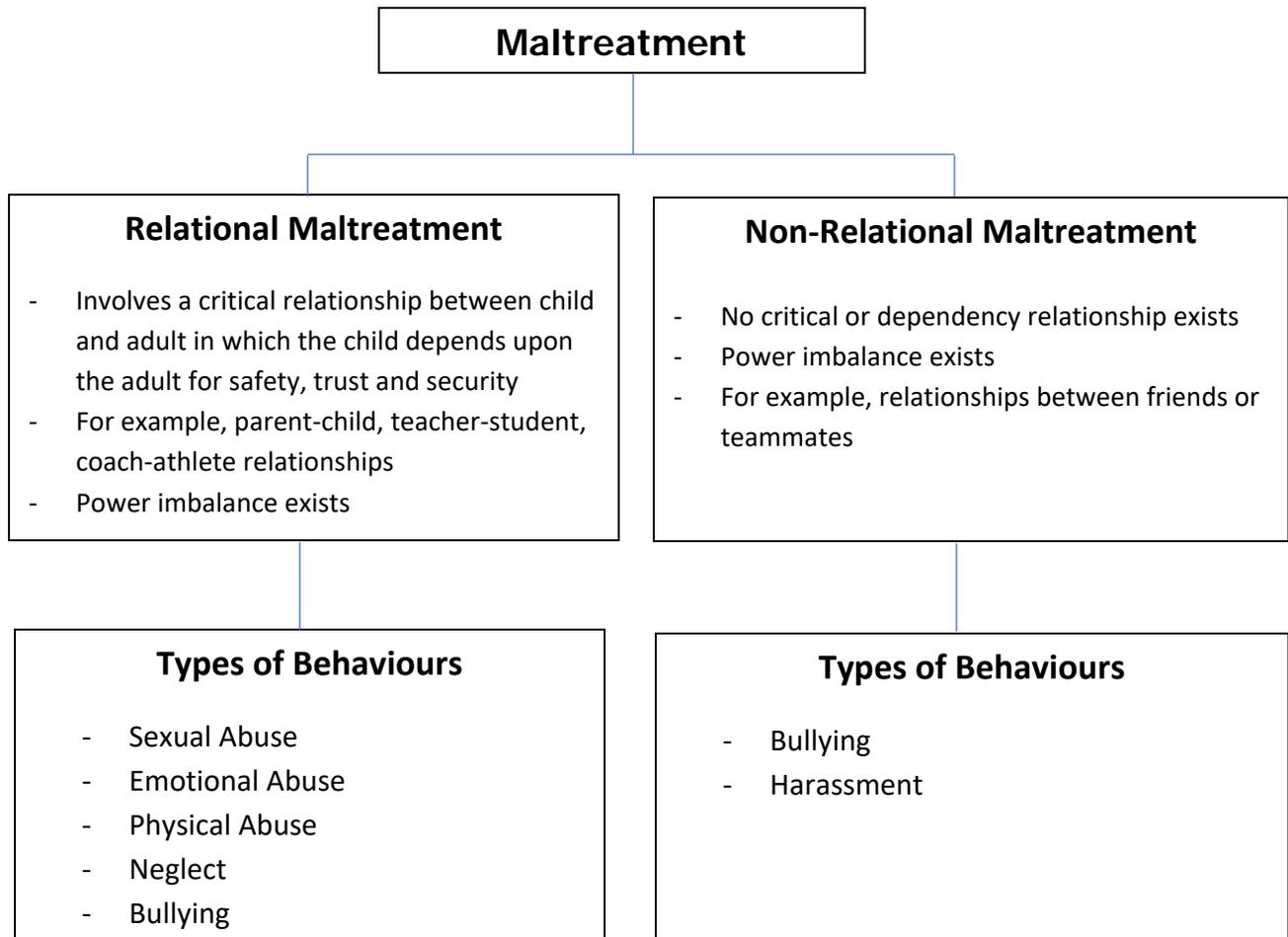


Defining Maltreatment

Provided by Gretchen Kerr, Harassment Officer for Gymnastics Canada

Maltreatment - has been defined as “Volitional acts that result in or have the potential to result in physical injury and/or psychological harm against the child.”
(Crooks & Wolfe, 2007)



