Abuse and Misconduct in Youth Sport Organizations

MICHELLE PETERSON

PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF

MICHELLE PETERSON CONSULTING
Agenda

- What abuse we are seeing in sports today
- Statistics on abuse in youth sports
- Offenders and victims-path to abuse
- Why youth sports
- SafeSport
- Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and SafeSport Authorization Act 2017
- Best Practices for Youth Sport Organizations
- What to do if you have an incident
Types of Abuse in Youth Sports

- **Emotional Abuse**: sustained and repeated pattern of non-contact behavior that attacks an athlete’s emotional development and sense of self-worth. Emotionally ill-treatment of an athlete by a coach with the potential to be harmful. This behavior will make the athlete vulnerable to future physical and sexual abuse. Verbal attacks-degrading-excluding-belittling-ignoring-

- **Physical Abuse**: contact or non-contact behavior that results in, have the potential to, or threaten to cause physical harm to an athlete-hitting, punching, kicking..

- **Child Sexual Abuse**: A child is sexually abused when they are forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This doesn't have to be physical contact and it can happen online.
• **Sexual Harassment** - is creating an inappropriate or hostile environment with inappropriate sexual behaviors. Unwanted often persistent, sexual attention. Sexual contact, comments or behavior.
**Bullying**: When there is an imbalance of power and the person with the power uses coercion, intimidation, and dominance to **control or harm** a weaker, smaller, less talented athlete. To be habitually cruel. Intention, persistent or repeated pattern to cause fear, humiliate or physical harm.

**Hazing**—actions whether physical, sexual, verbal, mental, emotional, or psychological which subjects another person or group to, voluntary or involuntary, with a result that has the intended or unintended effect of abusing, mistreating, degrading, humiliating, harassing, or intimidating the person who may be younger, weaker or have less power.
Abuse Statistics

- 1 in 4 girls (1 in 3) girls and 1 in 6 (1 in 5)(1 in 20) boys will be a victim of sexual abuse before the age of 18
- Nearly 70% of all reported sex assaults are committed against kids
- 73% of sex abuse child victims don’t tell
- 1/3 of all sex assaults are peer to peer abuse
- 90% of child abusers do not have a criminal history or SOR
- Females commit 14% of the cases with males victims and 6% female
- False allegations 4 to 8% - divorce cases/custody dispute or adolescent
Abuse Statistics for Athletes

- Before age 18, between 6% - 13% of competitive athletes experience some form of sexual abuse or assault within their sport. That's as many as 1 out of every 8 athletes.

- Studies show 2% to 8% of athletes are victims of sexual abuse in sport.

- Elite athletes are at higher risk.

- Boys and girls are both at risk.
Abuse Statistics for Athletes

- In a study of 159 cases of sexual abuse occurring in sport revealed the perpetrators were coaches, teachers or instructors in 98% of the cases.

- Involvement in youth sports increases risk of abuse: Club level youth athletes have a 1 in 4 chance of being abused in sport. On a team of 20, 5 are at risk.

- One in five coach firings is linked to sexual misconduct.

- More than 80% of sexual abuse cases occur in one-adult/one-child situations.
Sexual violence against children in sports and exercise: a systematic literature review 2018

- Sexual violence against children in sports is prevalent
- Girls more often—neither disclose
- Minority groups higher risk
- Athletes at higher levels of competition are more vulnerable for grooming
- Coach is often seen as the perpetrator-peer athlete abuse may precede coach/athlete
- Sports is an ideal environment for sexual abuse since it is seen as a “sacred” part of the culture and consequently suspends social norms.
○ 323 cases of sexual violence in sport found that 77% of the perpetrators were male coaches aged 31-50 years.
○ 159 cases of sexual violence in sport found 98% perpetrators were coaches, teachers or instructors.
○ This study assumes that the prevalence of sexual violence against children in sport is very high and there is variability across different social- and geographical as well as sport – settings.
○ 17.2% of females have experienced sexual violence in organized sports as children. 10.2% for boys. (under reported by males)
Types of Offenders

- **Pedophilia**
  - Fantasies, urges, or behaviors that are recurrent, intense, and sexually arousing and all of which involve prepubescent children, generally age 13 or younger.
  - *Finds victims in youth serving organizations*
  - Cold blooded predators—own needs and desires—no love

- **Situational or Opportunistic Offender**
  - Did not plan on offending but driven by impulse control and immediate gratification
Offenders

**Child Molester**
- Defined as a significantly older individual who engages in any type of sexual activity with individuals legally defined as children
- Often finds victims in youth serving organizations

**Adolescence Sex Offender**
- Defined as any male or female between the ages of 12 and 17 who commits any sexual act with a person of any age against the victims will, without consent, or in an aggressive, exploitive, or threatening manner.
Characteristic of an Offender in a youth sport organization

