



CATEGORIES AND INDICATORS OF ABUSE

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Everyone involved in providing aikido activities for children must be able to recognise possible signs of abuse or neglect and know how to respond. For Alliance purposes, a child is anyone under the age of 18.

This document describes the principal categories of abuse, wider safeguarding concerns and possible indicators. It is guidance for recognition and initial response; it is not an investigation manual and does not replace safeguarding training.

It is not your responsibility to decide whether abuse has occurred. It is your responsibility to take concerns seriously, respond appropriately, record what you have seen or been told, and report the concern without delay.

RELATED ALLIANCE DOCUMENTS

This guidance should be read alongside the following Alliance documents. These documents contain the detailed procedures and should be updated independently so that operational instructions are not unnecessarily duplicated here:

- AA Safeguarding Policy Statement
- AA Responding to Concerns and Allegations guidance.
- AA Anti-Bullying Policy
- AA Coaching and Supervising Children in Aikido
- AA Recruitment and DBS Guidance

Please refer to the most recent versions of these documents, available from www.aikidoalliance.co.uk

UK-WIDE APPLICATION

The Alliance applies the same safeguarding principles and standards across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Clubs must also follow the legislation, statutory guidance, reporting arrangements and terminology that apply in the country where the activity takes place. Where legal terminology or procedures differ, the relevant home-country requirement takes precedence; however, the Alliance's safeguarding standard must not be reduced.

IMMEDIATE ACTION

If a child is in immediate danger, is seriously injured, or urgent assistance is required, call 999. Take any reasonable and proportionate steps needed to protect the child. Then follow the Alliance Responding to Concerns and Allegations guidance as soon as it is safe to do so.

UNDERSTANDING ABUSE AND NEGLECT

A person may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Abuse may happen once or repeatedly. It may occur in a family, institutional, online, community or sporting environment, including an aikido club. The person causing harm may be an adult or another child and is often, but not always, known to the child.

Abuse and neglect can affect a child's physical health, emotional wellbeing, relationships, behaviour, learning and development. Children respond in different ways. Possible effects are not inevitable, and timely protection and appropriate support can help children recover.

The four principal categories below provide a framework for recognising harm. They can overlap, and a child may experience more than one form of abuse. Other safeguarding concerns, including exploitation, domestic abuse, online abuse, bullying and harmful sexual behaviour, may fall within or involve one or more of these categories.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse involves deliberately causing physical harm to a child. It may include hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, biting, inappropriate physical restraint, or otherwise causing physical injury. It can also include fabricating the symptoms of illness or deliberately causing illness in a child.

EXAMPLES IN AIKIDO

Physical abuse or harmful practice in aikido may include:

- striking, throwing, restraining or applying a technique to punish, intimidate or humiliate a child;
- using pain-compliance methods or applying joint locks with inappropriate force;
- requiring training that is unsafe or beyond the child's age, physical development, experience or ability;
- continuing training despite injury, illness, distress or a clear request to stop;
- encouraging or supplying performance-enhancing or other inappropriate substances; or
- using physical intervention other than where immediately necessary and proportionate to prevent injury or serious damage, in accordance with Alliance guidance.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse is persistent emotional maltreatment that causes, or is likely to cause, serious adverse effects on a child's emotional development. It may occur on its own but is involved to some degree in all forms of abuse.

It may include:

- repeatedly conveying that a child is worthless, unloved, inadequate or valued only when they meet another person's expectations;
- silencing a child, preventing them from expressing their views, or ridiculing what they say or how they communicate;
- imposing expectations that are inappropriate for the child's age, development or ability;
- overprotection that prevents normal exploration, learning or social participation;
- causing a child to feel frightened, threatened, unsafe, exploited or corrupted;
- seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another person, including domestic abuse; or
- serious bullying, including cyberbullying.

EXAMPLES IN AIKIDO

- persistent criticism, humiliation, sarcasm, shouting, threats or name-calling;
- racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist or other discriminatory treatment;
- using rank, grading, selection or exclusion to control or intimidate a child;
- placing sustained and unrealistic pressure on a child to perform; or
- deliberately isolating or rejecting a child within the club.

NEGLECT

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may include failing to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional care, supervision, protection from harm, medical care or treatment.

