



RECOGNISING ABUSE IN RUGBY LEAGUE

It is not the responsibility of those working or volunteering in Rugby League to decide that abuse is happening but it is the responsibility of everybody involved in Rugby League to report any concerns they may have either to the RFL Safeguarding team or to Children's Social Care (formerly known as Social Services).

Everybody involved in Rugby League needs to understand the different categories of abuse and to be able to recognise the signs.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

What is it?

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.

What are the signs of physical abuse?

- Unexplained bruising, marks or injuries on any part of the body
- Bruises which reflect hand marks or fingertips
- Cigarette burns, bite marks, broken bones or scalds
- Fear of parents being approached for an explanation
- Aggressive behaviour or severe temper outbursts
- Flinching when approached or touched
- Reluctance to get changed eg wearing long sleeves in summer – suddenly not wanting to shower when they usually take a shower
- Depressed or withdrawn behaviour
- Running away from home
- Thinking that the application of violence is acceptable
- Thinking that violence is an acceptable response

Examples of Physical Abuse in Rugby League

- Use of drugs to enhance performance
- Intensity of training or competition exceeding the child's physical development
- A coach, volunteer or spectator hits a child
- Use of exercise as a form of punishment
- Forcing a child to train/play too soon after injury

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

What is emotional abuse?

The persistent emotional ill treatment of a young person such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the young person's emotional development. It may involve conveying to young people 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 young people, .i.e too much pressure regarding winning matches, this can be particularly true for very talented players. It may involve causing young people to feel frightened or in danger by being constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted which may make the young person very nervous and withdrawn. 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.

What are the signs of emotional abuse?

- A failure to thrive
- Sudden speech disorders
- Neurotic behaviour
- Excuses made to avoid going to training or to a match
- Being unable to play
- Fear of making mistakes
- Far too critical of own performance
- Low self esteem
- Self harm

Examples of Emotional Abuse in Rugby League

- Constant criticism
- Name calling and sarcasm
- Bullying or unrealistic pressure to perform to high expectations consistently.

SEXUAL ABUSE

What is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse is when girls and/or boys are abused by adults (either male or female) who use children or young people to meet their own sexual needs. Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve contact including penetrative acts (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non- penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Talking to children or young people in a sexually explicit manner is also a form of sexual abuse.

What are the signs of sexual abuse?

- Pain, itching, bruising or bleeding in the genital/anal areas
- Sexually transmitted diseases, vaginal discharge or infection
- Discomfort when walking or sitting down
- Sudden or unexplained changes in behaviour
- Fear of being left with a specific person or group of people
- Having nightmares
- Running away from home
- Sexual knowledge which is beyond their age
- Sexual language or drawings
- Bed wetting
- Self harm or mutilation
- Saying they have secrets they can't tell anybody
- Suddenly having unexplained sources of money
- Not allowed to have friends
- Acting in a sexually explicit way towards adults or peers

Examples of Sexual Abuse in Rugby League

- Coaching techniques, which involve physical contact with young people, could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may be unnoticed
- The power of the coach (or other volunteer) over young performers, if misused, may also lead to abusive situations developing.
- The position of a coach (or other volunteer) to young performers can mean that the coach (or other volunteer) may be the only person to whom the child can disclose incidents of sexual abuse.
- Sexual abusers can use rugby league to groom children. Most abusers plan their abuse of children by seeking work or volunteering opportunities which puts them in contact with children, making friends with a child, making friends with a child's parents/carers, appearing trustworthy, providing attention or gifts, giving the child a place in the team, make threats of harm about the consequences of telling etc. An abuser must groom the adult's around the child to gain their trust and allow them access to children.

NEGLECT

What is 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. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal drug abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter including exclusion from home or abandonment, failing to protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger, failure to ensure adequate supervision including the use of inadequate care-takers, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

What are the signs of Neglect?

- Constant hunger, stealing food
- Constantly dirty or smelly
- Loss of weight or constantly underweight

- Inappropriate dress for the conditions
- Regularly attending without a kit/equipment etc.
- Complaining of being tired all the time
- Having few friends
- Mentioning being left alone or unsupervised

Examples of Neglect in Rugby League

- A coach not ensuring children are safe
- Exposing children to undue cold, heat or to unnecessary risk of injury.
- Not having water and/or refreshments available either before, after or during training sessions or matches or ensuring players drink water regularly on hot days in training and matches

BULLYING

What is Bullying?

Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated over a period of time, in circumstances where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. There are a number of types of bullying:

- Physical – hitting, pushing, kicking, theft, any unwanted physical contact or use of violence
- Verbal – racist or homophobic remarks, threats, name calling, spreading rumours, sarcasm, teasing
- Emotional – isolating an individual from their peers, being unfriendly, excluding (emotionally and physically), sending hurtful text messages, tormenting, (e.g. hiding kit or equipment, threatening gestures)
- Cyber – emails, chat rooms, message boards, social networking sites, instant messaging services, SMS text messaging, phone calls. Also includes misuse of cameras or camera phones
- Racist - racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
- Sexual - unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments
- Homophobic - because of, or focussing on the issue of sexuality

What are the signs of Bullying?

- A child says he or she is being bullied
- Is unwilling to go to club sessions
- Becomes withdrawn, anxious or lacking in confidence
- Feels ill before training sessions
- Has clothes torn or equipment damaged
- Has possessions which go missing
- Asks for money or steals money
- Has unexplained cuts or bruises
- Gives improbable excuses for any of the above

In extreme circumstances:

- Starts stammering
- Cries themselves to sleep at night or has nightmares
- Becomes aggressive, disruptive or unreasonable
- Is bullying other children
- Attempts or threatens suicide or runs away
- Self-harming

Examples of Bullying in Rugby League

- A parent who pushes their child too hard
- A coach who shouts at or humiliates children or a particular child or who excludes one child
- A child or children who actively seek to make rugby league an unhappy experience for another child or children
- Using social media inappropriately to humiliate another

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