

RECOGNIZING CHILD ABUSE IN SPORT

The first step in helping abused or neglected children is learning to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is occurring within sport, but a closer look at the situation may be warranted when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination.

Signs of physical abuse

When the child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after a practice or travel with the team
- Seems frightened of any of the staff and protests or cries when it is time to go to practice
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Reports injury by a coach, teacher or any one else within the organization

Signs of neglect

When the child:

- Begs or steals food or money due to neglect or refusal of athletic staff to provide for the athletes
- Has injuries that are not cared for, or is forced to continue with training or competing with an injury
- Reports inadequate equipment for training or competition
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at training or competition that is supervising the athletes
- Alludes to a pattern of hazing or bullying within the team

Signs of sexual abuse

When the child:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior

Signs of emotional maltreatment

When the child:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)

Reporting abuse

If you do suspect a child is being harmed, reporting your suspicions may protect the child. Any concerned person can report suspicions of child abuse and neglect. For more information about where and how to file a report, contact your local child protective services agency or police department. An additional resource for information and referral is the Childhelp® National Child Abuse Hotline (800.4.A.CHILD).