

## MANAGING THE ULTIMATE RISK

Recognizing and addressing sexual abuse and exploitation in youth sports

### PARENTS ARE THE PRIMARY ADVOCATE

- Parents must be willing to speak up when they have concerns
- Speaking with the coach directly is far more important than talking with other parents on the sidelines
- Formal risk management is a SECOND line of protection

### ASSUMPTIONS

- Background checks are inadequate protection for children IF they are the only form of risk management OR if they are relied upon to eliminate sexual predators from your program
- Sexual offenders leverage the needs of parents and children. Where sports success is considered all-important, offenders see opportunity.
- Some claims arise not out of the actions of predatory adults, but out of failing to recognize and manage needy, boundary-less children.

### RECOGNIZING THE PERPETRATOR

- Who is their target?
  - Vulnerable children
  - Unsupervised children
  - Children upon whom they have become fixated or obsessed, generally from afar
- What is the risk?
  - Surreptitious sexual contact (frottage)
  - Sexual assault, including penetration
  - Soliciting sexual acts or stimulation
  - Violent conduct up through abduction and homicide
- Pedophile: Fixated and seductive
  - Seeks or creates opportunities for access to children

- Has tremendous aptitude for identifying children's needs and vulnerabilities
- Highly manipulative
- Generally seeks certain profile of victim
- May initially attain gratification simply by proximity
- Creates "special" relationships
- Prolific

#### ➤ Regressed Sex Offender: The Known, Trusted Adult

- Intrafamilial or similar
- Regressive conduct
- Impulsive, immature, egocentric individual
- May be associated with drug or alcohol use
- Generally has a sexual partner available
- Largely heterosexual behavior
- Serial sexual abuse
- Mixes nurturance and sexuality
- Shame and compulsion are common

#### ➤ Identification

- "Secrets" between coach and player
- Coach shows particular, notable, and intense interest in several children
- Coach gravitates towards children with troubled home lives or poor social acceptance by peers outside of soccer
- Children who do not keep secrets or challenge the coach are described as "outsiders", chided or ostracized
- Attempts to be isolated with one child
- Repeated comments about the appeal or attractiveness of a child
- Child is withdrawing from normal support network
- Child's attitude toward activity changes, i.e., avoids or gets symptoms

### SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND HARASSMENT

- Who is at risk?
  - Older adolescents and young adults

- What is the risk?
  - Sexual behavior or romantic involvement becomes part of the terms and conditions of participation
  - Tolerating sexual advances becomes a term or condition of participation
  - A "consensual" relationship begins between coach and player

- With regard to consent:
  - If such a relationship develops in your club or program, it implies the consent was between the player, the coach and the organization

#### ➤ Quid Pro Quo Harassment

- A player is told or it is implicit that playing time, team membership, recommendations, support or other sport-related benefits will be enhanced, improved, withdrawn or withheld in any manner relative to an intimate or sexual relationship.

#### ➤ Indicators

- Coach discloses intimate or personal feelings or emotions to the player
- Coach seeks personal intimacy with the player
- Coach "courts" the player
- Coach responds in kind to seductive behavior
- "Special" relationships and secrets, i.e., us versus them mentality
- Coach makes physical contact excessively or disproportionately with one player
- Openly states of appropriateness of "dating" players

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE RISK

- There is no simple way to analyze the degree of risk
  - Ask questions
  - Gather more data
  - Avoid gossip and cavalier statements

- Assess the conduct and demeanor of the players
  - Get involved
- Protection
- Check references, thoroughly
  - Challenge age group preferences if the adult is not a parent
  - Involve a parent in team management in the case of non-parent coaches
  - Question expansion of the coaching relationship into other contacts. Explore the relationships.
  - Establish policies for communication and enforce them.
  - Do not be afraid to ask for information, references or background.
- Prevention
- Let players know that they will be supported for seeking help with anything that makes them uncomfortable as a part of their participation
  - Assure that there are multiple avenues of support
  - Exit interviews for any players that without explanation
  - Strict prohibition of any sexual or romantic relationships between adults and youth
- Identifying issues
- Child's symptoms are most likely to lead to concerns
  - Generally no behavioral indicators on part of offender or behavioral change has plausible basis
  - Symptoms will include depression, avoidance, nightmares, fears, acting out, simulating the conduct or precocious behavior, self-harm or withdrawal
  - Children fear "telling" will mean loss of loved one, loss of affection or punishment for them. Often think no one will believe them.
- What of you have concerns?
- Insert a "safety net" into the situation; find an adult to share responsibility
  - Monitor closely
  - Document concerns
  - Ask questions
  - Let the individual know that you have concerns, and why, being sure to address it from the perspective of concern for THEM.
  - Be present. Involvement of healthy, caring adults is the best form of risk management
  - If you are the child's parent, ask your child or ask another trusted adult to talk with them, normalize your question by saying, "sometimes, kids feel..."
  - If you are concerned about another parent's child, tell the parent you are concerned.
  - If you are reasonably convinced that there is a problem, contact your local social services intake department to ask for help in addressing the situation
  - You may be mandated to report suspected child abuse and neglect. Check your local and state laws.
- Do Not:
- Jump to conclusions.
  - Use your "gut" for more than an incentive to investigate further
  - Be conclusive or careless in expressing concerns to others.
  - Pull a child or a coach from a situation that may or may not be an issue; get help!
  - Confuse sexual aggression with sexual orientation
  - Attempt to act on impressions gained by stereotypes