

SAFE TO COMPETE:

Protecting Child Athletes From Sexual Abuse

DISCUSSION GUIDE: AGES 11-17

Discussing personal safety is increasingly important as tweens and teens grow more independent.

What to Talk About

PHYSICAL CONTACT:

From stretching exercises to tackling drills, different sports require varying degrees of physical contact between athletes and coaching staff. Talking to adolescents about appropriate touch is important in helping them recognize any inappropriate contact by peers or adults.

Tell Them

"You have the right to tell anyone who touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable to stop."

POWER DYNAMICS:

Child sexual abuse victims are often emotionally linked to their abusers, and these abusers are often authority figures. Coaches, training staff, and even team captains often wield a great deal of authority over younger athletes. This may deter victims from disclosing abuse in fear that they may lose their place on a team, be harmed, discredited, or otherwise retaliated against.

Tell Them

"No one has the right to threaten or coerce others. If they do, tell a trusted adult about what happened."

CHECKING IN:

Youth are often trusting of offers from adults, but it's important that they check first with parents or guardians before accepting anything from or going anywhere with someone- even coaches or teammates' parents.

Tell Them

"It's important that we communicate about where you are and who you are with. Check in with me before changing plans or going somewhere."

How to Talk About it

DON'T EXAGGERATE:

Teens may dismiss the message and real risks if they hear sensational stories.

TALK OFTEN:

It can be hard to engage tweens and teens in serious conversations about their personal lives, safety, and other tough topics. You might strike out the first time you try to have these conversations, but keep trying! The more often you discuss safety, the easier it gets.

KEEP EMOTIONS IN CHECK:

If a young person ever discloses a suspicion or incident of abuse, do your best to respond in a measured and calm manner. Reassure them that reporting the abuse was the right thing to do, and reaffirm that you are there to support them.

Take Action

Contact local law enforcement immediately. Call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® at 1-800-THE-LOST for additional assistance.

