



TABLE TENNIS CANADA TENNIS DE TABLE HARASSMENT AND ABUSE FACT SHEET

DEFINITIONS AND GUIDELINES

Abuse and harassment have been a “hot” issue in sport over the last few years. It’s not that abuse and harassment in the sport environment is new – it’s just that it is now more visible and is receiving more attention and discussion.

When abuse and harassment occurs in sport, it denies people the right to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness. Left unchecked, it can lead to an unhealthy environment. It contributes to low team morale, increases turnover of volunteers and staff, increases insurance and legal costs and tarnishes sport’s image in the community.

On a personal level, abuse and harassment can affect a person’s health, athletic performance, job effectiveness and self-esteem. It can result in anti-social and violent behavior, and personal and family problems.

A defining characteristic of abuse and harassment is that it usually occurs when one person is in a position of power over another, or has the trust of another, and then abuses that relationship. Participants in sport can be vulnerable to abuse and harassment because the sport environment is characterized by close physical and emotional relationships and complex power dynamics.

Definition of Harassment

In general terms, harassment is defined as *comment or conduct directed toward an individual or group of individuals that is offensive, degrading or threatening*. Harassment can take many forms, whether physical, verbal, emotional or sexual and often, it combines several of these elements. Sexual harassment is one type of harassment and is defined as *unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that detrimentally affects the sport environment or leads to adverse consequences for those whom the conduct is directed*.

At its worst, harassing behavior is easy to discern – but in its less extreme forms the definition is not so clear. Not everyone perceives behavior the same way and the definition of harassment will always have a subjective element. This makes it difficult to clearly prescribe preferred norms of behavior.

Clear Examples of Harassment

Some forms of behavior are clearly and easily characterized as harassment. In its extreme form, harassment is an offense under the Criminal Code. Harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, age, sex, marital or family status, disability and in most provinces sexual orientation, is discrimination under federal and provincial human rights legislation and is also against the law. Hazing or initiation rights that single out a person or a group of persons and subject them to embarrassing, degrading or clandestine behaviour will almost always be viewed as harassment.

Definition of Abuse

In general terms abuse is defined as *the use or treatment of a person that is seen as harmful or lack of care*. Abuse can take many forms including physical, emotional, sexual, neglect and child abuse that results in physical injury, emotional damage or sexual exploitation.

The term "child abuse" refers to violence, mistreatment or neglect that a child may experience while in the care of someone they either trust or depend on. An abuser may use a number of different tactics to gain access to a child, exert power and control over them, and prevent them from telling anyone about the abuse or seeking support.

Clear Examples of Abuse

Some forms of behavior are clearly and easily characterized as abuse. In its extreme form, abuse is an offense under the Criminal Code. Psychological abuse will include any verbal or non-verbal act that reduces a person's self-worth or dignity and threatens their psychological and emotional integrity. Physical abuse includes any act of violence whether or not it results in physical injury. Intentionally inflicting pain or injury that results in either bodily harm or mental distress is abuse. Neglect includes failing to (intentionally or unintentionally) care for or meet the needs of people who are dependent and cannot meet their own needs. Sexual abuse is when a person uses another person for his or her own sexual stimulation or gratification without consent.

The "Grey Zone" of Abuse and Harassment

Not all of us view behavior the same way. As one moves away from the extreme examples of abuse and harassment, what one person views as acceptable behavior another person might define as unacceptable. For example:

- Words or actions that I may perceive or intend as a joke, another person may view as embarrassing or insulting.
- An invasion or crowding of personal space might seem intrusive to one person but may reflect another person's more physical or tactile way of relating to people.
- A coaching strategy intended to produce peak performance in an athlete or team may be viewed by one person as strong and assertive and thus acceptable, but by another as overly aggressive and abusive.
- A congratulatory hug, kiss or pat on the back might be perfectly acceptable to me but might make another feel uneasy and vulnerable.
- Flirting may leave one person feeling confident and positive but may leave another person feeling uncomfortable and awkward.
- Cultural differences can give rise to conduct that is acceptable and tolerable to some but invasive and uncomfortable or even threatening to others.

Guidelines for Behavior

The subjective aspect of abuse and harassment in the "grey zone" makes it difficult to know what is right and what is wrong. The following guidelines may be helpful as you question your own actions and words:

- Would I do this or say this if my significant other were present? (For example, my spouse, partner, boyfriend or girlfriend)

- Would I want another person to do this or say this to someone I care about, such as my spouse or daughter?
- Would I want to be seen on national TV or in my local newspaper doing this or saying this?
- Would I do the same thing or say the same thing to a person of the same gender as myself?
- Am I certain that what I am about to do or say is not going to make someone else feel uncomfortable or unwelcome?

If the answer to any of the above questions is “no”, then the behavior is in the “grey zone” and is not acceptable.

TTCAN’s Commitment

TTCAN is committed to supporting a sport and work environment that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits discriminatory practices.

We are of the view that abuse and harassment are important issues and those in sport need to be more knowledgeable about what kind of conduct constitutes abuse and harassment, and more educated about the positive and healthy ways that coaches, athletes, and participants in sport can interact.

These definitions and guidelines are one step in educating members about the issue of harassment and abuse and promoting appropriate conduct on and off the table tennis court.