



SMARTTEAMS
SMART TEAMS PLAY SAFE

Child Abuse and Neglect in Youth Sports

*A Guide for Parents and Coaches
Including Reporting Instructions*



SMARTTEAMS
SMART TEAMS PLAY SAFE

Table of Contents

Check Your Knowledge	3
Types of Abuse and Neglect	4
Effects of Abuse and Neglect	5
Warning Signs of Abuse or Neglect	6-7
What to Do if You Suspect Abuse or Neglect	8



SMARTTEAMS
SMART TEAMS PLAY SAFE

Check Your Knowledge About Abuse in Sports

Please place a checkmark next to the statements that you think are abuse or neglect:

The coach hits a player when they mess up a play.

In return for private instruction, the coach forces the player to perform sexual acts on him.

After the team loses a game, the coach ignores some of the players at practice the next day.

The coach screams at the players for not trying hard enough.

The coach throws equipment at a player.

Although the player has a sprained ankle, the coach demands that he continue playing.

During an overnight trip for a competition, the coach lets players watch pornography in his hotel room.

The coach does not let the players get a drink during practice because he doesn't think they are trying hard enough.



Types of Abuse and Neglect

All of the statements on the previous page are examples of abuse or neglect, so if you placed a checkmark next to all of them, you are correct. If you missed any, please especially consider reading on.

Abuse can occur in several forms and is centered on power, especially the power of the coach over the athlete. The following information should help you identify abuse or neglect, though it is not a complete list of behaviors that are considered abuse and neglect:



Emotional Abuse

Name calling, insulting, shouting, belittling, threatening, humiliating, scapegoating, ignoring, rejecting, bullying, taunting, shunning, isolating, denying



Physical Abuse

Slapping, hitting, shaking, throwing equipment at or near a player, kicking, pulling hair or ears, striking, shoving, grabbing, hazing, punishing "poor" play or rule violations through the use of excessive exercise or by denying fluids



Sexual Abuse

Requesting sexual acts, indecent exposure, fondling genitals, penetration, rape, incest, sodomy, sexual exploitation (prostitution), exposure to or creation of pornographic materials



Neglect in sports

Improperly treating injuries and forcing injured athletes to play, inadequate equipment, lack of supervision during overnight trips, allowing bullying or hazing by teammates

Key points to remember:

- Different types of abuse often occur at the same time; for example, while physically or sexually abusing a child, an adult often emotionally abuses them as well
- Both boys and girls can be victims of abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse, and both male and female coaches can be perpetrators.
- There are no excuses for abusing or neglecting a child.
- **Abuse and neglect are NEVER the child's fault.**

We urge you to discuss this information with your child in an age-appropriate way so that they are aware of what counts as inappropriate treatment.



Effects of Abuse and Neglect

Abuse and neglect can have long lasting and persistent negative effects on the child. In general, these may include:



Health and physical effects:

- Bruises, burns, cuts, broken bones
- Longer-term effects of brain damage and permanent disabilities
- Impaired physical development
- Sexually Transmitted diseases (sexual abuse specifically)



Effects on intellectual and mental development:

- Lower academic achievement and poorer school performance



Emotional, psychological, and behavioral consequences:

- Low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), impaired attachment, eating disorders, mistrust of others, poor peer relationships, difficulty regulating emotions, self-harming behavior, including cutting and suicide attempts, suicide
- An increased risk of violent behavior, juvenile delinquency, involvement in crime in adulthood, and substance abuse



Effects on sports performance

- Training effects, such as changes in motivation and reduced enjoyment (possibly leading to burnout and quitting sports), impaired focus, and difficulties with gaining new skills
- Performance effects, such as diminished performance



Warning Signs of Abuse or Neglect

The following is a list of possible warning signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of any one warning sign does not automatically mean that the child is has been abused or neglected, and some warning signs overlap between types of abuse.



Possible warning signs of emotional abuse:

- ! Being more compliant and/or seeking affection more than usual
- ! Low self-esteem and/or low self-confidence
- ! Severe or sudden depression, anxiety, or aggression
- ! Difficulty making or keeping friends
- ! Delayed physical, emotional, and/or intellectual development
- ! Headaches or stomachaches with no medical basis
- ! Caregiver (or coach) who belittles the child, denies love or attention, and seems unconcerned about the child's problems or well-being
- ! Avoidance and/or fear of specific situations or people



Possible warning signs of physical abuse:

- ! Frequent or unexplained injuries, such as bruises, scratches, , fractures, broken bones, bites, cuts, black eyes, and/or burns
- ! Explanations for injuries that do not make sense
- ! Specific patterns of burns, bruises, or other injuries that may suggest the use of an instrument or inappropriate physical contact
- ! Cigarette burns anywhere on the body
- ! Aggressive, disruptive, and/or destructive actions
- ! Abuse of pets or other animals
- ! Passive, withdrawn, and robot-like behavior
- ! Fear of going home or seeing parents or fear of participating in sports
- ! Injuries that appear after a child has not been at school or sports practice for several days
- ! Questionable clothing that may cover injuries to arms or legs



Possible warning signs of sexual abuse:

- ! Sexually-transmitted diseases
- ! Genital injuries, perhaps suggested by bloody underwear
- ! Pregnancy
- ! Trouble sitting or walking
- ! Child suddenly does not want to change for gym or practice
- ! Fear of washrooms, locker rooms, or closed doors, or fear of being alone with adults of a certain sex
- ! Nightmares and/or bedwetting
- ! Child attaches quickly to new adults they come into contact with
- ! Knowledge of sexual relations or sexual behavior outside of what is reasonable for a child's age
- ! Sexual abuse of other children and/or sudden interest in sex disproportionate for a child's age
- ! It is important to note that sexualized behavior in children is the result of sexual abuse, not its cause
- ! Quitting the team or being reluctant to return to the sports activity
- ! Sleep disorders
- ! Changes in appetite
- ! Running away
- ! Reluctance to talk
- ! Frequent vomiting
- ! Falling grades



Possible warning signs of neglect (in an athletic context):

- ! Poorly maintained or unsafe equipment
- ! Evidence of unsupervised overnight trips; for example, athletes tell stories of going off by themselves for an inappropriate reason, amount of time, etc.
- ! Injuries that are not taken care of or exacerbated by repeated use without time to heal



SMARTTEAMS
SMART TEAMS PLAY SAFE

What to Do if You Suspect Abuse or Neglect

If your child tells you that he or she is being abused or neglected, you should:

- Take them somewhere where they can talk freely
- Listen, believe, and support your child
- Reassure them continuously and speak on a level that they can understand
- Make sure they understand that what happened is ***not their fault***
- Contact their pediatrician or other medical provider right away

Note:

The law requires every person to make a report if you suspect child abuse or neglect. To make a report of abuse or suspected abuse, contact the Department of Family and Protective Services (CPS) or your local law enforcement agency.

Department of Family and Protective Services

You do not have to investigate or be certain that abuse has occurred; you only have to suspect its occurrence.

- **If your report is an emergency, Call 911** or your local law enforcement agency.

Source:

Brooke de Lench HOME TEAM ADVANTAGE: The Critical Role of Mothers in Youth Sports (Harper Collins)