

## RISK FACTORS FOR EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, AND SEXUAL ABUSE

There are several abuse risks in youth sports to be aware of, the largest of these being the sense of trust young athletes, as well as their parents, typically give to coaches. Coaches can often serve as “parental figures” for athletes, and the more elite level at which an athlete competes, the higher level of trust they typically place in their coach.

### ORGANIZATIONAL RISKS

- hierarchical systems between coaches and athletes
- performance- or compliance-based rewards
- rules and procedures made without external consultation
- lack of formal procedures for screening, hiring, and monitoring staff
- teaching necessary technical skills through overly-intensive training regiments
- sports which require legitimate touch, such as spotting skills
- lack of allowing individuality within competitive structures
- lack of policy pertaining to parental involvement

### LOCATIONAL RISKS

Some locations are more high risk than others. These include:

- away competitions/tournaments and the sharing of rooms
- being alone with a coach or other adult in a private room
- unsupervised changing or locker rooms

### SPORT CULTURE RISKS

- strict authoritative systems
- clear power imbalances between athletes and coaches or other adults in the sports community
- accepted scopes for athletes’ separation from their peers or parents, in terms of both time and physical training areas
- accepted behavior of secrecy
- the sexualization of athletes within specific sports
- an intense sense of competition/jealousy among team members
- normalized medical neglect like limiting food and water or requiring athletes to train injured
- extreme physical conditioning as punishment
- accepted demeaning comments and belittlement or intentional denial of attention
- Praising athletes by parents, coaches or peers for being able to endure abusive behavior

## EFFECTS OF ABUSE IN SPORTS

Numerous studies have outlined the harm done to minors who have been victimized. The effects of such harm are long-ranging, often continuing into adulthood. Some examples include:

- Depression/suicidal ideation
- Anxiety
- Poor self-esteem
- Substance abuse
- Self-destructive behavior

