



## Portland Aquatic Club

# Action Plan to Address Bullying

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Version	Date Revised	File Name
2.0	October 23, 2022	PAC Action Plan to Address Bullying

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*USA Swimming clubs are required to have an action plan to address bullying, reviewed with and agreed to by all athletes, parents, coaches, and other adults affiliated with the club. The following plan is based on a model USA Swimming procedure along with resources from Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Program ([www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ([stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov)), and the Anti-Defamation League (<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk/what-bullying-is-and-is-not>).*

## PURPOSE

Portland Aquatic Club is committed to providing a safe, caring, and welcoming environment for all our members. We recognize that bullying undermines team cohesion and can be devastating to the target. Our goal is to prevent bullying when possible and respond promptly and effectively when bullying does occur. **Please tell a coach, board member or athlete/mentor if you know of a bullying incident.**

Objectives of the Club's Bullying Prevention Policy and Action Plan:

1. Endorse a culture of inclusion where all teammates are valued to reduce the risk of bullying.
2. Define bullying and give all board members, coaches, parents, and swimmers a good understanding of what bullying is.
3. Clearly explain how to report an incident and outline the steps in the team's response.
4. Demonstrate that the team takes bullying seriously and assure swimmers and parents that they will be supported.

## WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying includes three components:

1. An intent to harm physically or emotionally
  2. Repeated actions or threats
  3. A power imbalance between the instigator(s) and the target(s)
- Note that power imbalance may come from a difference in social status, physical size, or with a group acting against an individual. Athletes who bully may perceive their



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target(s) as vulnerable. They may repeatedly use threats, intimidation, or aggression to obtain rewards from others in the form of objects, actions, or social gain. Some bullying focuses on the target's identity or perceived identity, and in this case it can also be called harassment.

- Unkind, mean, and harmful behavior is not always bullying. Arguments expressing opposing views, one-time physical altercations, accidental collisions, and rude interactions must be evaluated in the context of larger patterns.

### **PREVENTION PROCEDURE**

Individuals and groups instigate bullying behavior to get attention, praise, or social status from by-standers, peers, or even from the target. Team culture can limit the social rewards available for bullying and harmful behavior. Portland Aquatic Club aims to reduce the risk of bullying with the following actions.

- Positive coaching methods create the foundation for an inclusive team culture.
- Team events like Mental Health Mondays bring groups together and promote understanding of diverse needs and identities.

### **REPORTING PROCEDURE**

An athlete who feels that he or she has been bullied is asked to do one or more of the following things:

- Talk to your parents.
- Talk to a Club Coach, Board Member, or other designated individual.
- Write a letter or email to the Club Coach or member of the [PAC Board of Directors](#).
- Make a report to the USA Swimming Safe Sport staff.
- Use the [PAC Feedback Form](#) to report a concern to the Board of Directors.
- Please reference the [PAC Grievance Procedure](#).

There is no express time limit for initiating a complaint under this procedure, but every effort should be made to bring the complaint to the attention of the appropriate club leadership as soon as possible to make sure that memories are fresh, behavior can be accurately recalled, and the bullying behavior can be stopped as soon as possible.

### **HOW WE HANDLE BULLYING**

If bullying is occurring during team-related activities, we stop bullying on the spot using the following steps:

1. Intervene immediately. It is ok to get another adult to help.
2. Separate the athletes involved.
3. Make sure everyone is safe.
4. Meet any immediate medical or mental health needs.
5. Stay calm. Reassure the athletes involved, including bystanders.
6. Model respectful behavior when you intervene.



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If bullying is occurring at our club or it is reported to be occurring at our club, we address the bullying by finding out what happened and supporting the athletes involved using the following approach:

### ***FINDING OUT WHAT HAPPENED***

#### **1. First, we get the facts.**

- a. Keep all the involved athletes separate.
- b. Get the story from several sources, both adults and athletes.
- c. Listen without blaming.
- d. Don't call the act "bullying" while you are trying to understand what happened. It may be difficult to get the whole story, especially if multiple athletes are involved or the bullying involves social bullying or cyber bullying. Collect all available information.

**2. Then, we determine if it's bullying.** There are many behaviors that look like bullying but require different approaches. It is important to determine whether the situation is bullying or something else.

