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Coach Note: What Abuse Looks Like In Sport

Preventing abuse starts with recognizing the types of Abuse and relating those directly to experiences in Sport.

Abuse is defined as any act or failure to act that endangers a young person emotionally or physically. Because of the physical nature of sports, the emotions they arouse, and the poor example that may have been set by their own coaches, coaches must maintain a strict vigilance over their own and others' actions (verbal as well as physical). There are four types of abuse that may occur within the sport environment.

- **Physical abuse** includes any kind of hitting, slapping, pushing, or form of punishment (e.g., running "suicides" until players vomit or cramp up) that causes harm. A Notre Dame research study found 4% of child athletes reported their coach kicked or hit a player.
- **Sexual abuse** includes any kind of touching or observing that violates an athlete's privacy. It also includes showing children inappropriate sexual material or making sexual comments.
- **Emotional abuse** includes verbal and physical actions that humiliate or put down a young person or can harm the psychological well-being of the athlete. Emotional abuse can be quite common in sports. From the Notre Dame study, 11% of children reported that their



April is
Abuse Prevention
Month

On April 26,
Play Like A
Champion is hosting:

**An Abuse Awareness Symposium:
"Championing Children through
Collegiate Summer Camps"**

This inaugural symposium is designed to prepare collegiate athletic programs for hosting summer sports camps which are fun, safe and which promote character development. The Symposium will enable attendees to train camp coaches and counselors in the legal, ethical and psychological dimensions of working with campers. Play Like A Champion staff along with experts in the fields of child advocacy law, social work, and child & adolescent development will lead this interactive symposium to equip athletic departments with the tools to train their staff. Attendees will learn proven techniques of developing character through camps, while building a safe, transparent, fun environment for all.

Read more on our website,
<http://playlikeachampion.nd.edu/college/>

coach made fun of a member of their team. Historically, coaches may engage in verbal abuse as a form of motivation. Although many athletes may become immune to it, verbal abuse is an unwarranted violation of the person and has no place in sports, especially within the Play Like A Champion philosophy of coaching.

- **Neglect** – A failure to respond to athletes' physical and psychological needs. Coaches should be sensitive to possible injuries (especially concussions) as well as illnesses, bullying, and fatigue. A 1995 study by the Minnesota State Amateur Athletic Commission found that 21.5 percent of the respondents said they had been pressured to play with an injury.

Sports cultures provide an ideal breeding ground for child abuse for at least four reasons. First, sports provide opportunities for coaches to form relationships with athletes and to be alone with them. Second, the coach/player relationship is one in which there is a significant power and status differential. Coaches have traditionally operated as strong, assertive authorities, who expect unquestioned obedience. Third, coaches receive an extraordinary amount of child and parent trust, which borders on reverence. Fourth, coaches are often assumed to be moral leaders, who instill the virtues of hard work and loyalty, which are viewed as essential for success in life, so their tactics, although abusive, are tolerated in the name of discipline.

Abuse by coaches has unfortunately been tolerated at ALL levels of sport (professional, college, high school and youth). Coaches must recognize their own tendencies to abuse athletes and be vigilant of other coach's tactics that also constitute abuse.

The time to change a toxic abusive sport culture for all athletes is now.