

Hellcats Cheerleaders Anti-Bullying Policy

Aims

At Hellcats Cheerleaders, we aim to provide a safe, caring, and friendly environment for all of our athletes to allow them to train effectively, improve their life chances, and help them maximize their potential.

- We believe that all bullying behavior is completely unacceptable.
- We expect athletes to feel safe in the gym and at competitions.
- We want our athletes to understand issues relating to safety, such as bullying, and know how to seek support from the program should they feel unsafe.
- We aim to maintain a community that is free from bullying.

If bullying does occur, it will be dealt with swiftly, sensitively, and seriously. Evidence will be gathered impartially and acted upon to address both the behavior and the underlying issue at an early stage.

What is Bullying?

We define bullying or "picking on someone" as when a child or a group of children repeatedly say or do nasty and unpleasant things to another athlete.

Bullying includes actions such as being hit, kicked, threatened, intentionally isolated or excluded from social circles, sent nasty notes/messages, or repeatedly teased in an unkind way. These incidents happen frequently, making it difficult for the athlete being bullied to defend themselves.

Note: Bullying is distinct from occasional conflict. It is generally *not* considered bullying when two children of roughly equal strength or standing have the occasional fight, argument, or quarrel.

Recognising Bullying

Children who are bullied may be reluctant to speak up. When a disclosure is made, it must be treated seriously and investigated thoroughly. Coaches and staff must maintain rigorous vigilance and take an active interest in our athletes' social dynamics to spot early signs of distress.

Potential Signs of Bullying:

- Unwillingness or sudden reluctance to come to training.
- Withdrawn, isolated, or unusually sad behavior.
- Complaining about missing personal possessions.
- A sudden refusal to talk about what is wrong or being easily distressed.
- Physical symptoms of extreme stress (e.g., tracking changes in appetite, sleep, or instances of incontinence).
- Unexplained drops in confidence or athletic performance.

Particular vigilance should be maintained if difficulties are associated with a child from a minority racial/cultural background, a child with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), or where there are indications of sexual/gender-based harassment.

Definitions of Different Types of Bullying

- **Physical Bullying:** Occurs when a person uses overt bodily acts to gain power over peers. This includes kicking, punching, hitting, pushing, or any other physical attacks.
 - **Verbal Bullying:** Occurs when someone uses language, relentless insults, and malicious teasing to gain power over their peers (e.g., making fun of an athlete's physical capabilities, mocking their intelligence, or name-calling based on appearance). Verbal bullying often occurs away from adults, making it harder to identify, but it carries lasting psychological impacts.
 - **Relational Bullying:** Also known as Relational Aggression (R.A.), this involves an individual or group trying to hurt a peer's social standing or exclude them from the peer group.
 - **Cyberbullying:** The use of technology (social media, apps, texts, or online platforms) to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person.
 - **SEND-Related Bullying:** Targeting Children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities. Research indicates these children face a significantly higher risk of being bullied by peers.
 - **Sexist / Transgender Bullying:** Hostile or offensive actions that intentionally harm or demean an individual because of their sex, or because they do not conform to perceived traditional gender roles.
 - **Homophobic Bullying:** Any hostile action directed at individuals who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.
 - **Racist Bullying:** Any hostile or offensive action directed against people because of their skin color, cultural or religious background, or ethnic origin.
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Reporting and Responding to Bullying

Hellicats Cheerleaders aims to maintain a clear, well-publicized system to report bullying for the entire community—including athletes, coaching/non-coaching staff, and parents/carers. This applies to both victims and witnesses (bystanders).

