IDENTIFYING EMOTIONAL ABUSE

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“Slowly over time, my thoughts became silent and my dreams were only shared with myself. After a while, I started to believe that there were no choices and it just became easier to stay compliant. Heaven forbid I told anyone.”
What the Brain Says

**INSIDE THE TEENAGE BRAIN**
Adolescents are prone to high-risk behaviour

**Prefrontal Cortex**
- Its functions include planning and reasoning; grows till 25 years
- **Adults** Fully developed
- **Teens** Immature, prone to high-risk behaviour

**Amygdala**
- Emotional core for passion, impulse, fear, aggression.
- **Adults** Rely less on this, use prefrontal cortex more
- **Teens** More impulsive

**Parietal Lobe**
- Responsible for touch, sight, language; grows till early 20s
- **Adults** Fully developed
- **Teens** Do not process information effectively

**Ventral Striatum**
- Reward centre, not fully developed in teens
- **Adults** Fully developed
- **Teens** Are more excited by reward than consequence

**Hippocampus**
- Hub of memory and learning; grows in teens
- **Adults** Fully functional; loses neurons with age
- **Teens** Tremendous learning curve
Stress hormone cortisol is higher in bullied boys, meaning that their stress reaction system is in overdrive, while the girls cortisol is below normal hampering their stress responses.

Victims of children who were severely bullied were found to have significant shrinkage in the corpus collosum. This makes it difficult for victims to process and respond.
Defining Emotional Abuse

Repetitive, non-contact/possibly contact based experience meant to induce fear by exposing the victim to ongoing attacks, meant to belittle or humiliate, and must include an imbalance of power.

Power, Control, and Fear

Sustained Abuse of Power
Criteria for Abuse

- Imbalance of Power
- Repetition
- Intent to induce psychological harm
- Unsolicited/unwelcome
- Acts meant to intimidate
- Underlying threat of harm to body, social, financial or career status
- Intent to create fear

“You don’t get it dear, because you just aren’t that smart.”

“You’re worthless.”

“You’re a waste of my time.”
Positions themselves as first in the life of the athlete. They are coach, parent, doctor, educational advisor and friend.

- Uses "Mine" nd "My" more than "You" and "Us."
- The athlete is treated as a commodity more than a person.
- Relationship is built on fear.
- Ego statements based on the "I" and the talent of the coach, over the talent of the athlete.
Methods of Abuse

- Yelling/Screaming
- Hot/Cold actions to keep the victim guessing
- Name calling/Mocking
- Offhand jokes
- Humiliation
- Using body language to create fear for safety (cornering victim, hitting wall about the head, throwing items)
- Manipulating the victim to keep secrets
- Constant criticism
- Isolation
- Gaslighting

I know what is best for you.

“Let me see if I can put this in simple terms that even you understand.”
Was I Rushing or Was I Dragging?
Common Traits of Abuser Mentality

- Ability to manipulate perception of authorities (Eddie Haskell Effect)
  
  "But officer, I have no idea why she’s crying. All I wanted to do is help."

- Moral Justification
  
  “He needed a little nudge. Now look at how much better he is.”

- Backhanded Apologies
  
  “I know I got a little carried away, but you...”

- Savior mentality
  
  “Before I came along...”

- Gaslighting Mentality
  
  “You are remembering that incorrectly.”

- Uses words of Absolute
  
  “Everyone, No one, Always, Never”

  “I wasn’t yelling. I was helping her understand.”
Common Behaviors of Athletes Emotionally Abused

- Identification of the abuse isn’t recognized by the victim or parents until after multiple incidences have occurred.
- Victim will hide the abuse from friends and family, because of letting people down.
- Victim will often state they are “walking on eggshells.”
- Victim will often state they deserved it or that it’s their fault. They frequently use the phrase, “I should have done better.”
- Will lie to authorities when asked if help is needed out of fear for future retribution.
- Love/hate relationship with the coach

It just became my normal

I couldn’t figure out what I was doing wrong.
Common Statements of Victims

“I always feel I’m walking on eggshells when I’m there.”
“I couldn’t figure out what I did wrong.”
“I’m sorry. It was my fault.”
“I couldn’t tell anyone, because I would look weak.”
“It just became my normal.”
“No one would believe me.”
“I would just let everyone down if they knew.”
“I didn’t want people to worry.”
“She’s right. I am....”

“I just wish I would die.”
Societal Response

- “Why won’t you just stand up for yourself?”
- “Why don’t you just leave?”
- “If that was happening to my kid…”
- “Back in my day.”
- “You need to toughen up.”
- “If they aren’t being hit, I don’t see what the problem is.”
- “It will toughen you up.”

“I don’t see what the problem is. Look how successful he made you.”
Abusive Coaching

- Isolates athlete from parents/friends
- Ignores signs of injury, emotion, and fear
- Relationship is built on fear
- Uses personal attacks, belittling, or degradation as a means of motivation
- Monitors non-gymnastics time such as friends, social time, school, and meals
- Keeps the athlete guessing as to status
- Threatens status of athlete if confronted or if athlete leaves
- Denies basic needs
- Gaslights
- Manipulates and lies when confronted
- Criticism outweighs positive comments

Tough Coaching

- Doesn't dissolve into personal attacks, belittling, or degradation
- Focus stays on sport specific corrections
- Training isn't a zero-sum game
- Athletes look forward to practice even when it's tough
- It's about the athlete, not the coach
- Yelling may occur, but it's not the driver of training
- Build self-worth even when training becomes tough
- Relationship is built on mutual respect
- Respects basic needs
- Seeks to solve problems when questioned

Coaching is based on the brand of the coach

Coaching is based on the experience of the athlete
Phrases to Gain Control

- “If you don’t like it this way you can leave.”
- “I know what is best for you.”
- “You can either have friends or gymnastics”
- “Stop crying and grow up.”
- ”You misheard me. I would never say that.”
- “This is our secret.”
- “Want me to call your mother?”
- “I got you this far.”

A tough coach shapes the athlete and the person.

An abusive coach destroys the person inside the athlete.
We don’t make better children by making them worse.

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