

# Recognising & Responding to Signs of Abuse in Adults at Risk

## Recognising potential signs of abuse

This guidance is designed to help people think about what they may be seeing, hearing or feeling, not to make them experts on abuse. The first point of contact for you to discuss any concerns would usually be the Club Safeguarding Officer.

Reporting your concern will allow others to determine whether or not there is any further concern or action for them to act on. Using the Reporting a Concern Form will help those people make their decisions and the information you give will help them make their assessments.

It is not your responsibility to decide whether what you are witnessing is abuse, simply to alert others to what you are concerned about and allow them to take the necessary steps

There are often signs which may give you cause for concern. This is non-exhaustive and rarely does one form of abuse take place in isolation. The most frequent signs include:-

- Unexplained bruising or injury in an unusual place;
- Inconsistent explanation given for injuries;
- Lack of medical attention for injury/existing condition;
- Sudden behavioural changes eg withdrawal, emotional outbursts, very quiet or very aggressive;
- Inappropriate explicit sexual comments, language or behaviour;
- Difficulty making friends or being prevented from socialising with other people;
- Distrust of people, particularly if there would usually be a closer relationship expected eg with parents/carers, close family/friend or coaches;
- Variations in eating patterns;
- Noticeable loss of or gain in weight;
- Lack of personal hygiene, unkempt appearance, smelly, poor fitting clothes;
- Asking for or stealing food;
- Comments from or about the person which cause you concern;
- Non-attendance at training or a lack of interest in activities the person usually enjoys;
- Lack of confidence, increased anxiety or signs of depression;
- Threats of suicide or sounding helpless and hopeless;
- Bullying of other people, including siblings;
- Reluctance to talk;
- Money or belongings going missing/late or varied payment.

Abuse can happen in any context, and by any perpetrator.

There may be a number of reasons why a person at risk's behaviour changes, and these may not be related to any cause for concern.

## Responding to signs of potential abuse

People at risk may display these signs as a consequence of personal circumstances;

Carers and coaches should develop a dialogue about and with the person at risk, so that they can keep each other informed about any relevant issues of concern. Carers need to let coaches know if there has, for example, been bereavement or separation in the family, so that the coach can take steps to be sensitive to that person's

mood. (it is important that you don't try to find an explanation for the concerns but report them so that the appropriate investigations can be done by the right people).

Adults at Risk who are experiencing abuse, or who have, may make disclosures which are partial; they may say something direct or indirect.

We all need to listen and to take notice of what is said.

We need to be able to inform everyone, people at risk included, as to what to do with their concerns or things that have been said to them.

Often people at risk who are experiencing abuse are labelled as "difficult"; they may have a mental health issue, such as depression or self-harm, because of the abuse. They may be all the less able to speak about what is happening to them because of these reactions. Try not to form judgements, just act on the facts you have seen and heard. People at risk may be seeking attention as a means to get help, to be asked if they are alright, so that they can be helped.

People at risk who have additional vulnerabilities may be suffering abuse which they are less able to articulate or recognise as abusive. *For example*, those with learning disabilities or those suffering from and fearing homophobic abuse, may find it much harder to disclose what is happening or to feel they can trust anyone, and so need to be treated with great sensitivity and awareness.

The following definitions of abuse have been taken from the government's Guidance document "No Secrets": -

#### 1. Neglect

The most common forms of abuse can be categorised as the failure of any person who has responsibility for the charge, care or custody of an adult at risk, to provide the amount and type of care that a reasonable person would be expected to provide. This may include ignoring medical or physical needs, failing to allow access to appropriate health, social care and educational services and withholding the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition, hydration or heating.

Neglect may be intentional or unintentional and may be a wilful failure to provide care, preventing the adult at risk getting access to care or being reckless about the consequences for the person if access to the needed care is denied.

#### 2. Physical Abuse

The use of force which results in pain or injury or a change in a person's natural physical state. It can include hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, shaking, misusing medication, inappropriate or unnecessary physical restraint, exposure to extreme temperatures or withholding food and drink.

#### 3. Sexual Abuse

Unwanted sexual contact or communications, including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment and exposure to sexual imagery.

Consent may be withheld or be absent due to the fact that the adult at risk lacks the capacity to be able to consent.

