



USA Federation for Sport Cheering

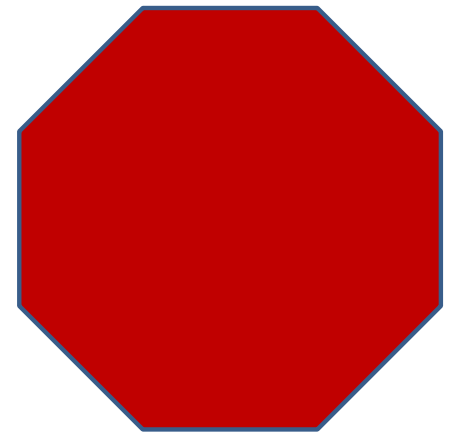
Understanding,
Preventing,
Recognizing
and Reporting
Athlete Abuse

For the Athlete

Parent or guardian permission is required for anyone under 18 years of age to access this training.

It contains mature themes, and they may want to preview the material and go through the presentation with you.

A note to parents: This course contains information about various forms of abuse. This content may be uncomfortable or trigger trauma for some participants.





USA Federation for Sport Cheering

Cheer and dance should be positive and safe environments for everyone. The protection of you - the athlete - and your teammates should be everyone's top priority.

In addition to protection from injury, athlete safety also means protection from various types of misconduct, including sexual assault, sexual misconduct, bullying, and hazing.

This includes barring those who would commit these acts from our sport. But our goal is to keep these acts from happening in the first place.

This course is intended to eliminate these acts by helping you to understand what abuse is, prevent it from happening, recognize when it does happen, and properly report it.

Thank you for your attending the USA Cheer athlete protection training.

USA CHEER

Commitment to Safety

USA Cheer is committed to facilitate training and education for all participants involved with cheerleading surrounding athlete safety. It is the duty of all coaches and staff to ensure and safeguard, to the best of their ability, the welfare and the prevention of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children and young people with whom they come into contact. All parties involved with cheerleading should be both committed and required to understand, recognize and report all athlete abuse and be actively involved in prevention.



What can you do to help?

Coaches and institutions, like schools and gyms, have responsibilities in protecting you from abuse. Those include background screenings, prevention policies, and reporting requirements.

It's important that you are aware of what you should expect from the coaches and programs you are involved with:

- Educate yourself about athlete protection, like you're doing now.
- Follow policies in place outlining expected behaviors.
- Expect consistent accountability when procedures are not followed.
- Look out for "red flags" and warning signs.
- Report concerns to an adult, law enforcement, and/or USA Cheer.



Understand

Understand what abuse is in order to prevent, recognize, and report it.



Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Understanding Athlete Abuse

- Awareness creates an environment where steps are taken to protect athletes from abuse.
- The overwhelming majority of coaches are amazing people who want to help children become the best they can be.
- However, it is important to recognize that youth sports, including cheer, are targets for those who seek out to abuse.
- It is important to recognize that many abusers are very good at hiding their abuse.
- You can help play a role in preventing abuse by being both aware of the possibility of abuse and vigilant in guarding against it, while being knowledgeable to report any potential abuse to the appropriate entities.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Understanding Athlete Abuse

- Abuse is purposely hurting someone with words or actions.
- Abuse can be physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, or a combination of any or all of these.
- Bullying is a form of abusive behavior. Bullying can happen in-person and online.
- Abuse can also take the form of hazing and harassment.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Understanding Athlete Abuse

- No one has the right to abuse you. It is not your fault. You are not alone – there are other kids suffering abuse too.
- Sometimes abusers will attempt to scare or threaten you, so you won't tell.
- It is okay to come forward. There are people who care and want to help.
- If you are being abused, find an adult you trust and tell them.
- Reporting abuse can help stop the current abuse and keep it from happening to someone else.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Understanding Misconduct and Abuse

We're going to cover different types of abuse, then focus on things you should be aware of and what to do in case you or someone you know are the victim of misconduct or abuse.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Sexual Misconduct

