Bullying

A common area of abuse or harm that you may become aware of in your role, is that of bullying.

Every child and adult has the right to participate in Martial Arts free from the fear of bullying. Bullying may be seen as deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves.

Bullying has the potential to cause permanent harm (physical, emotional or psychological). Schools should take steps to prevent bullying behaviour wherever possible and respond to incidents when they occur. A preventative approach means that sport is playing its part to create an environment and society in which people treat each other with respect.

Bullying can take the form of:

- **Verbal:** name calling, teasing, threatening, spreading rumours, sarcasm, racist taunts, homophobic bullying, graffiti and gestures.

- **Physical:** hitting, kicking, punching, spitting, stealing/breaking belongings.

- **Emotional:** ignoring, hurtful emails/text messages, excluding from activities, tormenting, ridiculing and humiliating.

Although anyone can be the target of bullying, victims are typically shy, sensitive and perhaps anxious or insecure. Sometimes they are singled out for physical reasons – being overweight, physically small, having a disability or belonging to a different race, faith or culture.

Bullies come from all walks of life; they bully for a variety of different reasons and may even have been bullied or abused themselves. Typically, bullies can have low self-esteem, be excitable, aggressive or jealous. Crucially, they have learned how to gain power over others.

Identifying Bullying

The competitive nature of Martial Arts can make it an ideal environment for the bully. The bully in Martial Arts can be:

- a parent who pushes too hard;
- an instructor who adopts a ‘win-at-all costs’ philosophy;
- a student who intimidates;
- an official who places unfair pressure on a person;
- a spectator who shouts abuse.

The damage inflicted by bullying can frequently be underestimated. It can cause considerable distress to children, young people and vulnerable adults, to the extent that it affects their health and development or, at the extreme, causes them significant harm including self-harm or in extreme cases, suicide.

There are a number of signs that may indicate a person is being bullied:

- sudden reluctance to go to activities such as training or games that they used to enjoy or a drop-off in performance/attendance.
- regularly feeling ill before training or games.
- physical signs such as stomach-aches, headaches, difficulty in sleeping, bedwetting, scratching and bruising, coming home with damaged equipment or clothes.
- behavioural changes such as becoming withdrawn, anxious, clingy, depressed, tearful, aggressive, unreasonable.
- start bullying others; a shortage of money or frequent loss of possessions.
- In more extreme cases, they might stop eating, start stammering, cry themselves to sleep, have nightmares, run away or threaten/attempt suicide.

These signs may indicate other problems or be a reaction to other events in a child or young person's life, but the possibility of bullying should be considered.

Homophobic bullying

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) people may face homophobic bullying. Homophobia is often driven by a lack of understanding which only serves to strengthen stereotypes and can lead to actions that cause LGB people to feel excluded, isolated or undervalued.

Adults bullying Children or Young People

Serious cases, for example if the bullying included physical abuse or racist name calling, may be considered abuse and so may be referred to the Police or Children/Adult Social Care.

The adult perpetrator should receive clear guidance on how their behaviour needs to be modified and monitored to ensure this is achieved.

Support for the Victim and the Bully(ies)

The bully(ies) will need support to help them realise why their behaviour is wrong and assistance to change their behaviour. Martial Art Clubs/Schools/Academies should involve the bully's parents/carers/guardians and the young person's School (if appropriate) in ensuring their behaviour is improving and any problems which may have caused them to bully are being addressed.

The victim's parents/carers/guardians should be involved, and they should be supported to ensure they feel able to remain in the programme.

Action to Help the Victim and Prevent Bullying

- take all signs of bullying very seriously;
- encourage all children to speak and share their concerns. Help the victim to speak out and tell the person in charge/someone in authority. Create an open environment;

- investigate all allegations and act to ensure the victim is safe. Speak with the victim and the bully(ies) separately;

- reassure the victim that you can be trusted and will help them, although you cannot promise to tell no one else (if a young person, you should inform the bully(ies) parents);

- keep records of what is said (what happened, by whom, when);

- report any concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Officer.

Action Towards the Bully(ies):

- talk with the bully(ies), explain the situation, and try to get the bully(ies) to understand the consequences of their behaviour. Seek an apology to the victim(s);
- if the bully is a young person, inform the bully(ies) parents;
- insist on the return of borrowed items and that the bully(ies) compensate the victim;
- impose sanctions as necessary;
- encourage and support the bully(ies) to change behaviour;
- hold meetings with the families to report on progress;
- inform all members of action taken;
- keep a written record of action taken.

Useful websites:

- https://sesma.co.uk/antibullying/
- www.beatbullying.org
- https://www.stopbullying.gov/
- http://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/