
TO THE SPORT CLUB: The following educational document was designed for distribution to parents by a sports club or program for the purposes of (1) emphasizing to all parents that the Club considers athlete safety a top priority, (2) educating parents about issues of coach and other sport leader conduct, (3) providing information about the Club's Athlete Welfare Advocates. It should be customized with information on how to contact the Club's Athlete Welfare Advocates (see last page). The parent should also receive a copy of the "Club Philosophy and Policies Governing Professional Coaching Conduct and the Conduct of all Athletes, Employees and Volunteers" and "What Every Athlete Should Know About Personal Safety."

WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ATHLETE SAFETY

Because everyone associated with our club cares about athlete safety and well-being!

Attached please find a copy of an important club policy, "*Club Philosophy and Policies Governing Professional Coaching Conduct and the Conduct of all Athletes, Employees and Volunteers.*" The purpose of this policy is to define in a very clear way inappropriate coach, sport leader and athlete participant conduct and the Club's commitment to protect the safety and well-being of athletes. The policy defines important terms and concepts such as bully, hazing, initiation rituals, physical punishment, sexual harassment, verbal and emotional abuse, etc. Please let us know if you have any questions.

We also ask that you read "*What Every Athlete Should Know About Personal Safety*" and discuss this education piece with your child.

While it may be uncomfortable to read about athlete abuse, sexual harassment, and other forms of unacceptable behavior, it is very important for the Club and all parents to educate our children about these critical safety issues. We need you to emphasize to your children that any conduct that makes the child uncomfortable should be discussed with you or the Club's Athlete Welfare Advocate (AWA). The AWA is our athlete safety officer.

Despite the fact that criminal background and previous employment reference checks are conducted on all of the Club's employees and volunteers who work with children, these background checks often do not reveal previous misconduct, especially if a previous employer simply fired the employee without contacting the police or if the behavior fell short of criminal conduct but crossed the line of professionally appropriate conduct.

We must all be vigilant guardians of our children.

Abuse of an athlete can take many forms, ranging from failing to act to prevent harm when a dangerous situation is recognized in a sports environment to sexual violence such as when a coach rapes an athlete, with many subtle and not so subtle forms of mistreatment in between. As we learned from recent media coverage of coach pedophiles in respected university programs and private sports clubs, even the most trusted adults may not be what they appear to be. Sexual abuse is almost always by a person known to the athlete who takes advantage of a position of power, is older, or bigger, or intentionally and successfully manipulates an immature or naïve athlete into what appears to be a consensual situation.

How You Can Help

1. **Review “What Every Athlete Should Know About Personal Safety” with your child.** Emphasize the following points:
 - The vast majority of athletes do not find it easy to disclose their concerns. Many are afraid of being criticized by teammates.
 - Many athletes will not question a coach’s behavior because they believe they will not receive instructional attention or be selected for a team or performance group.
 - Some athletes are afraid of being criticized by parents because they think their parents will suggest that they have to be stronger and not complain. While you should encourage your child to speak to you, you should also emphasize that they can go directly to the Club’s Athlete Welfare Advocate, even without telling you. Fear of your reaction should not affect your child’s decision to ask for help.
 - Explain that the sport environment sometimes contributes to an expectation of athlete “toughness” and, as a result, the sport culture urges that we tolerate abusive coaches thinking that it is acceptable behavior for coaches to “push” athletes using almost any means to do their best. Emphasize that this is not acceptable.
 - Explain that while our culture often accepts coach use of profanity, physically pulling athletes into position and other behaviors, these actions would never be tolerated of teachers in a classroom setting.

Talk to your children regarding all inappropriate or abusive behaviors and what they should do if they observe or are subjected to such behaviors.
2. **Be a Vigilant Guardian.** In sport club settings, many parents almost blindly allow the coach carte blanche in the handling of athletes. You must be the guardian of your children, holding coaches to the same standards as any teacher.
3. **Take any Reports of Mistreatment from your Child Seriously.** Don’t respond by telling your child to be “tougher.” Find out the specifics of what occurred. Talk to the Club’s Athlete Welfare Advocate if necessary.
4. **Keep An Eye Out for Abuse and Bullying Indicators.** There are other indicators of abuse that parents and sport leaders need to be sensitive to such as:
 - Unexplained or recurring injuries such as cuts and bruises situated in areas of the child's body that are not normally prone to injury.
 - Physical injury where the explanation given is inconsistent.
 - Unexplained changes in behavior such as a child becoming withdrawn, quiet, aggressive or verbally violent.
 - Inappropriate sexual awareness and/or behaving in a sexualized manner.
 - Disordered eating behaviors such as the athlete overeating or showing a loss of appetite.
 - Excessive weight loss or weight gain for no obvious reason.
 - Physical appearance becomes unkempt.
 - The athlete becomes withdrawn and isolated from the team and seems unable to make friends.
 - The athlete begins to display a distrust of adults.