EXAMPLES IN AIKIDO

- inadequate supervision or unsafe adult-to-child ratios;
- failing to respond appropriately to injury, illness, pain, fatigue, distress or additional needs;
- denying reasonable access to water, food, rest, toilets, suitable clothing or first aid;
- using unsuitable facilities or equipment, or failing to address known hazards;
- allowing a child to undertake training beyond their safe capability;
- failing to follow agreed attendance, collection or missing-child arrangements; or
- failing to take reasonable action when a child is at risk from another person.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse involves forcing, enticing, manipulating or persuading a child to take part in sexual activities. It may involve physical contact or non-contact activity and may happen online or offline. A child may not understand that the activity is abusive, and physical force is not required.

Sexual abuse may include:

- penetrative or non-penetrative sexual acts;
- sexual touching, kissing or rubbing, whether over or under clothing;
- involving a child in looking at, creating, requesting, possessing or sharing sexual images or recordings;
- causing or encouraging a child to watch sexual activity or behave in a sexually inappropriate way;
- sexualised conversation, messages or image sharing;
- grooming a child in preparation for abuse or exploitation, including through games, messaging, social media or other online services; or
- sexual abuse committed by another child, including harmful sexual behaviour.

RISKS IN A SPORTING ENVIRONMENT

People seeking access to children may deliberately target sport or community activities. They may misuse trust, authority, one-to-one contact, travel, changing arrangements, photography, online communication or the legitimate physical contact involved in coaching. Appropriate aikido contact must always be open, necessary for the activity, proportionate, respectful and consistent with Alliance guidance.

Every concern must be taken seriously and reported without prejudging whether it is true or making assumptions about the child or the person whose behaviour has caused concern.

WIDER SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE AND HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Children can harm other children. This may include bullying, physical violence, coercive or controlling behaviour, sexual harassment, sexual assault, abuse within intimate relationships, non-consensual sharing of images, and other harmful online or sexual behaviour. Harm may occur between children of any age or sex and may take place inside or outside the club.

All affected children must be safeguarded. Language should describe the behaviour rather than permanently label a child. A child who has displayed harmful behaviour may also have unmet safeguarding needs. Club personnel must not undertake investigative questioning; concerns must be managed under the Alliance Responding to Concerns and Allegations guidance.

BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

Bullying is behaviour that is intended to hurt, intimidate, humiliate or exclude another person and is often repeated or involves an imbalance of power. It may be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, discriminatory, relational or online. A single serious incident can still be a safeguarding concern even where it does not meet a repeated-behaviour definition.

Cyberbullying may involve messages, social media, gaming platforms, images, videos, impersonation, exclusion, threats or the sharing of private information. Relevant material should be preserved where safe to do so, but sexual images of children must not be copied, forwarded or shown unnecessarily.

Detailed prevention, recording, response and disciplinary arrangements are contained in the AA Anti-Bullying Policy September 2026 V3. Suspected abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, exploitation or criminal conduct must be referred under the Alliance safeguarding procedure and must not be treated solely as a behaviour-management matter.

EXPLOITATION AND GROOMING

Child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation occur where a person or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into sexual or criminal activity. The child may appear to agree, may receive something they need or want, or may have been exploited without recognising it. A child cannot consent to their own exploitation.

Grooming is the process of building trust with a child, and sometimes with their family or organisation, to facilitate abuse, exploitation or secrecy. It can take place face to face or online and may develop gradually.

OTHER SPECIFIC CONCERNS

Other concerns that may involve abuse or require safeguarding action include domestic abuse, trafficking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, radicalisation, discriminatory or hate-related abuse, hazing and initiation practices, and abuse linked to faith or belief. Staff and volunteers are not expected to diagnose or categorise these concerns before reporting them.

HAZING AND INITIATION PRACTICES

Hazing means requiring or pressuring someone, as a condition of joining a group or maintaining status within it, to participate in humiliating, degrading, dangerous or abusive activity. A person's apparent willingness does not make harmful conduct acceptable. Hazing is prohibited and must be reported.

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

There is no single reliable sign of abuse. Some indicators may have innocent or unrelated explanations, while some children who are being harmed show no obvious signs. Concerns should be considered in context, including the child's age, development, communication needs and any disability, without making assumptions.

