



MOVING FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION: Creating a “Zero Opportunity” Environment Prevents Children From Being Harmed

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Stop It Now!®

Adults are aware of child sexual abuse. It’s taking action that’s the hard part.

If we are going to create a “zero opportunity” environment, where sexual abuse is stopped before it starts, we have to be more proactive about defining what is okay and not okay in our clubs. We need to be prepared to intervene when we see inappropriate interactions or behaviors. And, we need to create an environment where all adults are empowered to act to protect children. When adults work together in these ways, we can create a “zero opportunity” environment.

At all clubs, it is important to clarify what is considered inappropriate behavior. Think intentionally about your club’s stance on matters such as privacy, appropriate touch, and expressing affection. Then, establish “standards of behavior” for staff and volunteers that are designed to ensure only appropriate behavior occurs at your facilities and activities.

Next, educate staff and volunteers about your standards of behavior – why you have them, what they are, and how you will enforce them. Refresh that training annually. Dedicate time to observing interactions during your club’s activities to make sure the standards are being followed. Communicate your standards to parents. They want and need to know that your club has policies, procedures and standards in place to promote a safe gymnastics environment for their children.

Also, we must empower staff, volunteers, parents and other relevant persons who observe interactions or behaviors that concern them to speak up, and this empowerment must happen *before a questionable situation arises so you are prepared to recognize and respond.*

1. Let staff, volunteers, and parents know that your club values their input, and make it easy for them to reach out to the club owner, manager or coach. Be visible in the club, and return phone calls and emails in a timely manner.

2. Encourage staff, volunteers, parents and others not to dismiss questionable interactions or behaviors.

a. While we can’t see or know someone’s intent, we can respond to what we see. Behaviors do not have to be explicitly sexual to elicit concern. Encourage them to move past the point of questioning themselves [“I’m probably just overreacting.” “What can I do? I don’t have any proof.” “What if I’m wrong?”] to the point of speaking up.

b. Give them examples of ways to speak up. Simple sentences are a good place to start. “I think Coach violated a standard of behavior by pulling Mia aside during practice for a private conversation in his office.” “I would prefer that you high-five Sophie instead of hug her.” “Please don’t single Michael out for gifts anymore.”

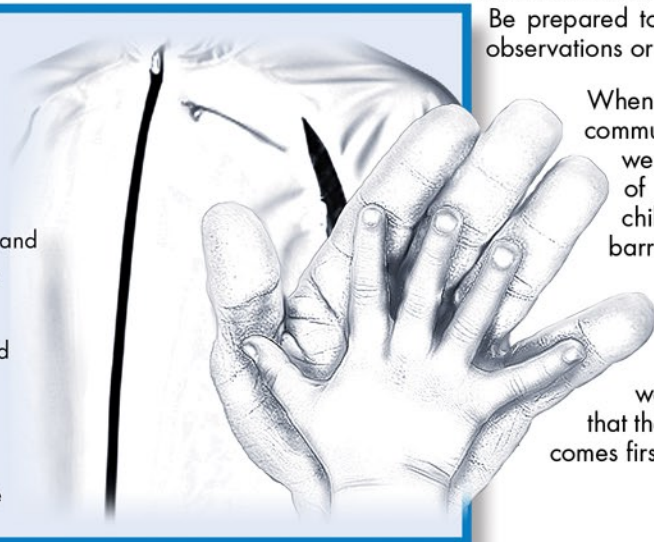
3. Take seriously any concerns raised and promptly act on them. All the empowerment will be for naught if your club’s families don’t feel like you will listen to and act on their concerns. Be prepared to act on your own observations or concerns, as well.

WHAT CAN I DO?

1. Establish “standards of behavior” for your club.
2. Schedule dedicated time to observe the interactions and activities in your gym so you know first-hand what is happening.
3. Review your staff and volunteer training program and make sure it covers appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Link to USA Gymnastics page on Stop It Now!® web site



When we establish and communicate standards, we can create a circle of safety around children and put up barriers to someone behaving inappropriately towards children. When we speak up, we send a message that the safety of children comes first.



Stop It Now!
Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

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<http://survey.constantcontact.com/survey/a07e605262bh9rfhea1/start>