

Appendix 1 : Starting on common ground

When thinking about our principles and implementing the five steps towards safeguarding children in football, there are some terms that are important to understand.

The following definitions have been adopted in line with the International Safeguards for Children in Sport.

Child : a person under the age of 18 years.

Child abuse : an act or omission that harms a child (in other words, an individual may abuse a child directly, or may be indirectly responsible for abuse because he / she fails to prevent another person from harming that child). It can be physical, emotional, sexual or by neglect. It can take place in person or online. Although typically thought of as an adult mistreating a child, children can also harm other children. This is especially in relation to bullying.

Safeguarding : the action taken to ensure that *all* children are safe from harm when involved in football. It means proactively doing everything possible to minimise risk and prevent abuse of children.

Child protection : refers to the action taken in response to a *specific* concern for a child or children who may be suffering or at risk of suffering harm or abuse. Child protection is an essential part of safeguarding and requires referral to specialised child protection services, law- enforcement agencies and expert local organisations⁸ who are trained to advice on and manage cases, if concerns arise.

It is important to know that the terms “violence against children” and “child abuse” are often used interchangeably. The following have been adapted from key UN documents to further explain what is meant by “different types of abuse”⁹. Legislation in your country will set out and define these.

Physical abuse is deliberately physically hurting a child and includes any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. It mainly involves hitting (“smacking”, “slapping”) children with the hand or with an implement – a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, punching, kicking, shaking, throwing, scratching, pinching, biting or burning them or breaking their bones.

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child. It is also sometimes called psychological abuse and it can have severe and persistent adverse effects on a child’s emotional development. Emotional abuse may involve deliberately telling a child that he / she is worthless, or unloved and inadequate. It may include not giving a child opportunities to express his / her views, deliberately silencing him / her, or “making fun” of what he / she says or how he / she communicates. Emotional abuse often occurs as a pattern of deliberate, prolonged, repeated non-physical behaviour within a power-differentiated relationship. Emotional abuse may involve bullying – including online bullying through social networks, online games or mobile phones – by a child’s peers.

⁸ In some contexts, statutory public services may not exist or be operational, in which case it is important to map out and build partnerships with trusted local organisations / NGOs who are trained in this area.

⁹ General Comment No. 13 (2011) “The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence”; General Comment No. 8 (2006) : “The Right of the Child to Protection from Corporal Punishment and Other Cruel or Degrading Forms of Punishment”; UN Resolution A / RES / 73 / 148 adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2018 on sexual harassment; Protecting children from bullying – Report of the Secretary-General (2018, A / 73 / 265).

Bullying (or cyberbullying if conducted online) is unwanted, repeated and intentional, aggressive behaviour usually among peers, and can involve a real or perceived power imbalance. It can include actions such as making threats, spreading rumours or falsehoods, attacking someone physically or verbally and deliberately excluding someone.

Neglect is the failure to provide for a child's basic needs when those responsible for their care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so, whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene, supervision or shelter, that is likely to result in the serious impairment of a child's health or development. It also includes failure to protect a child from exposure to danger.

Sexual abuse is the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity. It occurs when adults exploit children sexually for their own gratification. It may involve physical contact, such as assault by penetration (for example, rape) or non-penetrative acts, such as kissing, rubbing and touching children's private body parts.

Sexual abuse does not necessarily involve contact; examples include involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse by gaining their trust (including via social media). In the majority of cases, the perpetrator is a person the child knows and trusts with sexual abuse often perpetrated in isolated, one-on-one situations.

Sexual harassment encompasses a continuum of unacceptable and unwelcome behaviour and practices of a sexual nature that may include, but are not limited to, sexual suggestions or demands, requests for sexual favours and sexual, verbal or physical conduct or gestures, that are or might reasonably be perceived as offensive or humiliating.

The following information may help you understand why safeguarding children is important.

Global prevalence and consequences :

According to the World Health Organization¹⁰, it is estimated that one billion children globally – over half of all children aged between two and 17 years – experience some form of emotional, physical or sexual abuse each year. Research documents that girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. For example, the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse is estimated at 18% for girls, and 8% for boys. Disabled children are three to four times more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse and neglect than their non-disabled peers. Despite its high prevalence, abuse is often hidden, unseen or under-reported and is most often perpetrated by people children know and trust. Furthermore, if girls and boys do report abuse, they are often stigmatised or not believed, and no action is taken.

Though no global data exists on the extent of abuse in sport, in recent years it has become increasingly evident that sport is not always a safe space for children, and that the same types of abuse sometimes found in homes, schools and communities can also occur in sport programmes. In the world of football, as in other sports, research and recent court cases have revealed that playing football may expose children to abuse, and footballers' own accounts of "historic" (non-recent) sexual abuse point to vulnerabilities within the game.

¹⁰ INSPIRE : seven strategies to end violence against children. WHO, 2016

In terms of its impact, the immediate and long-term consequences of abuse can undermine children's education, health, and well-being, and may impact their productive capacity in later life. Strong global evidence shows that child abuse increases risks of : physical injury; HIV and other sexually transmitted infections; mental health problems; delayed cognitive development; poor school performance and dropping out of schools; early pregnancy; reproductive health problems; and communicable and non-communicable diseases.

What are some of the risk factors for abuse within sport ?

- Potential risk situations : changing rooms, showers, carpooling, overnight stays, away trips;
- Tolerance for bullying, including amongst peers;
- High tolerance of physical violence and injuries;
- Dominance and unequal power relationships, for example between managers or coaches and their athletes;
- Inappropriate adult-child relationships and abuse of positions of trust;
- Discrimination and gender inequality;
- Social tolerance for abusive relationships or behaviour : a key factor that makes children, particularly girls, vulnerable to abuse;
- Reputation and scandal avoidance : leading to incidents being silenced or unreported, sometimes leading to the continuation of the abuse;
- Lack of clear policies and procedures, especially at national and local levels.

What are some of the protective factors against abuse in sport ?

- Organisations have a culture of respect and zero-tolerance towards any form of abuse at all levels.
- There are clear policies and procedures in place that are well known by all, including children, young people, and their families, with a designated contact person.
- Incidents and allegations are taken seriously and followed up.
- Organisations promote a better understanding of the issues through education and awareness and are committed to deterring those who may wish to use sport as a means of gaining access to children for inappropriate reasons.
- Caring and committed staff and volunteers at all levels of the game.