- All reported incidents will be formally recorded on a specific Bullying Report Form.
 - All reports will be taken seriously and investigated impartially, involving all relevant parties.
 - We utilise a restorative approach to rebuild well-being and restore harmony and safety between the involved parties.
 - Sanctions imposed (where necessary): Verbal warning, written warning, temporary suspension, or permanent exclusion from the program.
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Actionable Guidelines for the Community

For Children and Young People in the Programme:

1. If someone is doing or saying something you don't like, put up your hand and say firmly: "Stop that! I don't like it when you say or do that."
2. If they continue, tell them clearly: "I am going to report you to an adult if you carry on."
3. If they do not stop, tell a coach or staff member immediately.
4. The adult will listen to you, take notes, and help the person bullying understand what they are doing wrong so you can both work out a way to put things right.

For Parents and Carers:

- Watch for signs that your child is unhappy at training (e.g., reluctance to attend, changes in mood, loss of appetite, or disturbed sleep).
- If your child is being bullied, please notify a member of staff immediately or encourage your child to do so.
- Reassure your child that it is not their fault.
- Access professional anti-bullying resources (such as the websites listed below) for guidance on building your child's assertiveness and self-esteem.

For Bystanders (Athletes Who Witness Bullying):

- Don't ignore it! Always report incidents of bullying that you witness.
 - Support the victim by offering to help them report the behavior or standing by them.
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Program Responsibilities & Procedures

Hellcats Cheerleaders Commitments:

- Encourage co-operative training and team-building across all cheer squads.
- Use positive peer influence to promote bullying as entirely unacceptable.
- Investigate facts quickly, fairly, and impartially, interviewing bullies, victims, and witnesses separately.
- Maintain open, transparent communication and a shared approach with parents/carers.

Procedures Once an Incident Has Been Reported:

1. **Initial Assessment:** The lead coach will speak to the bully and victim separately to get their points of view without immediate accusation (using a "no-blame" framework where appropriate).
 2. **Documentation:** All parties, including witnesses, will produce a written record (an adult may scribe if necessary).
 3. **Restorative Action:** Children will be informed of any behavior expectations or sanctions. Where appropriate, a restorative justice approach will be used: the bully will be asked to reassure the victim that it will not happen again and offer a sincere apology (verbal, written, or visual).
 4. **Staff Awareness:** All staff members interacting with these athletes will be notified so they can monitor behavior closely and ensure the victim's ongoing safety.
 5. **Monitoring & Support:** The victim will be monitored to ensure they feel secure and to protect their self-esteem. The bully will be offered support and guidance to recognize and modify their unsociable behavior.
 6. **Escalation:** If the behavior continues, further meetings, parental interventions, and stricter disciplinary actions will take place, up to and including **exclusion proceedings**. Parental notification is mandatory for all confirmed bullying incidents.
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Recording, Evaluation, and Ongoing Education

All incident forms will be reviewed periodically to identify behavioral trends and inform our preventative workshops. We will regularly discuss these concepts with athletes to ensure they understand:

- What bullying is and why people do it.
 - How to show they are not upset and display assertive body language.
 - The importance of staying with trusted friends and standing up for individuals who are being singled out.
 - Reminding everyone: **We are all individuals and we should be allowed to be proud of our differences.**
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Useful Websites

- Kidscape: www.kidscape.org.uk
 - Anti-Bullying Alliance: www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk
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Appendix: Restorative Approach Script & Questions

Coaches and staff should use the following prompts to guide conflict resolution:

- *"What has happened here? Let's listen to both points of view."*
- *"What is the core problem?"*
- (To all parties): *"How does that make you feel?"*
- *"How do you think [Name] is feeling right now? Why do you think they feel that way?"*
- *"What can we do right now to help [Name] feel better and put things right?"*
- *"What steps can we take to stop this from happening again?"*
- *"Do you understand that if you keep doing/saying unkind things after being asked to stop, that is bullying?"*
- *"Would you want someone treating you this way?"*
- (To the victim): *"If someone does this again, remember to put your palm up firmly and say: 'Don't do that, I don't like it!' Let's practice that right now."*
- (To the perpetrator): *"If someone says 'Don't do that, I don't like it' to you in the future, what is your responsibility?"*