- a. Review the definition of bullying above.
- b. To determine if the behavior is bullying or something else, consider the following questions:
  - What is the history between the athletes involved? Have there been past conflicts? Is the athlete worried it will happen again?
  - Is there a power imbalance? Remember that a power imbalance is not limited to physical strength. It is sometimes not easily recognized. If the targeted athlete feels like there is a power imbalance, there probably is.
  - Does the instigator have any special needs that may affect the ability to interpret social cues or control impulses? For example, neurodivergence includes a broad range of characteristics that may affect proprioception (the awareness of one's body in space) and interoception (the awareness of internal states) which can increase the risk of conflict. Similarly, social-emotional agnosia (difficulty understanding facial expressions, body language and vocal tone) makes it harder to understand feedback from others.
- c. Remember that it may not matter "who started it." Some children who are bullied may be seen as annoying or provoking, but this does not excuse the bullying behavior.
- d. Once you have determined if the situation is bullying, support all athletes involved.

### ***SUPPORTING THE ATHLETES INVOLVED***

#### **3. Support the athletes who are being bullied**

- a. Listen and focus on the athlete. Learn what's been going on and show you want to help. Assure the athlete that bullying is not their fault.
- b. Work together to resolve the situation and protect the bullied athlete. The athlete, parents, and fellow team members and coaches may all have valuable input. It may help to:



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- Ask the athlete being bullied what can be done to make him or her feel safe. Remember that changes to routine should be minimized. He or she is not at fault and should not be singled out. For example, consider rearranging lane assignments for everyone. If bigger moves are necessary, such as switching practice groups, the child who is bullied should not be forced to change.
  - Develop a game plan. Maintain open communication between the Club and parents. Discuss the steps that will be taken and how bullying will be addressed going forward.
- c. Be persistent. Bullying may not end overnight. Commit to making it stop, and consistently support the bullied athlete.

#### **4. Address bullying behavior**

- a. Make sure the athlete knows what the problem behavior is. Young people who bully must learn their behavior is wrong and harms others.
- b. Show athletes that bullying is taken seriously. Calmly tell the athlete that bullying will not be tolerated. Model respectful behavior when addressing the problem.
- c. Work with the child to understand some of the reasons he or she bullied. For example:
  - i. Sometimes athletes bully to fit in or just to make fun of someone is a little different from them. In other words, there may be some insecurity involved.
  - ii. Other times athletes act out because something else—issues at home, abuse, stress—is going on in their lives. They also may have been bullied. These athletes may need additional support.
- d. Involve the athlete who bullied in making amends or repairing the situation. The goal is to help them see how their actions affect others. For example, the athlete can:
- e. Write a letter apologizing to the athlete who was bullied.
  - i. Do a good deed for the person who was bullied, for the Club, or for others in your community.
  - ii. Clean up, repair, or pay for any property they damaged.
- f. Avoid strategies that don't work or have negative consequences:
  - i. Zero tolerance or "three strikes, you're out" strategies don't work. Suspending or removing from the team athletes who bully does not reduce bullying behavior. Athletes may be less likely to report and address bullying if suspension or getting kicked off the team is the consequence.
  - ii. Conflict resolution and peer mediation don't work for bullying. Bullying is not a conflict between people of equal power who share equal blame. Facing those who have bullied may further upset athletes who have been bullied.
- g. Follow-up. After the bullying issue is resolved, continue finding ways to help the child who bullied to understand how what they do affects other people. For example: praise acts of kindness or talk about what it means to be a good teammate.



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**5. Support bystanders who witness bullying.** Every day, children witness bullying. They want to help, but don't know how. Fortunately, there are a few simple, safe ways that athletes can help stop bullying when they see it happening.

- Be a friend to the person being bullied.
- Tell a trusted adult – your parent, coach, or club board member.
- Help the athlete being bullied get away from the situation. Create a distraction, focus the attention on something else, or offer a way for the target to get out of the situation. “Let’s go, practice is about to start.”
- Set a good example by not bullying others.
- Don’t give the bully an audience. Bullies are encouraged by the attention they get from bystanders. If you do nothing else, just walk away.