- 95% are known to the victim and to you
- Most likely a coach—position of trust
- 90% to 96% are male—Heterosexual, often married with children
- Adolescent (1/3)
- Normal to high intelligence—kind, friendly, helpful—high functioning
- Abnormal interest in children—time spent
- Dedicated, committed—on BOD—in Admin
- May want to exclude adults or parents
- Finds ways to be alone with an athlete or among kids
- Elite coach came highly regarded—skilled at the sport
- Likes control—power
Grooming

- Targeting specific kids for special attention, activities, or gifts.
- Slowly isolating a kid from family members and friends: physically and emotionally. **one-on-one interactions (sleepovers, camping trips, day activities, etc.),** or undermining relationships with parents and friends to show that “no one understands you like I do.”
- **Gradually crossing physical boundaries.** Full frontal hugs that last too long, making kids sit in their laps, “accidental” touches of private areas – In some cases, offenders have engaged in partially clothed tickle sessions, showered with kids, or slept in the same bed with them.
- Encouraging a kid to keep secrets from family members. The shame and fear associated with child sexual abuse make it easy for offenders to enforce secrecy in this area as well, keeping abuse “just between us.”
Path to Abuse

- 1) Targeting the victim
- 2) Building trust
- 3) Isolating the Athlete
- 4) Initiation of sexual abuse and securing secrecy
Targeting the Victim(s)

This involves finding a victim:

- Low self-esteem - Emotional neediness - Male or female
- Un-involved parents - Single parent
- Parental attitudes toward sex and prevention methods
- High performers - elite athlete - sacrifices all dedication
- Weak relationship with parents
- Strong devotion to coach and sport - will do anything
- Low awareness to sexual abuse or sex
- Passionate - will to do anything for the sport - hard working
- In a family who is uneducated on offenders - Family who is dismissive of signs
- Family who likes the coach and is friends with him allows closeness and are passionate about athlete future.
Building Trust

- **Gathering information;**
  - Learning everything about the family, athlete and the organization and becoming a trusted individual.
  - Drive kids to practice? Need a father figure? Need money, equipment?
  - Coach is helpful to club- takes on BOD roles...etc.
  - Cheer leader for the kid- never seen a kid play like this?
  - Future for the kid- D1
  - Families need him- teammates need him
Isolating the Athlete

- By using this “special” relationship with the athlete, parents and YSO, the coach will begin isolating the athlete.
  - Driving alone - Ok with parents
  - Traveling-alone – ok with parents
  - Babysitting/ tutoring/private lessons
  - Hotel rooms-tutoring-private lessons
  - Movie nights, games, activities
  - Drugs, alcohol and secrets
  - Shows “love” neediness
  - Coach claims; Unique and special relationship where athlete is appreciated in a way that others, not even parents can provide or understand
Initiation of the sexual abuse

At a stage of sufficient emotional dependence and trust, the offender progressively sexualizes the relationship.

- Verbal- jokes, body comments, sex talk
- Pictures, video, porn, sexting
- Creating times when nudity happens- swimming, travel, locker rooms, hotel rooms
- The offender uses curiosity and stimulation to advance sexual acts
- This creates another aspect to the relationship
- This takes the dynamic to a whole new level
Secrecy

- Once the sexual abuse is occurring, offenders commonly use secrecy and blame to maintain the athlete’s continued participation and silence;
  - Now the athlete is entangled—how could I have let this happen
  - Feels responsible
  - No one will believe me
  - You will be off the team
  - I will go to jail, I will kill my self
  - A bond is formed through secret and lies
  - Afraid to end the relationship—emotional and material needs
  - The loss of the relationship and the consequence of exposing it will humiliate and render them even more unwanted
Why clubs think they are safe from misconduct

- Our kids would talk
- Parents will tell - Parent and other adults look the other way - silence - athletic future
- Clubs believe they know their coaches - We need him
- Clubs believe background checks will catch them
- Clubs believe I would see it and recognize an offender
- Our policies are sufficient
- It doesn’t happen in this sport
- He is on the BOD and everyone loves him
- He is great with kids and loves kids - devoted to kids
- Our kids are tough and would stop the abuse
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<th>Why Youth Sports?</th>
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<td><strong>Over 40 million kids participate in private youth sport clubs nationally</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Youth serving organizations can be a hunting ground for perpetrators especially those organizations with their guard down</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Study in 2003 found 15,000 registered sex offenders working in youth sports organizations</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Concerns among experts that offenders are moving from the Catholic churches and boy scouts to youth sport organizations. Being prepared, educated and trained in abuse prevention is key</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Many youth sport organizations refuse to acknowledge the risk associated with youth sports and believe screening is all they need for protection</strong></td>
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Why Are Club Sports Vulnerable to Abuse?

- Victims are usually emotionally linked with their abusers and these abusers are often authority figures and not often questioned.

