Limerick Athletic Club Anti Bullying Policy



Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline Limerick AC's approach to a disciplinary issue involving members of the club.

Document Control

Version Number	Date	Changes
Draft	14th September 2026	Creation of document
1.0	18th November 2026	Approval by Committee

1. Introduction

This policy outlines how Limerick AC will deal with accusations of bullying involving membera of the club.

2. What is Bullying?

Bullying is the repeated use of power by one or more persons intentionally to harm, hurt or adversely affect the rights or needs of another or others. The term bullying refers to a range of harmful behaviour, whether physical or psychological, and usually has the following four features:

a) It is repetitive and persistent- though sometimes a single incident can have the same impact over time, as part of a continuous pattern.
b) It is intentionally harmful, though occasionally not consciously intended by the bully or bystanders.
c) It involves an imbalance of power, leaving someone feeling helpless to prevent or stop it
d) It causes distress, fear, loneliness and lack of confidence

Common characteristics include

e) Motivation to demonstrate power by creating fear and to gain 'respect' by peers.
f) Often people who bully have themselves been bullied in the past. The may feel powerless and compensate by trying to intimidate others
g) Bullying can be obvious, subtle, hidden, and difficult to prove.
h) Males often use physical bullying and threats, but exclusion from groups is more common amongst females.
i) Bullying can be by one person, one-on-one, by group against one or group on group.
j) Bystanders often show acceptance or approval, and those on the receiving end can see them as part of the problem.
k) Bullying in sport can be related to tensions in schools, groups, families and local communities.

3. Types of Bullying

Bullying may take many forms that include:

a) Emotional - Unfriendly, exclusion, torment (e.g. hiding belongings, threats, rumours)
b) Physical - Pushing, kicking, hitting, or any violence
c) Racist - Racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
d) Sexual - Unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments
e) Verbal - Calling names, sarcasm, rumours
f) Homophobic - Because of, or focussing on, sexuality
g) Cyberbullying - All types of internet and email misuse, threats by text, calls by mobile phone and other devices, misuse of technology e.g. camera and video.
h) Exclusion – less obvious. Person appears to be included but regularly excluded from group activity. Or given wrong information about activity, e.g. times of activity
i) Extortion – regularly extracting something from someone without returning the favour e.g. borrowing money, snacks, drinks etc
j) Gesture – a look, a signal, pulling a face, imitating the way someone walks, stands etc.

4. People involved

There may be several people involved in incidents of bullying behaviour, directly or indirectly having seen or heard about what is happening and these may be adults and/or young people. There are four typical types:

1. The person displaying bullying behaviour can be an individual or a group, this may be an individual who is popular or has discovered their behaviour evokes a reaction. Where a group is involved, they can be those most respected or thought to be part of a good team. People who behave in a bullying manner may be recognised by their own behaviours, often where:

- An individual is being intentionally hostile, aggressive, seemingly be without reason

- An individual or group exert power over another individual or group, often where an imbalance of power already exists

- Satisfaction is gained from their bullying behaviour

- An individual purposely causes harm to another

- An individual repeats harmful behaviour to another

2. The person or group on the receiving end of the bullying behaviour can be known as the target. Often these are individuals who are different from others or stand out for a reason e.g. different culture, background, sexual orientation; someone with a disability; or a talented or less skilled individual.

3. Those individuals who are onlookers to bullying behaviour, often taking no part, are known as the backup and the audience. They provide the audience and the reaction to the bullying behaviour and may be afraid to speak up in case they become a target of the bullying behaviour.

4. There is usually an individual or group who know what is happening but consider it is not their problem; they don't get involved as they are not affected but don't do anything to stop the behaviour

5. How to recognise if a child is being bullied?

Bullies operate using furtiveness, threats, and fear. Bullying can therefore only survive in an environment where the victim does not feel empowered to tell someone who can help or in which it is not safe to do so. The following indicators are warning signs that a young person might be getting bullied.

a) Reluctance to come to a venue or take part in activities.
b) Physical signs (unexplained bruises, scratches, or damage to belongings).
c) Stress-caused illness – headaches, and stomach aches which seem unexplained.
d) Fearful behaviour (fear of walking to a meeting, going different routes, asking to be driven).
e) Frequent loss of, or shortage of, money with vague explanations.
f) Having few friends.
g) Changes in behaviour (withdrawn, stammering, moody, irritable, upset, distressed).
h) Not eating.
i) Attempting suicide or hinting at suicide.
j) Anxiety (shown by nail-biting, fearfulness, tics).

