

Bullying

Bullying can be defined as a person or persons' intimidation of another, by verbal, physical or mental abuse. A person can be bullied for a variety of reasons; for example, because they're seen as being especially successful, for their looks, or for not being "part of the crowd"

There are three main types of bullying:

- verbal – insults, name calling (e.g. questioning their ability as a judoka)
- physical – punching or kicking someone
- mental – ignoring someone, making them feel excluded from club or social activities.

So what impact can it have?

For the victim, it can mean a lack of interest (in judo), perhaps to the point of staying away if their tormentor(s) is also at the club. The tormentor could be another student or even an instructor. Even if the bullying isn't actually taking place at the club but somewhere else, for example, school, it could have a detrimental impact on the judoka's attitude and performance.

For the club, it could mean damage to its reputation if it becomes known as a one that tolerates bullying, as this could drive current and potential members away.

The following are examples of some warning signs which could mean a judoka is being bullied:

- if they're unusually reticent / aggressive
- if they have any unexplained physical marks, e.g. bruising, cuts

The signs could be even more obvious, for example, catching a judoka in the act of bullying another.

Steps to dealing with bullying - how to confront, who to tell:

In the first instance, the senior instructor should always be informed; after all, while within the dojo all judoka are the responsibility of the club instructors and ultimately the senior instructor at the time. In the event of a judoka being caught – on the mat or merely within the dojo – in the act of bullying another, they should be removed immediately.

Club policy is that bullying is unacceptable and that bullies are not welcome. However, the club would be obliged to inform the bullies' parents of the reasons for banning them,

along with evidence to back up the case; they could otherwise be accused of bullying or bias themselves.

This assumes that the bullying is taking place at the dojo. If, on the other hand, the bullying is taking place away from the dojo but the club are made aware of it (for example if the judoka confides what's happening to a friend or an instructor) then again the club may have a moral duty to make the judoka's parents aware. Morally, the only time I would suggest that this doesn't happen is if the judoka insists that no-one else – parents, school – are informed (for example, if they fear retribution) but that is a personal opinion. Otherwise there may be an implication of breach of trust by the instructor or club, even if the best interests of the judoka are intended.

While this piece has concentrated on bullying from the point of view of the club and its instructors, it should be borne in mind that everyone – instructors, judokas, parents – have a responsibility for ensuring that it has no place in society: within the club or out of it.

Michael Kelly