

Combating Sexual Abuse of Participants in Youth Sports

*Prepared on Behalf of the
USA Track & Field (USATF)*

Youth Sports Organizations (YSOs)

Existing in every state and locality, YSOs support area youth and promote:

- Healthy activity
- Athletic skills
- Social development
- Community networking
- Positive values

Unfortunately, YSOs are a Target for Child Predators

Youth sports organizations offer an inviting situation for those who seek opportunities to victimize children.

Sports training often utilizes a hierarchical power structure, with adults in positions of authority, and participants expected to follow directions precisely and without question.

Predatory Pedophiles Will Seek the Most Vulnerable in a Group of Children

“I've actually stood with predatory pedophiles outside one-way glass in a daycare center while they picked out which kids were most vulnerable as targets. No conversation with the kid; they just picked the vulnerable ones out by watching their interaction with other kids.”

- *Andrew Vachss*

The Nurturing Mission of YSOs Attracts Predators

“What creates that vulnerability? Predatory pedophiles spot the unbonded child. The child most at risk for victimization is the child not bonded deeply to anything or anybody.”

- *Andrew Vachss*

Predators Will Seek to Enter a Child's Circle of Trust

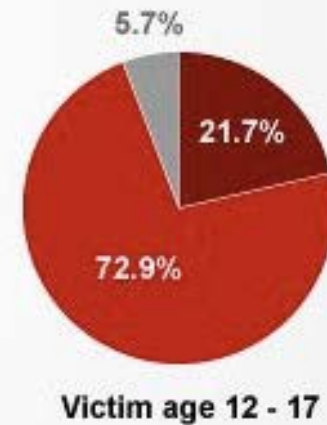
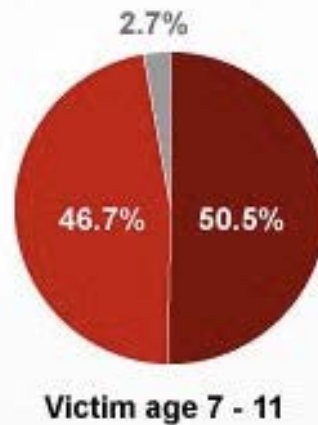
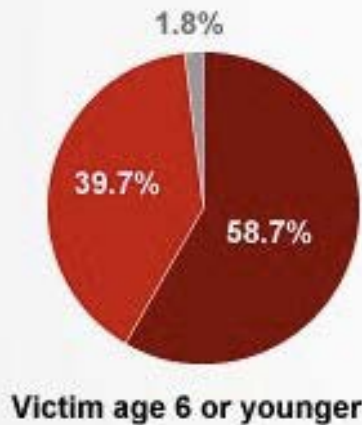
The overwhelming majority of child sexual abuse is not committed by strangers. Most child sexual abuse takes place within the child's **Circle of Trust**, starting with parents and radiating outward to teachers, coaches, pastors, daycare workers, etc.

Most child predators are not strangers, but within the Circle of Trust

WHO ARE THE OFFENDERS?

Across a variety of age ranges, the percentage of sexual assaults against juveniles by strangers was relatively low.

- Family member
- Acquaintance
- Stranger



SOURCE: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Statistical Briefing Book, 2008 | Numbers may not add up to 1,000 due to rounding.

YSOs Constitute a Way for Child Predators to Enter the Circle of Trust

Predators who have entered a child's Circle of Trust access their victims through a process of entrustment by parents/guardians, who look upon the interaction as providing a special experience for their children.

Predators may focus on physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, or any combination of abuse.

Tactics Used by Child Predators

Once inside a child's Circle of Trust, predators commonly use several tactics to approach the victim, including:

- ***Camouflage***: initially acting in an exemplary manner in the role the predator has taken inside the Circle of Trust
- ***Grooming***: enticing the victim through special treatment over time, in order to lower the victim's defenses
- ***Institutional Manipulation***: mastering organizational rules in order to exploit lapses and create opportunities to prey on the victim, and later to keep the victim helpless.

YSO Events Can be Exploited by Child Predators

- YSO participants are not always accompanied to events by parents/guardians.
- Unchaperoned travel to YSO events, even far from the child's home, is common practice.
- Parents trust coaches and other adults in a YSO and will allow children to interact and travel to events without much scrutiny.

Growing Public Awareness of Child Predators in the Youth Sports Context

Recent cases of child predators who accessed victims through youth sports include:

International: UK national youth soccer coach Barry Benell, November 2016

US: Second Mile founder/Penn State coach Jerry Sandusky, 2012 (YSO coach)

Park Tudor coach Kyle Cox, 2015 (school coach)

YSO coaches James Bell, Marvin Sharp, Mark Schiefelbein, William McCabe, 2013 (USAG clubs)

Protecting USATF Participants from Child Predators

A Proposal for Best Practices

LEGISLATIVE
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for CHILD
PROTECTION



Developing Goals for Best Practices

The LDICP performed a close analysis of recent child sexual abuse cases involving USA Gymnastics (USAG) club coaches James Bell, Sharp, Mark Schiefelbein, and William McCabe.

The resulting civil suits implicating USAG's organizational response underline the problems resulting from poor procedures. With this lesson in mind, the LDICP developed the following goals for best practices.