There are other possible reasons for many of the above.

6. How to Prevent Bullying

- Ensure that all members follow the club's code of conduct, which promotes the rights and dignity of each member.
- Deal with any incidents as they arise.
- Use a whole group policy or no-blame approach, i.e., not bullying the bully but working with bullies and the group of young people, helping them to understand the hurt they are causing, and so make the problem a shared concern of the group.
- Reinforce that there is a permission to tell culture.
- Encourage young people to negotiate, co-operate and help others, particularly new or different children.
- Offer the victim immediate support and put the no blame approach into operation.
- Never tell a young person to ignore bullying, they cannot ignore it, it hurts too much.
- Never encourage a young person to take the law into their own hands and beat the bully at their own game.
- Tell the victim there is nothing wrong with them and it is not their fault.

7. Reporting & Dealing with Bullying

Dealing with bullying behaviour is normally the responsibility of all officials and coaches within the club.

a) Where bullying behaviour involves an adult:
The person in charge should ask to speak with the adult separately, away from any young people or other adults. The person in charge should describe the type of behaviour witnessed and the effect it is having on others, especially young people, highlighting the codes of conduct and the Anti-Bullying policy as reminders about acceptable behaviour. The adult should be asked to stop with such behaviour; if the behaviour is denied or does not change, the person in charge may need to issue an immediate sanction to protect young people or others.

b) Where bullying behaviour involves young people only:
The person in charge should talk with all the people involved in bullying behaviour as soon as they become aware of the issue and try to reach an agreement about what happened between those involved, highlighting the codes of conduct and the Anti-Bullying Promise as reminders about acceptable behaviour. An immediate sanction may be necessary to deal with the bullying behaviour.

8. Who do you report bullying to?

Any issues regarding a juvenile member of the club should be reported to the Child Welfare Officer. Issues regarding adults should be reported to the Club Secretary.

All allegations of bullying will be dealt with in confidence and in the first instance using the following procedure.

Step 1 – Interviewing the individuals involved

The person alleged to have been bullied:

a. Listen to the victim's story in a calm non-judgemental way
b. Indicate form the start that the incident is being taken seriously
c. Inform Designated Safeguarding/Children's Officer
d. Allow the victim to explore their feelings about the incident
e. Do not attempt to find out all facts as this may increase stress
f. Discuss and agree how they might be support. Involve them in achieving a constructive solution
g. Agree acceptable targets for reaching the solution
h. Agree a review date
i. Monitor the situation with workforce members in an unobtrusive way.

The person who allegedly displayed the bullying behaviour

j. Interview the person along with any bystanders
k. Do not disclose information sources – respect confidentiality
l. State that all incidents of inappropriate behaviour are taken seriously
m. Clarify that the group has a problem, and they need a constructive solution
n. Facilitate them working to set agreed targets for the group
o. Make the group aware that progress will be monitored, and appropriate action taken

Step 2. Provide support for the individuals involved

The person alleged to have been bullied

a. Identify a workforce member who will act a point of contact for the person
b. Find a reliable friend of group of friends who will accompany the person and report any incidents
c. Identify times and places of bullying and minimise opportunities by supervision
d. Provide advice to the workforce on preventing bullying e.g. seating arrangements
e. Work with the person to develop self-esteem and social skills

The person who allegedly displayed the bullying behaviour

f. Communicate clear expectations of behaviour
g. Communicate and act on any breach of disciplinary policies.
h. Work with the person to improve their social skills

Step 3 – Conduct a review meeting. (After suitable period e.g. 3-6 weeks.)

a. Interview all those involved to ascertain level of progress.
b. If targets are not achieved, set new targets
c. Monitor and review until targets achieved.

