



Champion Coach Note: Recognizing Abuse

April is Abuse Awareness Month. This month, the weekly coach notes will focus on issues pertaining to the recognition, prevention, and handling of incidences of child abuse in sports. Our first note will focus on recognizing signs of abuse.

Coaches provide a positive adult figure in the lives of children. Their purpose is to form a group of young athletes into a cohesive team, by developing individual talent and teaching those individuals to work together toward team goals. The job description of a coach is largely X's and O's, but above anything athletic, a coach's first responsibility is to ensure the safety of the lives they are entrusted with.

Children have the right to enjoy happy, healthy childhoods with loving home lives. Unfortunately, many suffer as victims of physical, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse. For abused children, participating in sports can be a temporary escape from pain they endure outside of sports. Sports can also become an outlet for suppressed emotions and can provide a venue for children to express those emotions, in both positive and negative ways.

As a coach, it is important to be attentive to the signs that a child may display that may indicate he/she is a victim of abuse. These signs include:

- Sudden changes in behavior or athletic performance



"This is slavery: not to speak one's thought."

~**Euripedes**

- Lingering, untreated medical issues
- Physical bruising that persists or gets worse
- A watchful, reserved demeanor
- Being starved for attention, and acting out to garner response
- Being overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn
- Early arrival at and opposition to going home from practice or games

Recognizing these signs is a critical step in stopping child abuse, but it is certainly not the only one. These signs are just red flags for an attentive coach. They do not necessarily equate to child abuse, but they should heighten a coach's awareness of the possibility of abuse in a child's life. Coaches are limited in their abilities to affect a child's life, and they do not necessarily have the right to decide how a child is brought up. Coaches DO have a right AND a responsibility, though, to be a voice for a voiceless child, and speak up about a child enduring abuse.

In the coming weeks, we will explore the ways of moving from recognition to action as it pertains to reporting and stopping abuse.