- Sports stakeholders (e.g., athletes, parents, coaches, admin) who are uninformed or poorly informed about sexual abuse prevention policies and procedures or characteristics of an offender.

- Local-level sports franchises that are unaware of prevention measures implemented by their national or regional organizations.

- Administrators who are unaware or have difficulty implementing prevention policies and procedures and who lack the training and resources about child sexual abuse prevention. YOU NEED AN EXPERT.

- Ambiguity of appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

- A subculture which normalizes harassment and exploitation.
Why Do Child Athletes and Other Stakeholders Remain Silent About Sexual Abuse?

- Disclosing sexual abuse can be traumatic and stressful for child victims and their families. Fear of being punished by the coach.
- Children may have been threatened with harm if they disclose, fear they will not be believed or concerned administrators will believe coaches over athletes.
- Other obstacles to disclosure include:
  - Tendency to minimize victims' problems, blame the victims and challenge their credibility.
  - Acceptance of inappropriate behavior is seen as a part of sports culture.
  - Behavioral boundaries between coaches and athletes have not been made clear.
  - Parents' and coaches' fears of making false accusations based on mere suspicion without evidence.
  - Not having the necessary skills to recognize sexual abuse.
What is a Youth Sport Organization to do?
SafeSport

- Launched in 2012 to recognize, report, respond, and prevent abuse and misconduct in all 47 NGB sports.
- All 47 NGB’s and Paralympics should all adhere to the same SafeSport policies
- Support should come from NGB’s down to the State to the local clubs. Requires participation for membership/benefits
SafeSport

- To **prevent know offenders from joining** our programs and to deter offenders that have not yet been caught.
- To **protect our participants** be creating an environment that puts the potential offender at risk and deters them from becoming involved.
- To **prevent negligence** and help in insulate NGB’s and its Affiliates and local programs and volunteers from liability.
SafeSport

- Policy and Procedures
  - Appropriate rules around coach and athlete conduct
- Education and Training
  - On-line training for all those who spend time with kids
- Screening
  - Screen those who come into contact with athletes
- Reporting
  - All are mandated reporters—a process for reporting
- Responding
  - Neutral investigations
- Monitoring and Supervision
  - Is this working? Accountability
Have to do something because....

Create your own polices with the assistance of an expert or prevention organization.
SafeSport Authorization Act of 2017

- Signed by the President February 2017
- Help protect and prevent sexual abuse in youth sport organizations
- Creates a **Standard of Care** for youth sport organizations-including those offered by local leagues, churches, schools, camps and non-profits.
- Requires:
  - Prevention training
  - Prevention policies-one-on-one
  - Mandatory reporting
SafeSport Act of 2017

- This new law puts all Youth Sport Organizations on notice that child sexual abuse is a real risk in youth sports, and reasonable steps should be taken to protect your athletes.
Best Practices

- No private texting or email between athlete and coach—include parent
- No one-on-one contact—between coach and athlete— in a car, hotel rooms, homes, travel, tutoring, babysitting, lessons
- Coach and athlete cannot be friend or follow each other on social media
- Locker rooms need to be supervised—coaches don’t dress or shower with athletes, no photos, cell phones
- Rules around physical contact—no lap sitting, tickling, back rubs, rubbing or touching privates, massages, kissing. Open environments.
• Private meetings have in open spaces or include another adult
• No horseplay- rough housing- wrestling-define what is appropriate/acceptable
• No socializing- dinners, movies nothing social alone only as a team
• No sharing hotel rooms coaches with athletes
• Parents cannot opt out of policy and procedures
• No gifts-special favors
• Coaches and athletes cannot date
• Educate all members!!!!
• Athlete advocate
• Put an athlete on the BOD
• Athlete committee
You did everything right but.....
When you have an incident

- Accept it—your clients are the families and kids
- Make decisions that put the athletes/victims first
- Get help—hire an expert to help navigate going forward
- Remove the coach immediately
- Be open and transparent with members/athletes
- Fully cooperate with investigation PD
- Have your own internal investigation
- Communicate—inform members—have meetings—bring in experts—counselors—investigators—child advocates
When you have an incident

- What is your message? From admin-staff-BOD
  - We are proud of our members/athletes for coming forward
  - We fully support those who have suffered and want all to come forward
  - We will investigate this and make sure it never happens again
- Re-evaluate your BOD or any staff who enabled
- Look for high risk situations or environments
- Use this situation as a positive/ market it that way
- Be available –members-media-
- This does not have to end badly
• Thank you for providing safe and fun environments for our kids to learn valuable life lessons, build character and confidence.

• Thank you for also putting your athletes’ safety first and making a difference toward ending child sexual abuse in youth serving organizations.

• Thank you for being a part of the solution!
Thank you!

Michelle Peterson
303-550-0441
michellepeterson00@gmail.com
www.mpetersonconsulting.com