Summary for immediate response

The person in charge of the group should always try to stop bullying behaviour as quickly as possible

a) Young people should not be forced to shake hands with each other
b) If an adult is involved in the bullying behaviour this should be stopped immediately
c) Parents should always be told – this may happen after the behaviour has been sorted out

d) Child Welfare Officer (CWO) should be told, the CWO should not need to do anything unless bullying behaviour continues
e) Reaching a solution straightaway is usually better for all young people involved
f) All those working with young people should encourage the group to follow the Codes of Conduct
g) Only those involved, their parents and the CWO need to be told about what has happened; the CWO will note the behaviour, the actions and the outcome – this record will remain with the CWO.

Use of sanctions

If bullying behaviour cannot be resolved through the No Blame (See Appendix 1) approach the issue should be sent forward as a disciplinary matter to be dealt with under the clubs disciplinary procedure.

Restorative approach with young people

The preferred method to deal with reports of bullying behaviour is the No Blame approach to resolve the behaviour. This can help to restore or repair a previously positive relationship and allows the young people involved to consider their feelings, their behaviour and the effects of bullying behaviour on everyone.

Appendix 1 The No Blame Approach

What is the No Blame Approach

The NO BLAME approach seeks a resolution for young people involved in bullying behaviour whilst maintaining their relationship within their peer group. Young people involved often want certain behaviours to stop, without a need for punishments to be imposed. This approach is often difficult for adults to reconcile, often wanting punishments to be handed out. The guidance should be taken from young people involved.

The NO BLAME approach encourages young people to recognise the impact of their behaviour and to take responsibility for changing it. Using this approach, a previous relationship between individuals or within a team may be re-established and this is often the preferred option for the young people involved.

The ethos behind the NO BLAME approach is to:

- EXPLAIN the problem, i.e. that someone seems to be unhappy, seems to be picked on etc. and explain how that person is feeling; this should not accuse anyone.

- ASK for ideas as to how to help this person

- LEAVE the individual/group to put their ideas into practice

- MEET with the individuals involved to check how the behaviour has changed

- SHARE the responsibility of changing the behaviour and encouraging everyone to speak to a trusted adult if there is bullying behaviour in the club

The NO BLAME approach does not attempt to get 'confessions', it seeks to get an acknowledgment of behaviour and provides an opportunity for young people to change hurtful behaviour.

There may be issues that are not resolved through the NO BLAME approach, where behaviour continues.

Bullying behaviour is a breach of a code of conduct and may have to be dealt with through a disciplinary process. However, the outcome for young people is far better when issues can be resolved through such a restorative practice.

Step 1 – Interview with the victim

If you find that there has been an incident of bullying, first talk to the victim. At this stage find out who was involved and what the victim is now feeling. Try asking the following questions:

- Was it verbal or physical intimidation?
- How hurt is the victim?
- Was it within his/her own peer group?
- Ensure the victim that his/her name will not come out in the investigation.
- Actively listen.

Step 2 – Meet with all involved

Arrange to meet with all those involved; this should include some bystanders, those who may have colluded, those who joined in and those who initiated the bullying.

- Have a maximum of six to eight in the group – keep the number controllable.
- Make a point of calling a "special" meeting.
- Ensure the severity of the topic is understood by all.
- Speak only of the hurt caused in general terms with no reference to the victim.
- Play on the conscience of all – ask questions like: How would you feel?
- Would you like it done to you?

Step 3 – Explain the problem

The distress suffered as a result of the bullying incident is explained. At this stage, the details of the incident or the allocation of the blame are not discussed. Explain the feelings of loneliness, feeling left out, rejected or laughed at. Try asking questions:

- Would they like it if it happened to them?
- "Someone here in this group was bullied by someone within the group, what could we do to see it does not happen again?"
- Listen, watch out for reactions, and pick up on any without isolating anyone.

Step 4 – Share the responsibility

Explain what steps/controls may have to be introduced to prevent further incidents and how everyone will lose out as a result.

Step 5 – Ask the group for their ideas

At this stage, the group is encouraged to suggest ways that would make the victim feel happier. All positive responses are noted. Use phrases "if it were you" to encourage a response. Listen to all suggestions and note them.

Step 6 – Leave it to them

Now the problem has been identified, solutions suggested, the problem is now handed over to the group to solve. Arrange to meet again in a week"s time.

Pass responsibility over to the group and give a time frame within which something must be done.

Step 7 – Meet them again

Each member of the group, including the bully, discuss how things are going, who is doing what and have there been other incidents? This allows for continual monitoring and also keeps all involved in the process.