- Sexual misconduct is sexual conduct without consent, sexual relationships involving a power imbalance, adult sexual relationships with a minor, and sexual harassment, among others.
- It is never appropriate for a coach to have a romantic or sexual relationship with an athlete. They may make you feel “special” or “older”, but it is not okay. It is abuse and it is against the law. Most people who are abused as minors don’t realize that it was abuse until later in life.
- All sexual contact between a coach and athlete, regardless of age, is strictly prohibited.
- Sexual misconduct is not limited to sexual contact between a minor and adult and includes any non-consensual sexual contact between two persons.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Sexual Misconduct Also Includes:

- Gender or sexual orientation harassment;
- Non-consensual sexual contact;
- Sexualized bullying or hazing;
- A coach asking about an athlete's sex life or discussing his or her sex life with an athlete;
- Sending or requesting nude or inappropriate photos;
- Exposing athletes to pornographic materials.

All of these are abuse and are wrong

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



- Safe vs unsafe touches: There are some touches, like high-fives, that are safe. There are other touches that may come from adults, or other athletes that are not safe.
 - Sometimes in sports a coach or teammate may accidentally touch you in a way that you're not sure about – remember that abuse is intentional or on purpose. Always tell a safe adult about any touch that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable or you just aren't sure about.
- Sexual abuse can happen in different ways: touching, looking, talking about, showing, taking pictures.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Grooming

- “Grooming” is a trick or technique used by people who abuse others.
- The word “grooming” is often used to mean “cleaning up”, like combing your hair or brushing your teeth. Grooming can also mean “getting ready”, the way you would get ready for school or practice by getting dressed or packing your bag. In the same way, sexual abusers “groom” kids they want to abuse by getting them ready to abuse.
- Groomers don’t want to get caught, so they target kids who they think won’t tell or say no. They try to pick kids they think they will someday get a chance to spend time alone with.
- Grooming takes time and can be hard to notice. It often starts off slow so that you don’t notice it is happening and they try to get you to become comfortable with the groomer or the things they’re doing.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Grooming

What kind of tricks does a groomer use?

- Testing Boundaries – jokes, roughhousing, back rubs, tickling, or other games
- Touch – from regular, mostly comfortable non-sexual touch to ‘accidental’ touch of private parts, often over time
- Intimidation – using fear, embarrassment, or guilt to keep someone from telling
- Communicating secretly – texting, emailing, DM's or calling in an unexpected way, especially if the parents don't know about it
- Sharing sexual material – using someone's curiosity to make sexual behavior seem normal by showing pictures, videos, texts, websites, notes, etc. that are sexual
- Breaking rules – encouraging someone to break rules, which helps establish secret-keeping as a part of the relationship and can be used as blackmail in the future; this includes the use of drugs and alcohol

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Physical Abuse

- Physical abuse refers to non-accidental physical harm (or risk of serious physical harm) to a child by an adult.
- Physical abuse may be on purpose or may be the unintended result of physical punishment or excessive discipline.
- Child abuse is against the law.
- Physical abuse includes obvious things like hitting, slapping, punching, shaking, but can also include things like using forced, painful stretching and unsafely forcing performance through injury.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Emotional Abuse

- Emotional abuse can be the most difficult to identify, but it is the most common.
- Emotional abuse happens when you are repeatedly made to feel worthless, unloved, alone, or afraid.
- The impacts of emotional abuse are just as harmful as physical abuse.
- Some examples include physical or social isolation, constant criticism or humiliation, constantly swearing, yelling, or screaming.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Bullying

Bullying is a form of abusive behavior. Bullying someone through intimidation, threats, or humiliation can be just as abusive as physically harming someone. Abuse can also take the form of hazing and harassment.