Important characteristics of this definition:

- Emphasis on potential for harm which reflects a preventative approach.
- Emphasis on “volitional” is important to highlight that the adult’s behaviour is deliberate rather than accidental.
- The adult’s intentions are irrelevant. For instance, if a parent or coach causes harm, or the potential for harm, but did not intend to harm the child or expresses an intent to discipline rather than punish the child, the behaviour may still constitute maltreatment.
- A pattern of behaviour is required for the definition of maltreatment

Emotional Maltreatment - caregiver's (parent, teacher, coach, etc.) failure to provide a developmentally appropriate and supportive environment. It is important to note that emotional abuse is at the foundation of all other forms of maltreatment (sexual, physical and neglect).

In sports, this conduct has the potential to cause emotional or psychological harm to an athlete when it occurs as persistent, pervasive or patterned acts (i.e. yelling once at an athlete once does not constitute maltreatment). Examples include:

- Refusal to recognize child's worth or legitimacy of child's needs (including complaints of injury/pain, thirst or feeling unwell).
- Creating a culture of fear; threaten, bully or frighten the child.
- Frequent name-calling or sarcasm that continually "beats down" the child's self-esteem.
- Embarrassing or humiliating child in front of peers.
- Excluding or isolating athlete from the group.
- Withholding attention.
- Encouraging child to engage in destructive and antisocial behavior, reinforcing deviance or impairing a child's ability to behave in socially appropriate ways.
- Over-pressuring whereby the adult imposes extreme pressure upon the child to behave and achieve in ways that are far beyond the child's capabilities.
- Verbally attacking an athlete personally (e.g., belittling them or calling them worthless, lazy, useless, fat or disgusting).
- Routinely or arbitrarily excluding participants from practice.
- Throwing sports equipment, water bottles or chairs at, or in the presence of, participants.

Neglect - acts of omission (whereby coach should act to protect health and well-being of athlete but does not).

- Isolating an athlete in a confined space or left on equipment, with no supervision, for an extended period of time.
- Withholding, recommending against or denying adequate hydration, nutrition, medical attention or sleep.
- Ignoring an injury.
- Knowing about sexual abuse of athlete but failing to report.

Physical Maltreatment - involves contact or non-contact behavior that can cause physical harm to an athlete. It also includes any act or conduct described as physical abuse or misconduct (e.g., child abuse, child neglect and assault).

Almost all sport involves strenuous physical activity; in practices and competition, athletes regularly push themselves to the point of exhaustion. However, any activity that physically harms an athlete—such as extreme disciplinary actions or punishment—is unacceptable. Physical misconduct can extend to seemingly unrelated areas including inadequate recovery times for injuries and restricted diet.

Examples include:

- Punching, beating, biting, striking, choking or slapping an athlete.
- Intentionally hitting an athlete with objects or sporting equipment.
- Providing alcohol to an athlete under the legal drinking age (under U.S. law).
- Providing illegal drugs or non-prescribed medications to any athlete.
- Encouraging or permitting an athlete to return to play prematurely or without the clearance of a medical professional, following a serious injury (e.g., a concussion).
- Prescribed dieting or other weight-control methods (e.g., weigh-ins, caliper tests) without regard for the nutritional well-being and health of athlete.
- Isolating an athlete in a confined space or left on equipment, with no supervision, for an extended period of time.
- Forcing an athlete to assume a painful stance or position for no athletic purpose or excessive repetition of a skill to the point of injury.
- Using excessive exercise as punishment (e.g. stretching to the point of causing the athlete to cry, endurance conditioning until athlete vomits).

Exceptions: Emotional and physical misconduct does not include professionally accepted coaching methods (NCCP) of skill enhancement, physical conditioning, team building or improving athletic performance.