

As a coach, you understand how important it is to foster mutual respect and encouragement on your team. Players who feel respected and valued as part of the team are more likely to bring their best to the game, and the same goes for students in school.

Evidence shows that students who feel harassed or bullied are more likely to be absent and do poorly in school, or even to engage in risky behaviors. It's also been proven that bullying and harassment among peers is linked to abusive behavior in dating relationships. That's why Coaching Boys into Men® (CBIM) encourages you to establish your locker room as a safe space – free from harassment or degrading remarks based on gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, or any other identity. No matter what, every student deserves to feel safe and respected on your team and at school.

Know the Issues. Bullying is a hot topic these days and it can seem like every little thing gets reported as bullying. When that happens, it's hard to know what to do and when. No matter the situation, you should deal with any mean behavior on your team and focus on building a respectful culture. When bullying does happen, you'll need to address it more directly and in line with your school/district/state policies.

So, what is bullying? Bullying can take many forms (relational, verbal, physical, cyber) but has three main components: Bullying is 1) *unwanted and aggressive behavior* that is 2) *repeated over time* (or has the potential to be repeated) and involves a 3) *power imbalance* (social, physical, identity). Research shows that everyone involved in bullying is negatively impacted, including the target, the person doing the behavior, and the bystanders who see it happening.

Set the Tone. Tell your players clearly that degrading language, name-calling and bullying are not ok on your team and hold them accountable throughout the season. Expect your team to treat each other, their classmates and their opponents with respect, and to pay attention to the language they use. Encourage your players to come to you with any questions or problems they may be having. See Training Cards 3 and 4 for more tips on how to address these issues with your team.

Lead by Example. Pay attention to your own language and behavior on the field and in the locker room. Your players look up to you and will follow your lead. Encourage your players to do their best, support each other and model respect towards opponents.

Some students may be at higher risk for bullying, particularly students with disabilities and those perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT). You can help reduce that risk by creating safe and inclusive spaces, where diversity is valued and everyone is welcome. Speak out if you hear anyone called a “retard,” “spaz,” “homo,” or “fag”. Your leadership will help make LGBT students, students with disabilities, and all students feel safer on your team.



Intervene. If you witness bullying behavior, follow these steps:

- 1) Stop the behavior immediately: You can say, “That’s not ok here,” or “Cut it out guys,” or “That’s not how we treat each other on this team.”
- 2) Educate: Speak to the entire team about your expectations for respectful behavior and how they can help prevent bullying.
- 3) Follow-up: Check back in with the students involved every so often to make sure the bullying has stopped. If necessary, refer the students to a school counselor or other resources for support.

Take it to the next level. Bullying can be a problem on any team and in any school. Your leadership can improve the climate and culture of your team and bring the best out in all of your players. Your players can be role models of respect for the students around them. It’s a winning combination.

To learn more about bullying and how you can make your team safer for all students, check out these resources:

- **StopBullying.gov:** Information from various government agencies on what bullying is, what cyberbullying is, who is at risk, and how you can prevent and respond to bullying.
- **Changing the Game, The GLSEN Sports Project:** Resources for coaches and PE teachers to help make safe and inclusive sports spaces for all student athletes, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.
- **PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center:** Digital-based bullying prevention resources for parents, schools, teens and youth.
- Always keep the contact information for your school’s counselor or the violence prevention advocate in your community handy in case one of your athletes reports a difficult or potentially dangerous situation.