Any sexual relationship between a service user and a care worker is a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Acts 2003 and should be reported to the police.

#### 4. Financial Abuse

The use of a person's property, assets, income, funds or other resources, without their informed consent and authorisation. It can include theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure to use resources in connection with wills, property, inheritance or other financial transactions, misuse of an enduring or lasting power of attorney.

Emotional/Psychological abuse



This includes emotional abuse, threats, deprivation of contact, humiliation, intimidation, coercion, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal of services.

## 5. Institutional Abuse

The mistreatment, abuse or neglect of an adult at risk by a regime or individuals within which/by whom the person is living or using services. The environment, operations or routines of the institution violate the person's dignity and potentially their Human Rights.

## 7. Bullying and harassment – means deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually over a period of time, which puts the young person down. It can be:

- verbal
- written
- physical
- by gossip and spreading rumours, *and be*
- by phone or social media access ([Social Media Policy](#) and [Anti-bullying Policy](#))

Bullying and harassment usually includes:

- name-calling;
- threats and gestures;
- stealing and/or hiding other people's belongings;
- ostracising the young person;
- ignoring them or having unwelcome and unnecessary physical contact, such as barging and shoving.

**In sport**, bullying and harassment may include:

- someone shouting at a Person at Risk on the court;
- a coach who uses personal criticism to put down the Person at Risk;
- homophobic name-calling
- making the person feel physically awkward and victimised due to making the training too hard for their ability.

**Harassment** usually involves the same sorts of behaviours as bullying. It may be identified as a random act or a sustained campaign of intimidation.

## Barriers to Reporting a Safeguarding Concern

England Netball recognises that there are extra barriers that some people may face when they report abuse. It is important that all those working in netball understand that everyone is different and that some may also be at more risk of abuse than others.

## People with a Disability

People with disabilities have the same rights to protection as any other person. They may be particularly vulnerable and at greater risk of all forms of abuse, and are 3 or 4 times more likely to be abused. The presence of multiple disabilities increases the risk of both abuse and neglect.

Increased vulnerability could be due to the person having learning disabilities and different methods of communication (eg BSL or Makaton), a lack of understanding of social boundaries or perhaps a need for assistance with personal care. The latter can lead to a person with a disability being more dependant and compliant than a non-disabled person. In addition, the fact that they may be perceived as different can make them a target for bullying and abuse.

Anyone working with people with disabilities needs to be especially alert to the signs and symptoms of abuse and have strategies in place to ensure that all people at risk are able to raise concerns.

## Gender and Cultural Barriers

There are also cultural and gender differences that may mean that some people find it harder to talk about an abusive situation. *For example* males may be more reluctant than females to seek help. They often have less supportive networks around them and are less likely to talk to friends than their female counterparts tend to be.

People who are more isolated in their support networks may also be less likely to talk to someone, so a person with fewer friends may find it more difficult to know who the right person to talk to is.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people may also face additional difficulties in disclosing which you should consider and seek to minimise by making suitable arrangements to help create a sense of trust and safety.

## What should netball clubs do?

Netball Clubs and organisations should make sure that an inclusive environment is created where everyone is valued for their individuality and the contribution they make to the club, and where they can feel confident that their concerns will be listened to. They must ensure their Club Safeguarding Officer is fully trained and supported to carry out their role.

Clubs can take the following steps to create a safe and supportive environment:

- Never forget what it's like to need help and support - make it easier for people at risk to take up the offer of help
- Help to tackle the myths about those who seek help - seeking help is not a sign of weakness; encourage carers to promote this message
- Help to tackle the myths about people at risk - be positive about people at risk
- Make yourselves aware of how to support any members with specific needs
- Listen to your netballers - improve your club using their feedback
- Promote safeguarding in netball - lack of awareness is a significant barrier to people seeking help
- See the whole person - engage with people at risk both in terms of their strengths and their weaknesses
- Build trust - treat people at risk with respect
- Empower people at risk to find their own solutions
- Make communications accessible to all members considering any specific needs eg font size, format etc
- The CSO's contact details should be clearly and accessibly displayed in the club, and all members. Volunteers, parents/carers and supporters should be made aware of who the CSO is and what the Reporting a Concern process is - [flow chart](#).