to prevent it progressing and preserve the relationships of the juniors involved. The situation should be monitored and the Coach/Leader/CCO should check in with the junior who was targeted.

The coach should talk to those involved and highlight the codes of conduct and the anti bullying policy of the club describing what is and isn't acceptable. If necessary immediate

sanctions can be imposed. This can depend on the age group. The aim is to maintain relationships. The Club Children Officer and parents/carers of all the juniors involved should be informed as soon as possible and records made of the incident and subsequent actions.

### Bullying reported involving a junior being bullied by another juniors/s after the incident

There are different ways in which a club can approach resolving an issue between juniors. One of these is the 'No Blame Approach'. The aim of this approach is to maintain relationships after the incidents have occurred and encourage those involved to empathise with the person being bullied and take ownership for resolving the situation. Blame is not apportioned but those involved are encouraged to acknowledge that their behaviour was wrong and give them an opportunity to change their behaviour without ostracising anyone. Action should be taken as soon as possible.

There are 6 steps to the **'No Blame Approach'**

1. Interview the junior who has been bullied. Ask them about how they are feeling in general. Depending on the age of the junior they may or may not want a parent/carer present. Parent/carer should be aware of the interview taking place and the usual safeguarding requirements should be observed so that an adult is never alone with a junior.
2. Convene a meeting with all those involved, the accused bully/bullies, the victim and any bystanders.
3. Explain the situation and how the junior being bullied is feeling.
4. Give responsibility to the group. Ask each member of the group for ideas to make the junior who has been bullied feel happier.
5. Leave it up to the group to act on, give them responsibility to reach a resolution.
6. Meet the group again about a week later to check in with how things are going.

The coach should monitor behaviour going forward.

If the bullying is of a more serious nature or the 'no blame approach' is not successful then intervention may be required and a more formal disciplinary process instigated.

### Bullying involving an adult bullying a junior

If the bullying is perpetrated by an adult in the club then the Coach/Leader/CCO should speak privately to the adult outlining what they have witnessed or has been reported. The adult should be reminded that this is a breach of the Code of Conduct. If the adult refuses to change their behaviour then immediate sanctions can be imposed to protect junior athletes and a report made to TI where the case management group would review the complaint.

The CCO should speak to the junior involved and their parents/carers to assure them the situation has been acknowledged and is being dealt with.

# Managing Challenging behaviour

It is likely that at times coaches and other club officers will be required to intervene when a child is demonstrating challenging behaviour rather than bullying behaviour. The following guidance aims to outline good practice and provide strategies and sanctions which could be employed as well as those that should be avoided. The guidance is centred around:

- Maintaining the welfare of the child at all times
- Providing clear guidelines to coaches and club officers regarding appropriate conduct and the process for responding to unacceptable behaviour
- Ensuring that children are not subjected to harmful, abusive or humiliating behaviour
- Recognising that children may demonstrate challenging behaviour as a result of a specific circumstance, such as a medical condition or being the victim of abuse
- Recognising that triathlon, and sport in general, can significantly improve the wellbeing of children

Where possible the club should support the inclusion of all children in taking part in triathlon and only in exceptional circumstances should a child be barred from taking part in club activities.

Agreeing acceptable and unacceptable behaviours

Acceptable and unacceptable behaviour should be agreed with the input of coaches, club officers, junior members and their parents/carers and what actions or sanctions may be implemented as a result of unacceptable behaviour. This gives ownership to all parties. The developed code of conduct should be included in the welcome pack for the club with all new members required to agree to it when they first join the club.

In any situation the response should correspond to the behaviour demonstrated and be outlined to the athlete and their parent/carer as soon as possible. Suggestions for responses include:

- Encouraging the child to make amends for their actions
- Reinforcing positive behaviour
- Increasing the level of supervision for the activity
- Discuss the unacceptable behaviour with the child and their parent/carer and develop an agreement for it not to occur moving forwards
- Impose sanctions, such as missing a club social gathering
- Temporary exclusion, or permanent exclusion in extreme cases or if the child is a high danger risk to themselves or others . This is a last resort.

Never employ the following responses:

- Threatening physical punishment.
- Refusing to communicate with the child
- Intimidation or humiliation
- Physical Intervention: Always try to avoid physical intervention unless it is vital to preventing a child from injuring themselves or others. Physical intervention should result from conscious decision making and should not be a reaction to the behaviour and the club officer/coach should always ask themselves if it is the only option before intervening.

  If physical intervention is deemed appropriate, then the following points should be considered:
    - The intervention should be completed in a way which is the least restrictive and does not hurt the child/young person
    - Will the intervention achieve an outcome in the best interest of the child/young person?
    - Is the intervention in proportion to the demonstrated behaviour?
    - Using the smallest amount of force to implement the intervention and for the shortest duration possible
    - Ensuring that during the intervention the child/young person is not touched inappropriately
    - That it is not being used as a punishment
    - That pain is not being inflicted

Following the implementation of any physical interventions they should be recorded and passed over to the Club Children's Officer as soon as possible. There should be a follow up including how the physical and emotional wellbeing of those involved in the incident will be checked and monitored.

Support to the parents/carers:

- Parents/carers should be advised on the organisation/ club's bullying policy and practice.
- Any incident of bullying will be discussed with the child's parent(s)/carers.
- Parents will be consulted on action to be taken (for both victim and bully) and agreements made as to what action should be taken.
- Information and advice on coping with bullying will be made available.
- Support should be offered to the parent(s) including information on other agencies or support lines.

Resources:

- Childline- Anti bullying page
- Child Protection in Sport Unit
- Webwise.ie
- Sticksandstones.ie

Sources:

This policy has been adapted from the following sources

- Swim Ireland Anti Bullying Policy
- British Triathlon Federation Anti Bullying Policy
- Sticksandstones.ie