- The athlete begins to exhibit behavioral changes such as reduced concentration and/or becoming withdrawn, clingy, depressed, tearful, emotionally up and down, reluctant to go to school, training or sports club.
- A drop in performance at school or in the sport.
- Physical signs such as stomachaches, headaches, difficulty in sleeping, bed-wetting, scratching and bruising, damaged clothes and bingeing, for example, on food, cigarettes or alcohol.
- A shortage of money or frequent loss of possessions.

This is not an exhaustive list of indicators and the presence of an indicator cannot be seen to be definitive proof that an athlete is being abused. But your response to such indicators should be further investigation of the possibility that abuse is occurring.

Understand What Our Club Does to Help Prevent Abuse

Please know that the Club is also doing all it can to ensure the safety of your child:

- All coaches, volunteers, and staff undergo criminal background checks and previous employer reference checks before they are hired and allowed to work with children.
- The Club's written policies (1) clearly define coach misconduct, (2) prohibit romantic or other nonprofessional relationships between coaches and athletes, (3) define and prohibit emotional, verbal, and physical abuse, bullying, hazing, initiation rituals, and (4) prohibit all forms of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence.
- Our Club has education sessions for athletes to help them identify inappropriate behaviors and the process to be used to report such behaviors.
- Our Club has an independent "athlete welfare advocate" who athletes know they can go to in complete confidence to help them address concerns.
- Our Club conducts education sessions for coaches, staff and volunteers regarding professional behavior and prohibited behaviors that they must stop if observed by anyone.

Understand Why Confidentiality so Important in the Case of an Abused Athlete?

- Research shows that it may take 15-20 years for an abused person to feel safe enough to speak about the traumatic experience. Thus, every effort must be made to educate young athletes (1) about what constitutes abuse, (2) that abuse is not their fault, and (3) that a safe place exists for them to discuss a traumatic or distressing experience and get help.
- Molesters of children cultivate the silence of the victim through clear instructions to keep the relationship or misconduct secret, making the athlete think he/she will be:
 - embarrassed by disclosure;
 - will be punished by parents;
 - blamed by those in authority who think the coach is more important than the athlete;
 - dismissed from the team;
 - rejected by teammates; or
 - hurt by the withdrawal of benefits (instructional attention, team selection, etc.)
- Most children will not seek the help of the AWA if they think their parents will be immediately informed. Don't take this need for confidentiality personally. The important consideration is that your child feel that there is a safe place to ask for help in thinking through a situation that makes him or her feel uncomfortable.

A Place for Parents to Go For More Help or Information

Safe4Athletes. Go to Safe4Athletes.org or call Safe4Athletes at 1-855-SAFE4AA (855-723 3422) (toll free). Safe4Athletes is a not-for-profit organization that advocates for athlete welfare where every athlete is provided a safe and positive environment free of sexual abuse, bullying and harassment. Parents should feel free to contact Safe4Athletes for more information.

What Safe4Athletes does:

1. Advocates for and helps sports organizations adopt effective policies, procedures and educational programs that prevent coach, volunteer and peer misconduct whether it be sexual, bullying, harassment or other forms of inappropriate behaviors.
2. Assists sports organizations faced with situations involving sexual misconduct, bullying, harassment and other forms of inappropriate conduct on how to handle these situations appropriately and act quickly to restore safe environments for athletes.
3. Is a safe and confidential place where abused athletes, their parents, or others concerned about the impact of coach/volunteer/peer misconduct can call to:
 - talk to other athletes who have been through similar situations;
 - be referred to professional counselors who can provide psychological or other assistance;
 - get advice on how to communicate with their sport organization so appropriate proceedings can be initiated to investigate, adjudicate, and if necessary, remove the offending coach or sport leader from his or her position before others can be hurt; and/or
 - help their sport organizations find model policies, procedures and programs and advice on how to prevent and to deal with such situations.
4. Encourages and helps educate all parents and athletes to be more aware of what they can do to recognize inappropriate coach/volunteer/peer behavior and understand how traumatic the effects of such experiences can be for athletes.
5. Partners with state, regional and national sport governing associations and other national sport organizations to encourage the adoption of legislation mandating that their members adopt strong policies, procedures, and educational programs regarding this issue.

Contact Your Club ATHLETE WELFARE ADVOCATE

If you are unsure about any situation that makes you or your child feel uncomfortable, please call either of the Club's Athlete Welfare Advocates to help you think through the situation and what should be done. Mary Smith, (XXX) XXX-XXXX, Mary.Smith@gmail.com OR John Smith (XXX) XXX-XXXX, John.Smith@gmail.com

We care about the safety and well-being of all of our athletes. We must all be vigilant guardians of our children.

Some of the information obtained contained in this paper was adapted from two primary resources "Definitions of Abuse" as published in Wavepower, Loughborough, Leicestershire, UK: British Amateur Swimming Association, May, 2009 and WomenSport International's brochure on "Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport" retrieved on October 14, 2011 from http://www.sportsbiz.bz/womensportinternational/taskforces/harassment_brochure.htm