

ASSESSING RISK: USING TOOLS TO PROTECT YOUTH FROM SEXUAL ABUSE



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As a club owner or manager, you have first-hand experience in risk management. From teaching youth gymnasts proper injury-preventing form and technique to teaching club staff proper emergency evacuation procedures, you take steps every day to protect the people you serve. Protecting your gymnasts from child sexual abuse should be no different.

From the time they toddle in to the time they vault or hand-spring out (sticking the landing, of course!). Young athletes deserve a safe environment that allows them to focus on their training and have fun. Along with general safety measures and emergency action procedures, child protective policies are part of a responsible risk management plan. Assessing risk for child sexual abuse begins with three key factors:

RISK FACTOR 1 LACK OF A COMPREHENSIVE BACKGROUND CHECK PROCESS FOR ALL STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

On its own, a simple criminal background check is not an adequate screening tool because most offenders have not been caught or convicted. A comprehensive process includes:

- Criminal background check that includes a search of sex offender registries
- Reference verification that includes professional and personal references
- Employment history verification
- Personal interview that includes a review of behavioral standards

Combining these methods creates a stronger system for catching “red flags” before a candidate is hired. This process should include volunteers who are simply unpaid staff members and often have the same access to and interaction with gymnasts.

RISK FACTOR 2 LACK OF WRITTEN STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR FOR STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, AND OLDER YOUTH WHO SERVE CHILDREN

Clubs without written and shared conduct guidelines have no structural safeguard to prevent child sexual abuse, and are therefore particularly at risk. Standards of behavior set expectations for conduct that both staff and parents can help enforce.

Use the USA Gymnastics new Safe Sport Policy and the Proactive Policies as a guide for developing your standards of behavior.

Effective standards of behavior:

- Encourage athlete development and competitive spirit through methods such as praise and achievement-based rewards
- Prohibit risky behaviors such as isolated, one-on-one interactions
- Clearly define appropriate physical contact and set boundaries for interaction on- and off-premises

RISK FACTOR 3 LACK OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEER TRAINING ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Clubs that don’t address child sexual abuse prevention and whose staff are unable to spot red flag behaviors can unknowingly create an environment that allows offenders to violate boundaries, engage in grooming activities, and sexually abuse children. Staff and volunteers should be trained to...

- Identify boundary violations and reinforce policies (“*It’s against our standard of behavior for Katie to ride with you to the competition without another adult present. Let’s carpool instead.*”)
- Spot physical, emotional, and behavioral signs of possible abuse
- Report boundary violations and suspicions or discovery of abuse using a designated reporting process

By implementing comprehensive background screening, developing written standards of behavior, and enabling staff and volunteers to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse, gymnastics clubs become a place where young gymnasts can safely develop their skills, have fun and go for the gold. Visit www.D2L.org for more

information as well as USAGymnasticsUniversity.org to begin your prevention training by accessing the online course, *U301 Stewards of Children*, a child abuse prevention course created by Darkness to Light.

Risk management criteria provided by The Redwoods Group — learn more at www.redwoodsgroup.com/safety-resources/

FOR FULL- AND PART-TIME STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

SCREENING AND HIRING PRACTICES	CHECK YES/ DATE	CODE OF CONDUCT AND STAFF EXPECTATIONS	CHECK YES/ DATE	TRAINING AND EDUCATION	CHECK YES/ DATE
Employment applications include questions regarding criminal conviction, past work history and education/ training.		Organization has a written code of conduct describing how staff members will conduct themselves when interacting with children. These policies include any older youth who work with children.		All staff members participate in child sexual abuse prevention training before working with children in any capacity.	
Prospective staff members are personally interviewed by at least two people within the organization.		Code of conduct is shared with parents and children, posted in plain sight within facility and reviewed/signed by staff members on an annual basis.		All staff members receive specific training on how to report code of conduct violations, suspicious behaviors and reports of abuse using a designated chain of command.	
Prospective staff members must pass a criminal background check that includes sex offender registries.		Operations are structured to prevent staff members from being in isolated, one-on-one situations with children—including in bathrooms, locker rooms, showers and storage areas.		Managerial staff have a full understanding of reporting requirements and procedures.	
Prospective staff members must provide at least three references—including two professional references.		Operations are structured to prevent children from being in isolated one-on-one situations with other children—including in bathrooms, locker rooms, showers and storage areas.		Staff and volunteers have access to USA Gymnastics safety videos.	
Management checks references and confirms work history/reasons for leaving.					

This form is not intended as a comprehensive risk assessment tool and does not address all policy issues for gymnastics clubs. Its purpose is to provide the tools to implement simple, proactive measures that prevent child sexual abuse within your organization.