Bullying behavior can take on a variety of different forms:

- **Verbal** – using words, statements, or insults in a negative way.
- **Physical** – any type of unwanted physical force.
- **Social** – harming others through the manipulation and damage of their peer relationships.
- **Damage to Property** – damaging or threatening to damage an individual's personal belongings.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Cyberbullying

- Technology allows people to say things from a distance, or even totally anonymously. Hiding behind a screen can make people feel empowered to bully, harass, abuse, or otherwise behave badly.
- Any form of technology used to harass, harm, or intimidate can be considered cyberbullying.
- Common methods of cyberbullying include:
 - Sending negative or intimidating messages over text, email, or social media
 - Spreading rumors over the internet
 - Displaying hurtful messages online about another person
 - Stealing account information to post something as another person
 - Taking or sharing unwanted pictures of someone

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Safety Online

- Never post anything online that you would not want others to see, even in a private setting.
- Never share personal information or passwords, even with friends.
- Never send messages when you are upset.
- If someone sends mean, hurtful, or intimidating messages online, do not respond, share this with a safe adult.
- Do not delete inappropriate messages just because someone else tells you to. Show an adult.
- Talk to your parent or another safe adult if you believe a teammate is being cyberbullied.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Harassment

- Harassment is when the words or actions become so severe or are targeted at a specific person so much that it hinders their ability to participate, harms their well-being, interferes with their rights, or intimidates them because of their identity.
 - Bullying and harassment are especially harmful when someone is bullied because of characteristics like race or ethnicity, gender, gender expression or identity, disability, religion, sexual orientation, age, or a person's association with another person or group.
 - Examples of harassment may include: Making negative or disparaging comments about any of the traits above or displaying offensive materials, gestures, or symbols.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Prevent

The primary goal of any program should be to prevent misconduct and abuse from happening



Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Prevent

The program, whether it is a school, gym, or club, should have policies in place that help prevent abuse from happening.

Most of these policies involve screening and education for everyone who comes in contact with athletes, but also includes certain types of limitations on one-on-one contact and coach-athlete communications.

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Prevent

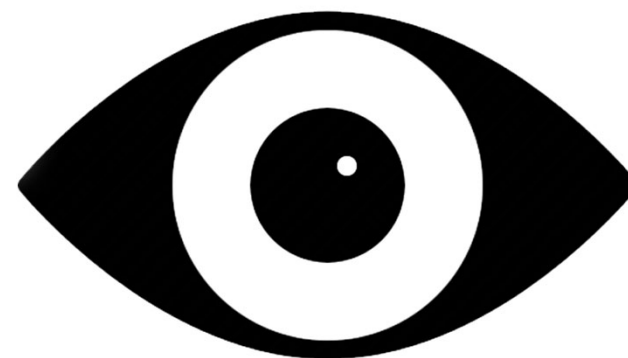
Recognize

Report



Recognize

Recognize when you or someone else is being targeted for abuse so that you can help stop it



Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Red Flags

- ❏ Red flags are warning signs that start going off in your head when something just doesn't feel right. They could be a signal that something is wrong.
- ❏ Sometimes your red flags will go up when someone tries to cross personal boundaries with you.
- ❏ It is okay to tell an adult you must leave if something that feels wrong is happening.
- ❏ In addition to that “feeling” that something isn't right, here are some other “red flag” situations to be aware of.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Red Flags

When an adult or another athlete:

- ❑ Uses mean or abusive words
- ❑ Uses hurtful or inappropriate touches
- ❑ Plays games about private body parts
- ❑ Plays tricks to get you to do something unsafe
- ❑ Asks you to keep an unsafe secret
- ❑ Shows special interest in you or gives you gifts that no one else is getting
- ❑ Tries to get you to use drugs or alcohol

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Red Flags

When an adult or another athlete:

- ❏ Tells you they will get in trouble if you tell or that no one will believe you
- ❏ Tries to use their position as a “famous or important” coach or athlete to pressure you
- ❏ Sends private messages or photos
- ❏ Shows or tells you about inappropriate messages or pictures
- ❏ Asks to meet somewhere alone
- ❏ Offers to drive someone separate from other people
- ❏ Sends messages late at night