Possible indicators may include:

- an injury or explanation that is inconsistent, unexplained, repeated or does not fit the child's age or development;
- bruises, burns, bites or other injuries in unusual locations or patterns;
- frequent injuries, untreated medical needs, persistent hunger, fatigue, poor hygiene or unsuitable clothing;
- marked changes in mood, behaviour, confidence, concentration, attendance or performance;
- becoming withdrawn, anxious, aggressive, unusually watchful or fearful of a particular person or place;
- reluctance to change clothes, unexplained genital pain or discomfort, or sexual knowledge or behaviour that is developmentally unusual;
- self-harm, suicidal thoughts, substance misuse, running away or other high-risk behaviour;
- having money, gifts, transport, accommodation or possessions that are unexplained;
- secrecy about relationships or online activity, repeated contact from unknown adults or older young people, or distress linked to a device; or
- a child saying, indicating or otherwise communicating that they are being harmed, frightened, controlled or made uncomfortable.

INDICATORS IN THE CLUB ENVIRONMENT

- reluctance or refusal to attend training, events or trips;
- an unexplained deterioration in enjoyment, participation or performance;
- distress connected with physical contact, changing, travel, photography or particular adults or children;
- bullying, exclusion, sexualised behaviour, coercion or intimidation; or
- a parent, coach, volunteer or participant persistently ignoring boundaries or Alliance requirements.

The presence of one or more indicators is not proof that abuse has occurred. Equally, uncertainty is not a reason to delay reporting a concern. Record facts and observations, not conclusions or assumptions.

RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE OR CONCERN

If a child tells you about harm, or you observe something that concerns you:

- make sure the child and others are immediately safe; call 999 where there is immediate danger, serious injury or an urgent need for assistance;
- stay calm, listen carefully and take the child seriously;
- allow the child to speak in their own words and at their own pace;
- use only open prompts needed to clarify what the child is communicating; do not question at length or investigate;
- reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling you and that the harm is not their fault;
- do not promise secrecy; explain that the information must be shared with people who can help;
- do not confront the person whose behaviour has caused concern or discuss the matter unnecessarily;
- Do not take photographs of injuries or marks. Record what you have observed factually in writing; any photographs required as evidence should be taken by, or only on the specific instruction of, the police, children's social care/social work or an appropriate healthcare professional;
- as soon as possible, make a factual written record of what was seen, heard and said, including the child's exact words where possible, the date, time, location and action taken;
- **report without delay in accordance with the Responding to Concerns and Allegations guidance.**

Listen in a quiet and suitable place where the child can speak without unnecessary interruption while appropriate safeguarding arrangements are maintained. Do not take a child to an isolated location merely to obtain privacy.

IF THE USUAL REPORTING ROUTE IS UNAVAILABLE OR INAPPROPRIATE

If the Welfare Officer is unavailable, implicated in the concern, or does not act appropriately, contact the Association Safeguarding Office or the Alliance Lead Safeguarding Officer. If a child may be at risk and an internal contact cannot be reached, or delay could increase the risk, contact the police or the relevant children's social care/social work service directly. Follow the reporting arrangements for the UK country in which the concern arises.

INFORMATION SHARING AND RECORDS

Share safeguarding information only with those who need it to protect the child or manage the concern. Relevant information may be shared without consent where this is necessary and proportionate to safeguard a child. Records must be factual, dated, stored securely and handled in accordance with Alliance data-protection and safeguarding requirements.

REFERENCES

This document has been reviewed with reference to the following sources:

- NSPCC Sport: Child abuse in a sports setting - <https://sport.nspcc.org.uk/help-advice/introduction-to-safeguarding/child-abuse-in-a-sports-setting/>
- NSPCC Learning: Safeguarding children and child protection - <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection>
- England: Working Together to Safeguard Children - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>
- Wales: Wales Safeguarding Procedures - <https://safeguarding.wales/>
- Scotland: National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 (updated 2023) - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland-2021-updated-2023/>
- Northern Ireland: Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland - <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/co-operating-safeguard-children-and-young-people-northern-ireland>

External guidance and reporting arrangements may change. Clubs should use the current version of the relevant Alliance procedure and home-country guidance when responding to a concern.

CHANGE LOG

Date/version	Details
July 2022	Review completed; no changes recorded.
July 2023	Review date recorded.
September 2026 V2	Full review and update: UK-wide application; current definitions and indicators; child-on-child abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, exploitation and online abuse; revised disclosure and reporting guidance; detailed bullying procedure cross-referred to the AA Anti-Bullying Policy September 2026 V3; current sources added.