



# SafeSport for Coaches: Bullying



**Did you know?** More than half of reported SafeSport incidents occur in the locker room. Many of them involve bullying, hazing and similar behaviors. **Properly monitored locker rooms can deter these incidents.**

**Bullying.** A vast majority of reports to USA Hockey involve bullying either by a coach or by a teammate. Distinguishing between behavior that is just plain mean or rude and actual bullying can be difficult. The USA Hockey SafeSport Handbook has comprehensive information to use as a guide..... However, sometimes more perspective is needed to make a good determination. These resources have been assembled to help in those instances.

**Bullying affects everyone involved.** Whether the child is the target, a witness, or the person who bullies, the end-result is that everyone feels less safe – vulnerable, compromised and nervous. We understand that you became a coach because you love the sport and enjoy working with and teaching young people. We appreciate your passion! However, it is important to recognize that you may be called upon to manage negative behaviors and issues that arise on your team.

**What is it? A Quick Guide:**  
**Rude** = accidentally saying or doing something hurtful.  
**Mean** = saying or doing something to hurt a person on purpose, once or maybe twice.  
**Bullying** = cruel behavior, done on purpose and repeated over time, that involves an imbalance of power.

## How can you deter and mitigate bullying?

- Put an emphasis on team-building and creating a “family” atmosphere. This can reduce the chances that bullying will occur and create a cohesive team experience that will benefit everyone. **One of the best protections against bullying is a sense of belonging and connection.**
- Let your staff, parents and players know that if they witness bullying or any other inappropriate behavior (whether the target is their child or not), you expect it to be **reported – to you** – immediately.
- Sometimes you may see actions by older players that seems harmless. Remember if the behavior has a power imbalance (like a group of players ganging up on one player), is intentionally hurtful and repeated, you may be witnessing bullying behavior. **Check it out!**
- Sometimes the player being bullied may be trying to ignore or avoid confrontation, so they do not complain or might even laugh it off. Just because the player does not appear bothered by the treatment does not mean the behavior is acceptable.
- If you think a player is being bullied, talk to the player and tell them what you have noticed. Provide specific details (hanging out alone, missing articles of equipment, level of play has decreased, interest in game has decreased). Then listen to the player. Discuss your concerns with the player’s parents and the association’s SafeSport Liaison.
- **Enforce a zero tolerance policy regarding bullying, hazing and any similar behaviors.**
- **As a coach, you can often quickly defuse a situation by acting quickly and helping correct the misbehavior.**
- **If you need to make a report about bullying, you can do so at [www.usahockey.com/safesport](http://www.usahockey.com/safesport).**



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### Additional Resources:

- Guidelines for preventing misbehavior: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/coaching-and-parenting-young-athletes/201512/disciplinary-problems-and-bullying-in-youth-sports>
- Coach's Guide to Bullying in Sports: <http://www.active.com/mountain-biking/articles/coach-s-guide-to-bullying-in-sports>
- Differentiating between rude, mean and bullying behavior: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/signewhitson/why-bullying-is-the-new-little-boy-who-cried-wolf\\_b\\_6509816.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/signewhitson/why-bullying-is-the-new-little-boy-who-cried-wolf_b_6509816.html)
- Common views and myths about bullying: <http://www.pacer.org/publications/bullypdf/BP-1.pdf>
- What to teach young athletes about bullying: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/coaching-and-parenting-young-athletes/201702/what-teach-young-athletes-about-bullying>