

Abuse Avoidance Training for Minors Ages 4-12

Introduction

Sports are supposed to be fun, but on rare occasions, the bad actions of some adults may result in child abuse. Children need to be informed about the different types of and warning signs of abuse, be aware of what situations to avoid to reduce the risk of abuse, and to know when and how to report incidents.

In 2018, Congress passed a new Federal law referred to as “The Safe Sport Act” which requires sports organizations, subject to parental consent, to provide training for minors regarding prevention and reporting of child abuse and a process to allow a complainant to easily report any incident of child abuse to the appropriate persons.

At a minimum, we strongly recommend that parents review this training document and based on your child’s age and maturity level, discuss only age appropriate content contained herein with your child in the privacy of your home.

It is also recommended that parents should view additional training from the U.S. Center for Safe Sport.

What is Abuse?

Abuse is when someone intentionally hurts another person, either physically or emotionally. We will cover the different types of abuse:

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is unwelcome touching or spoken sexual interactions. These may be aggressive or threatening actions. Examples of child sexual abuse include:

- An adult or someone older than a child touching the private parts of a child’s body that a bathing suit would cover, or an adult making a child touch the adult’s private parts.
- An adult showing a child pictures or movies of people without clothes or taking these types of pictures of a child.
- An adult discussing sexual matters with or in front of a child.

Grooming

Adults who sexually take advantage of children groom them by being a friend so the child will like them. They want the child to trust them. Next, bad adults find ways to be alone with the child and they begin non-sexual touching such as tickling or wrestling which gradually turns into touching private parts. Once the sexual touching starts, bad adults want to continue the sexual touching and prevent children from telling an adult by blaming the child or by threatening the child or the child's family with violence. Below are typical grooming behaviors and situations that lead to abuse.

- Abusers pretend to be responsible adults such as coaches and teachers who care about children and win the trust of their child victims and their parents.
- But it is a warning sign when abusers appear to care too much and want to hang out around children too frequently outside of official team practices and games.
- Abusers often offer children gifts, money, special trips to do fun things, babysitting, help with homework, and other favors to be liked and trusted and to spend time alone with them.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is hitting, shaking, choking, burning, pinching, beating, or other methods used to cause pain or injury. A child who is physically abused will likely have cuts, bruises, or other marks on his/her body.

Examples of Physical Abuse

- A coach forcing an athlete with an injury to play before a doctor says it is O.K. to play again.
- A coach or player purposely hitting another player with a bat.
- A coach or player purposely striking a ball against another player.
- A coach or parent denying water breaks as punishment.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is deliberate, non-contact behavior that can cause emotional or mental harm to a child that is repeated over time. Non-contact behavior can be verbal and physical, or the denying a child attention or support. This can mean someone making another person feel worthless, unwanted, or not cared for.

Examples of Emotional Abuse

- A player or players calling another player worthless, an embarrassment, or making fun of them.
- A coach refusing to allow a player to miss a practice for a family matter, or threatening to bench the player in future games if they miss practice.
- A coach throwing equipment, water bottles or chairs at or in the presence of athletes.
- A coach punching walls when the team loses the game.

- A coach or parent ignoring an athlete for extended periods of time.

Bullying is intentionally aggressive physical and/or non-physical behavior repeated over time that hurts, threatens or frightens another person. Bullying can take place both on and off the field. Bullies can be teammates, parents, coaches, spectators, or umpires. Examples of bullying are:

- Several people ganging up an individual team member.
- A coach making an athlete feel like they are not part of the team.
- Fans verbally abusing players from the opposite team by saying mean things.
- Ongoing teasing of an athlete by teammate(s)

Cyberbullying is the use of the internet or cell phones to harass and bully another person. This can be in the form of mean text messages, posting unwanted pictures of someone else on social media, and creating a fake social media account and pretending to be someone else.

Harassment is unwanted behavior that is repeated over time and that annoys, puts down, threatens, or offends someone else. Below are examples:

- An athlete being called bad names by teammates or a coach.
- Teammates or a coach making bad comments about an athlete's gender, disability, religion, race, or sexual orientation.

Hazing is a physically harmful or offensive act that is forced onto someone or someone is forced to do. Hazing often occurs as an initiation for a new member of a team. Examples of hazing are:

- A new player being taped or tied up and forced to stay in a closet.
- A player being forced to drink alcohol or to do an illegal drug.
- Forcing a player to dress or act in an inappropriate way.

Situations to Avoid

- No single child should ever be alone with a single adult other than a parent unless the child has written permission from the parents.
- Parents should be encouraged to be with their child during all practices, games, tournaments, meetings, training sessions, etc.
- Have a child buddy when alone with another adult who isn't a parent. This could be when in a car, a locker room/changing area, or in an individual coach meeting or training session. Otherwise, a second adult should be within an observable distance.
- Do not friend any adult staff member on Facebook, or send private/direct messages to an adult staff member on Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat.
- When communicating by text or email with an adult staff member, make sure that another staff member or parent is always copied on all incoming and outbound communications.

- When spending the night in hotel rooms, boys should be paired with boys and girls with girls of a similar age and an adult chaperone should never spend the night inside the room but should be outside the room but close enough to supervise.
- If an adult gives a gift to a child, the child should always inform their parent or another trusted adult.

What to Do and Who to Tell

If you think that you are being abused, the most important thing you can do is to immediately tell someone you trust. Do so even if the person hurting you tells you that something bad will happen if you tell anyone. You should immediately tell your parent or guardian. If you can't trust anyone at home, talk to someone at school like a teacher, counselor, or school nurse. A family friend, pastor or neighbor can also help.

No matter what, abuse is never your fault and you don't deserve it. It's normal to feel upset, angry, and confused when someone hurts you. But don't blame yourself or worry that others will be angry with you. Even if you think you've done something wrong, that does not make it okay for someone to hurt you. All kids deserve to have adults in their lives who love and support them as they grow up.
