

POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL: ABUSE IN SPORTS

The wheel diagram shows ways abusers in sports use power to gain and maintain control over athletes.



*"Coaches, guardians, and people of influence" is being used to represent a coach, trainer, physical therapist, doctor, physician, parent, or other administrative personnel working within a sport that has access and ability to abuse athletes.

**The Grooming Process in Sport: Narratives of Sexual Harassment and Abuse by Celia Brakenridge and Kari Fasting

MINIMIZING, DENYING, AND BLAMING

- Coaches, guardians, and people of influence can gaslight the athlete by saying the abuse is a part of appropriate athletic training. Coach, athlete guardians, and enablers may argue that the athlete misinterpreted an acceptable form of training as abuse and try to make the athlete believe the abuse was acceptable.
- The coaches, guardians, and people of influence shift the blame onto the athlete for not fighting back, alleging the athlete allowed the abuse, or questioning why the athlete did not report sooner. An athlete's physical strength and athleticism will often be weaponized to cause doubt that the athlete could be a survivor.

COERCION

- Coaches, guardians, and people of influence may use manipulative tactics and persistent boundary crossing to initiate abuse and maintain power and control.
- Coaches, guardians, and people of influence will weaponize personal information against the athlete to gain access and control the silence of the athlete. For example, coaches and athlete guardians may introduce performance enhancers, use disclosed information, or create sexual abuse material of the athlete in order to have something that could harm the athlete if they reported.

ISOLATION

- Coaches, guardians, and people of influence may distance the athlete from their team, friends and family, or other coaches, trainers, and staff in order to eliminate their contact with the people within their life that could hold the coaches, guardians, and people of influence accountable.
- Isolation can be extremely dangerous when the athlete is distanced (especially with travel teams) from their own family and friends. This can happen by the coaches, guardians, and people of influence convincing the athlete that their family does not understand what is best for them, their family does not prioritize their athletic future, or by creating an environment where the athlete has limited time to be with these people.

GAINING TRUST OF ATHLETE & CAREGIVER

- Trust can be gained through different actions that make coaches, guardians, and people of influence seem like a trustworthy person.
- Coaches, guardians, and people of influence will often exploit a child and family's vulnerabilities to groom the child such as offering rides to a single parent family, providing a mobile phone to a family with limited financial means, or acting as an affirming person for a queer youth that is not out to their family. These acts provide an additional dynamic of power and control over the athlete.
- Coaches, guardians, and people of influence may ask the athlete personal questions, as well as disclose personal information, to groom the athlete and develop a false sense of trust and gauge whether the athlete will immediately disclose boundary crossing behaviors.
- The grooming can be furthered by extra physical contact when providing demonstration or fixing the athlete's form. This inappropriate touching can begin by small moments that may initially seem appropriate like congratulating the athlete with a high five, but then escalate to inappropriate physical contact.

THREATS AND REWARDS

- Coaches, guardians, and people of influence may threaten the athlete to have reduced playing time or unnecessarily be placed on the injury list.
- Rewarding the athlete with excessive praise, in front of teammates from whom they withhold praise, can further isolate the athlete from teammates.
- Coaches, guardians, and people of influence may reward athletes for not disclosing by providing additional resources, one-on-one time, or allowing more playing time.

HETERONORMATIVITY, SEXISM, & CISSEXISM

- Coaches, guardians, and people of influence that perform toxic masculinity and/or become emotionally and verbally abusive over mistakes reinforce fear and a power dynamic over athletes.
- Male and masculine survivor athletes often face additional barriers and stigmas when disclosing due to homophobia and patriarchal stigmas that perpetuate the myth that survivors are weak.
- Cisgender male and gender expansive survivors are often silenced due to myths that survivors only identify as cisgender female. Coaches, guardians, and people of influence can exploit this myth to further silence survivors.
- Survivors that identify outside of the cisgender binary and/or identify as trans often experience additional barriers to reporting and disclosing due to heteronormative, patriarchal myths that suggest queer people are hypersexualized or are groomers themselves. Again, perpetrators will often exploit these cultural myths to further silence and gaslight survivors. Additionally, perpetrators may exploit athlete ban policies by reminding queer athletes that they are not allowed to play in other leagues based on their identity.

AUTHORITY

- The coach automatically has authority over the athlete as culture teaches children to respect and listen to adults.
- Perpetrators will often exploit pre-existing power dynamics in order to maintain power and control of athletes.
- Perpetrators regularly reinforce the power dynamic over the athlete through threats of not allowing the athlete's career to move forward or being placed on the injury list, further reinforcing that the perpetrator is the gateway to future successes.

GROOMING

- Grooming often happens over an extended period of time where perpetrators use the previously stated tactics to gain the athlete's trust, reinforce power and control, and make them feel as though they have no exit.
- Providing gifts to the athlete to gain trust, friendship, and further enforcing the athlete is indebted to the person causing harm. The gifts might be something special or unique such as new sporting equipment, 1-on-1 training, or sports memorabilia.
- Giving the athlete special attention that encourages trust between them and isolates them from their team and support.
- Giving excessive encouragement or communicating the athlete's unique abilities can be used as a grooming technique to access one-on-one time with the athlete. Be aware if you notice a person in a position of authority excessively playing into the athlete's dreams of success in the sport.