

Coming Together: Exploring Peer Verbal Abuse and Combating Conflict



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What is Peer Verbal Abuse?

Peer verbal abuse is defined as the act of forcefully criticizing, insulting, or denouncing another person. Characterized by underlying anger and hostility, it is intended to harm the self-concept of the other person and produce negative emotions. (National Domestic Hotline, 2020, para. 1)

Types of Verbal Abuse

- Appearance
- Involvement in Activity
 - Peer Coaching
 - Work Ethic
 - Competitive Success
- Character Defamation
 - Reputation
 - Outside Appearance
- All Occurred Constantly



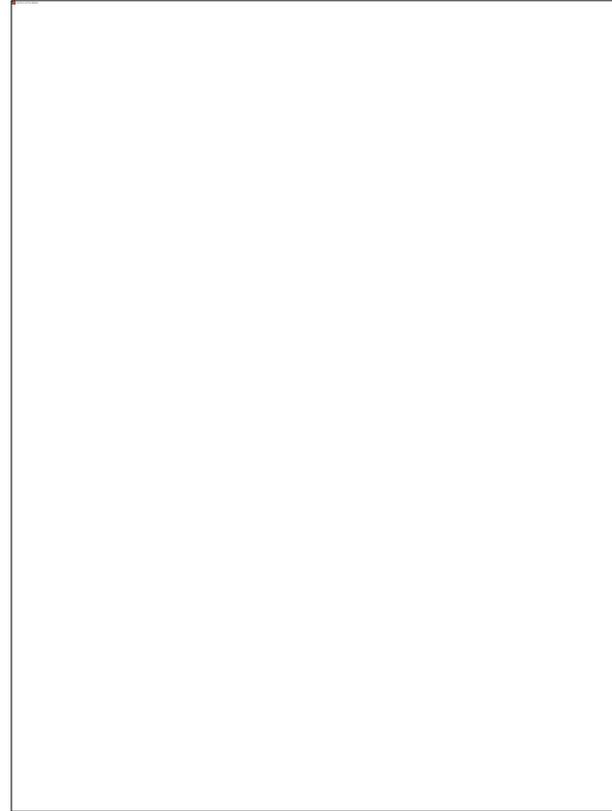
What Can Coaches do?

- Provide Awareness
 - Resources
 - Restate Information
- Coach Intervention
 - Believe Students
 - Speak Up
- Policy Adoption
 - Show Support
 - Provide Help



Protection Policy

- Review Guidelines
 - Go over team expectations
- Work with Students
 - Guide them
 - Teach them
- Probation Period
 - Limited Opportunities
- Removal of Student



Any Questions?

Protection Policy

The protection of students is essential. As such, our team has a strict policy against the use of hurtful, derogatory, and negative comments that reference a student's physical appearance, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexuality, reputation, work ethic, and competitive success. To clarify, peer verbal abuse is defined as the act of forcefully criticizing, insulting, or denouncing another person. Characterized by underlying anger and hostility, it is intended to harm the self-concept of the other person and produce negative emotions. (National Domestic Hotline, 2020, para. 1). Partaking in peer verbal abuse will NOT be tolerated, and students have the right to feel safe and protected during their time on this team. This protection policy is intended to validate concerns that are occurring on our team, and provide students the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. If peer verbal abuse occurs, please refer to the list over how our team handles peer verbal abuse below.

How to report Peer Verbal Abuse

1. Reporting peer verbal abuse (PVA) begins with contacting the Director or Assistant Director of Forensics to discuss the situation where PVA occurred.
2. After contacting a DOF/ADOF, coaches will reach out to the student(s) in question, to discuss verbal comments and review team and institutional guidelines. NOTE: guidelines are subject to change depending on team handbook/institutional needs. The reporter is encouraged to keep in contact with coaches after the initial report has been filed.
3. After reviewing the reported comments, the student(s) in question will continue to speak with DOF/ADOF and work with them to not engage in previous behavior. This may involve shifting travel hotel roommates, and limited peer coaching to mitigate the possibility of PVA.
4. However, if a student is reported for engaging in PVA three times and there has not been a correction of peer interaction, the student(s) will enter a **probation** period. Limiting their ability to interact with team members during team events, limited exposure to the PVA reporter, and limited travel experiences. Additionally, the student will continue to work with DOF/ADOFs during their probation period. The length of the probation period is determined by DOF/ADOF.
5. If PVA continues beyond the probation period, the student can face removal of scholarships and/or loss of state and national tournaments, or removal from the forensics team for the academic year.

NOTE: Students are encouraged to work with institutions Title IX coordinators and counselors if needed. Please see below for additional resources.

Additional Resources:

Title IX Coordinator: Email

Institution Counselor: Email

College Security: Number

Any Additional Support Group: Email/Number

What Can Coaches Do?

1. Provide Awareness

Provide resources for your students. Give them the opportunities to know about outside help that they can turn to. Mention campus counseling, support groups, and Title IX coordinators. Allow students to have information if they need it.

2. Restate information

Go over policies and team handbooks multiple times. Many teams only go over this important information at the beginning of the year. Review the information to make sure students are aware of its presence.

3. Coach Intervention

The most important thing a coach can do is believe their students, and to speak up when they see people engaging in PVA. Coaches have the opportunity to step in and set that precedent that verbal abuse will not be tolerated on a team.

4. Policy Adoption

Consider adopting a policy to protect students. The adoption of a protection policy allows students to see that not only are they supported, but that they have the opportunity to voice their experiences.

Common Types of Abuse

1. Appearance

Verbal comments often focused on appearance can pertain to how an individual chooses to dress or present themselves for tournaments. Oftentimes, this type of verbal abuse occurs when traveling for tournaments.

2. Involvement in Activity

Many times, verbal abuse can occur during peer coaching sessions without the presence of a coach nearby. Often, negative comments can be disclosed behind constructive criticism or suggestions for an event. It is important to note that suggestions for improving an event are acceptable, but once the comments become focused on a student's work ethic, their competitive success, or their contributions to the team, it becomes a form of PVA.

3. Character Defamation

PVA can go beyond the team and impact students outside of their organization. Character defamation can involve tarnishing an individual's reputation and their outside appearance. It can impact students in their everyday life, as well as their involvement within the greater speech circuit as well.

4. Prevalence

The types of abuse listed above are just the surface of how PVA can be engaged in. But one thing is certain, all types of PVA occurred constantly and consistently. It is important for students and coaches to recognize common types of verbal abuse in order to stop PVA from continuing.