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

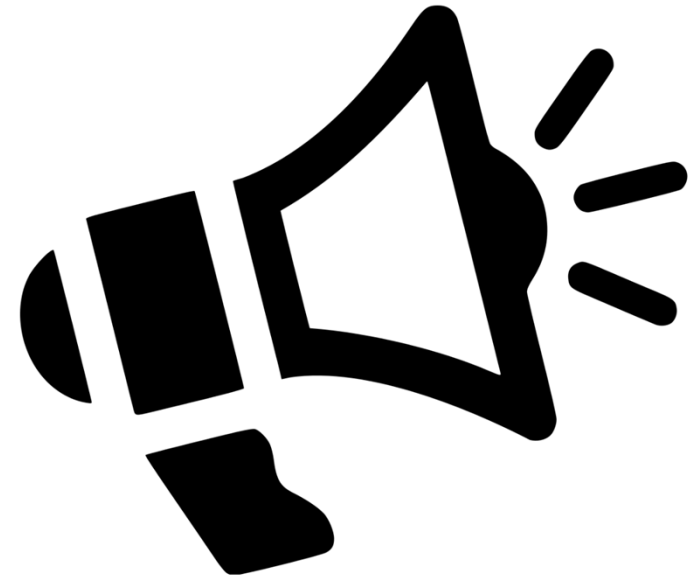
Report



Report

Reporting abuse or neglect is a vital part of protecting yourself and others.

Not reporting abuse allows perpetrators to continue their abuse



Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Report

If any of the “red flag” situations happen, you should absolutely tell a safe adult.



No matter when, where, how, or who hurts you, it is never too late to tell a safe adult. Don't feel like you should have noticed or said something sooner. It's not your fault.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Reporting Sexual Misconduct or Child Abuse

Who do I call?

- **If you or someone is in immediate danger, call 911.**
- Adults have a responsibility to report abuse. You can tell a safe and trusted adult about something unsafe that is happening, or that happened in the past, to get you or someone else help.
- A “safe adult” is an adult you can go to if you feel unsafe, if you have been hurt, or if you’re not sure if a situation is unsafe. Safe adults may be another coach, gym owner, administrator, parent, mentor, school counselor, teacher, law enforcement or other adult you trust.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Reporting for a Friend

- What if your friend has experienced (or witnessed) abuse or inappropriate conduct?
- Sometimes our friends confide in us. They may ask you not to tell anyone what happened. But some secrets require help.
- If you feel uncomfortable talking to an adult yourself, talk to a safe friend and ask them to help you talk to a safe adult. You should never tell a safe friend about being hurt or unsafe **INSTEAD** of a safe adult. It is important that you bring the issue to an adult.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Reporting

- Some incidents need to be reported to police. Ask the adult to make the report to the right authorities.
 - If you're comfortable, you can make the report to the police yourself. Ask a safe adult for help making the report.
 - You can also report to USA Cheer, but know that there must be enough information provided so that we can take the next steps. It's best to tell an adult who can help and get more information if it is needed.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Reporting Sexual Misconduct or Child Abuse

- Adults should also communicate any allegations with program administrators (gym owner, league president, athletics director, etc.) and with USA Cheer immediately.
- Any person, regardless of their membership status or affiliation with USA Cheer, may file a report with USA Cheer for suspected, alleged, or known emotional misconduct, stalking, bullying, hazing, harassment, grooming, and/or retaliation against reporting.
- Reports can be filed at usacheer.org/safesport/safesport-reporting

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Do not be alone with anyone who hurts you. Listen to the gut feeling when it says that what is being done to you isn't right. Find an adult you trust and tell them what is happening. If they don't believe you, keep telling other adults until someone does believe you. If you are too nervous or scared to tell someone you know about the abuse but want to report it to people who investigate child abuse, call 1-800-4-A-CHILD, then press 1.

Understand

Prevent

Recognize

Report



Being a part of a team should be a great experience. You can make lifelong friends, create amazing memories, and learn valuable life skills.

Our goal for athlete protection is that you won't experience any of the things we've talked about in this training.

However, we want to empower you to be able to speak up if you or your teammates experience any kind of abuse so that your experience is a positive one!



Resources

- Additional information and resources:
 - www.childwelfare.gov
 - uscenterforsafesport.org
 - www.stopitnow.org
 - www.cyberbullying.org
 - www.childusa.org



USA Federation for Sport Cheering

Thank you for
participating in the
Athlete Protection
Training for Athletes

