

Protecting Youth Athletes from Sexual Abuse

Key Actions for Leaders

Youth sports leaders can establish policies to help keep athletes safe from abusers. Those who would abuse children *tend to avoid organizations that have a visible policy and action plan to protect kids and report suspected abuse.* This document, and [accompanying video](#), is designed to give you *practical ways to discourage child predators from engaging in your organization.*

You can't identify child predators by how they look. The key is to pay attention to behavior.

Common warning signs of sexual abuse by coaches:

- Giving individual players special gifts
- Spending extra time (by phone/email/text/in person) with individuals outside of official practices/games
- Keeping secrets or telling players not to share their conversations or activities with their parents

What can you do as a leader of a youth sports organization?

- Ensure that every coach and parent watches our eight-minute video, *Protecting Youth Athletes from Sexual Abuse*, annually so they know how to protect their child from sexual abuse.
- Officially adopt the **Child Abuse Prevention Policy** developed by PCA and Kidpower (or equivalent policy). This policy, which you can modify to fit your circumstances, can be found at devzone.positivecoach.org/resource/article/youth-sexual-abuse-prevention-policy-procedures
- Post the policy on your website, and review with coaches and parents annually.
- Prohibit coaches and volunteers from being alone with individual athletes (including in cars), except in an emergency. Individual instruction should occur in a public setting where a parent or other adult can observe or drop in at any time.
- Let everyone know that in your organization you will report all suspected abuse to the police.
- Conduct background checks. Background checks are essential, but they are not enough. Data shows that a majority of those convicted of child sexual abuse would not have been identified in a background check.
- Screen for coaches and volunteers who fit with and support the mission and values of your organization.

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- Define and publicize how reports of suspected abuse should be made to the leadership of the organization. Identify the person responsible for following up.
 - Encourage parents to come to you with concerns, and let them know they will be taken seriously.
 - Be ready to have direct conversations with any coaches in question.
 - Follow-up quickly with parents to let them know the specific steps that have been taken to reassure them of their children’s safety.
- Make sure people know how and where to report suspected abuse. Childhelp’s National Child Abuse Prevention hotline is available at 1-800-4-A-CHILD.

Other Resources for Leaders

- Learn more about how youth sports can increase kids’ emotional safety from [PCA](#).
- Learn more about child protection and teaching kids personal safety skills from [Kidpower](#).
- All 50 states require that professionals who work with children report reasonable suspicions of child abuse. Visit www.childwelfare.gov for more information.

