

Action Plan of Piedmont Swim Team to Address Bullying

Effective 1/1/25

PURPOSE

Bullying of any kind is unacceptable at Piedmont Swim Team (PST) and will not be tolerated. Bullying is counterproductive to team spirit and can be devastating to a victim. PST is committed to providing a safe, caring and friendly environment for all members. If bullying does occur, all athletes and parents should know that incidents will be dealt with promptly and effectively. Anyone who knows that bullying is happening is expected to tell a coach, board member or athlete/mentor.

Objectives of PST's Bullying Policy and Action Plan are to:

1. Communicate that PST will not tolerate bullying in any form.
2. Define bullying and ensure a shared understanding by all board members, coaches, parents and swimmers.
3. Inform all parents, swimmers and coaching staff that a policy and protocol are in place should bullying issues arise.
4. Communicate how to report bullying.
5. Communicate that PST takes bullying seriously and will respond according to this policy when bullying is reported.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Generally bullying is the use of aggression, whether intentional or not, which hurts another person. Bullying results in pain and distress.

Bullying is the severe or repeated use, regardless of when or where it may occur, by one or more USA Swimming members of oral, written, electronic or other technological expression, image, sound, data or intelligence of any nature (regardless of the method of transmission), or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at any other member or Participating Non-Member that to a reasonably objective person has the effect of:

- i. Causing physical or emotional harm to the other member or damage to the other member's property;
- ii. Placing the other member in reasonable fear of harm to himself/herself or of damage to his/her property;
- iii. Creating a hostile environment for the other member at any USA Swimming activity;
- iv. Infringing on the rights of the other member at any USA Swimming activity; or
- v. Materially and substantially disrupting the training process or the orderly operation of any USA Swimming activity (which for the purposes of this section shall include, without limitation, practices, workouts and other events of a member club or LSC).

REPORTING PROCEDURE

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

- Talk to your parents;
- Talk to a PST Coach, Board Member, or other designated individual;
- Write a letter/email to PST Coach, Board Member, or other designated individual;
- Make a report to the USA Swimming Safe Sport staff.

No express time limit exists for initiating a complaint under this procedure, but every effort should be made to bring the complaint to the attention of appropriate PST 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 (coaches, board members) **STOP BULLYING ON THE SPOT** using the following steps:

1. Intervene immediately. If necessary, get another adult to help.
2. Separate kids involved.
3. Make sure everyone is safe, which includes identifying and mitigating any immediate dangers, such as securing weapons and promptly addressing serious physical threats.
4. Meet any immediate medical or mental health needs.
5. Stay calm. Reassure children involved, including bystanders.
6. Model respectful behavior when intervening.

If bullying is occurring or reported to be occurring within PST, we address it by **FINDING OUT WHAT HAPPENED** and **SUPPORTING MEMBERS INVOLVED** using the following approach:

FINDING OUT WHAT HAPPENED

1. Get the facts.

- a. Keep all involved children separate.
- b. Get information from several sources, both adults and kids including the target(s), the aggressor(s) and witnesses.
- c. Listen without blaming.
- d. Don't call the act "bullying" while trying to understand what happened.
- e. It may be difficult to get the whole story, especially if multiple athletes are involved or bullying involves social bullying or cyber-bullying. Collect all available information.
- f. Thoroughly assess the presence of weapons, physical severe threats, hate-motivated violence, serious bodily harm, sexual abuse and robbery or extortion. Ensuring all individuals' safety requires identifying and mitigating any immediate dangers.

2. Then, determine if it's bullying. Many behaviors look like bullying but require different approaches. It is important to determine whether the situation is bullying or something else.

- a. Review the USA Swimming definition of bullying;

- b. To determine whether or not the behavior is bullying, consider the following questions:
 - What is the history between those involved?
 - Have there been past conflicts?
 - Is there a power imbalance? Remember that a power imbalance is not limited to physical strength and is sometimes not easily recognized. If the targeted child feels like there is a power imbalance, there probably is.
 - Has this happened before? Is the child worried it will happen again?
- c. Remember - “who started it” doesn’t matter. Some children who are bullied may be seen as annoying or provoking. This does not excuse bullying behavior.
- d. Once you have determined if the situation is bullying, support all those involved.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN INVOLVED

3. Support children who are being bullied

- a. Listen and focus on the child. Learn what’s been going on and show you want to help. Assure the child that bullying is not their fault. Emphasize empathy and reassurance. Advise against blaming or punishing the bullied swimmer, or encouraging them to retaliate.
- b. Work together to resolve the situation and protect the bullied child. The child, parents, fellow team members and coaches may all have valuable input. It may help to:
 - i. Ask the child being bullied what can be done to make him/her feel safe. Remember that changes to routine should be minimized. He/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 bullied child should not be forced to change.
 - ii. Develop a game plan. Maintain open communication between PST and parents. Discuss steps to 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 child. Focus on creating a supportive environment where swimmers feel safe and understood.

4. Address bullying behavior

- a. Make sure the child knows what the problem behavior is. Young people who bully must learn their behavior is wrong and harms others.
- b. Show children that bullying is taken seriously. Calmly tell the child 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/she bullied. For example:
 - i. Sometimes children bully to fit in or just to make fun of someone is different from them. In other words, some insecurity may be involved.
 - ii. Other times children act out because something else—issues at home, abuse, stress—is going on in their lives. They also may have been bullied and in need of additional support.
- d. Involve the child who bullied in making amends or repairing the situation. The goal is to help them see how their actions affect others. For example, the child can:
 - i. Write a letter apologizing to the athlete who was bullied.
 - ii. Do a good deed for the bullied person, PST, or the community.

- iii. Clean up, repair, or pay for any property they damaged.
- e. 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 swimmers who bully does not reduce bullying behavior. Swimmers 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 kids who have been bullied.
- f. Follow-up. After the bullying issue is resolved, continue finding ways to help the child who bullied understand how his/her actions affect other people. For example, praise acts of kindness or talk about what it means to be a good teammate.

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.

- a. Be a friend to the person being bullied;
- b. Tell a trusted adult – parent, coach, or PST board member;
- c. Help the child 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."
- d. Set a good example by not bullying others.
- e. Don't give the child who is bullying an audience. Children who are bullying are encouraged by attention from bystanders. If nothing else, just walk away.