Goals for Best Practices

- First and foremost, affirming USATF's paramount goal of protecting participants from victimization by child predators.
- Creating procedures to minimize the ability of child predators to participate in USATF programs and events.
- Responding swiftly and effectively to reports of sexual abuse of USATF participants.

(continued)

Goals for Best Practices

- Empowering USATF shareholders to report sexual abuse to police directly
- Promoting education on child abuse issues and developing open communication among all shareholders, including:
 - Employees
 - Volunteers
 - Participants
 - Parents/Guardians
 - Affiliated organizations

Best Practices: Extending the Background Check Requirement

To curtail predators' opportunities to participate in programs and events, USATF should extend its background check requirement. Presently, when a club applies to the USATF, only the lead coach undergoes a background check . **Every adult who will come into contact with the club's children either during training or during programs should be required to undergo a background check.**

Best Practices: Restricting Adult Access to Participants During USATF Programs

To further reduce the ability of predators to engage with children at USATF programs, **USATF should restrict field and locker area access for a club's adults only to those who have been registered for such access prior to the event. USATF should further require that registration will only be permitted for club adults who already have successfully passed a USATF background check.**

Best Practices: Identifying Unregistered Club Adults During USATF Programs

USATF should issue identification (such as a lanyard license) to club adults who successfully register for a USATF event. The identification must be displayed during the event. This will simplify the identification of an unregistered adult. **If an unregistered club adult violates the restrictions on field and locker area access, USATF should immediately discipline the offending club by suspending its membership.**

Best Practices: Supporting Stakeholder Vigilance at USATF events

Requiring prior registration enables USATF to generate an official list of club adults who may access the field and locker area at an event.

USATF should post the registration list online to allow stakeholders attending the event to immediately verify that all club adults present have been registered. Further, USATF should develop a mobile app to enhance stakeholders' ability to report unregistered adults at an event.

Best Practices: Responding Swiftly and Effectively to Reports of Sexual Abuse

Upon receiving information of sexual abuse of a participant, USATF must report to police and/or state child protective services (CPS) immediately.

Prior to reporting to police/CPS, USATF should not conduct a separate investigation, as doing so will delay USATF's report, and may hinder the investigation conducted by police/CPS.

Best Practices: Empowering USATF Shareholders to Report Sexual Abuse

USATF should train its employees, volunteers, and member clubs on the individual legal duty to report sexual abuse to police/CPS directly.

Merely passing information up USATF's organizational chain does not fulfill the legal duty to report child abuse, a duty that states impose on individuals through mandatory reporter laws.

Best Practices: Empowering USATF Participants to Report Sexual Abuse

USATF should establish and require regular, age-appropriate education for participants on issues of child abuse both generally and within YSOs.

Such education should include information on spotting predatory behavior, including camouflage, grooming, and institutional manipulation.

Best Practices: Sharing Information Among USATF Stakeholders

In addition to expanding the background check requirement, applicants should be required to consent to USATF sharing with its stakeholders any information relevant to child abuse or victimization uncovered by the background check.

Combating Sexual Abuse of Participants in Youth Sports

A Proposal for Legislative Change

Laws Concerning Child Sexual Abuse in the YSO Context

The LDICP performed comprehensive research on present laws impacting cases where children are abused while participating in YSOs. The LDICP produced 50-state surveys of:

- Background Check laws
- Circle of Trust laws
- Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter laws

Findings from LDICP's Analysis of Child Abuse Laws

The LDICP's analysis of state and federal child abuse laws reveals several problems:

- Some states do not include coaches within the definition of Circle of Trust, effectively reducing the available penalties.
- Mandatory reporter laws vary across states, creating confusion about the duty to report.
- Mandatory reporters who fail to report child abuse are rarely investigated or penalized.

Legislative Proposal: Include Coaches in Circle of Trust Enhancement Laws

USATF should support increased penalties for predatory pedophiles who use YSOs to enter a victim's Circle of Trust. At present, many states do not include coaches within the definition of Circle of Trust predators.

Adding coaches, trainers, and YSO staffers (both paid and volunteer) to the Circle of Trust laws will effectively increase the penalty for abusing children who participate in youth sports.

Legislative Proposal: Expand Mandatory Reporter Laws

USATF should support expansion of state laws that require certain adults to report suspected child abuse. The definition of mandatory reporters varies widely across states.

State laws requiring all adults who work in YSOs to report child abuse to police/CPS will clarify public policy. Further, increasing oversight and penalties for failure to report will increase the effectiveness of child abuse investigations.

Legislative Proposal: Increase Sanctions for Failure to Report Abuse

USATF should support increased sanctions for failure to report abuse. At present, enforcement of mandatory reporter laws by the states is poor; sanctions are rare.

Creating federal legislation that penalizes failure by individuals or organizations to report child abuse will bring increased resources to mandatory reporter oversight. Penalties should include exposure to civil liability.

Changing Laws for Lasting Change

“Predatory pedophiles study children as carefully as any psychologist, and their camouflage is our unwillingness to see them. To protect our children, the answer is simple: raise the stakes. We must increase the incarceration of offenders, and we must develop tools to support effective abuse investigations.

“Some predatory pedophiles will be deterred, and children will be spared. Some will not, and the enhanced penalties will keep them away from victims for much longer periods of time. Either way, we will benefit.”

- *Andrew Vachss*