

## **You Are in the Right Place if You:**

Were deceived and betrayed by a coach

Are heartbroken and watch your child endure panic attacks and suffering

Are angry and trapped by retaliation and character assassination

## **Many parents report that in the beginning**

“The Mommy and Me classes overflowed with bouncing toddlers, happily jumping on mats and smiling. My child loved the sport from the start. . . “

## **Vulnerability**

“The marriage of talent, passion and praise may expose competitive athletes to abusive behavior.”

At some point, your child was identified as a natural athlete and worthy of the extra investment of private coaching or specialized training.

Naturally, you were proud of your child’s skill. Your child felt adored and had the coach’s attention and praise.

You knew your child was special. The coach only confirmed that fact. Your child loved the sport, was committed and had natural talent. The perfect combination.

However, this combination also made your child vulnerable and served as a point of entry for the coach to employ abusive tactics.

## **“The Groom”**

“When perfected, grooming is the act of manipulating athlete, parent and even an entire sporting community.”

Sports offers core values your child can use in every stage of life.

Friendship, determination and resilience.

As your child advances and is recognized as a top athlete at the state and national level, you expect your child to struggle, and even complain.

You expect your child to want to give up, but that is when you encourage the valuable skills of determination and commitment.

Soon the tension of practice, the stress of competition and the act of balancing life collides. It becomes impossible to distinguish your child's frustrations from acting out.

As the months and years pass, the coach's explosive behavior is accepted or excused. The coach is the expert and reminds you and your child of their credentials, medals and awards. You are uneasy, but you believe your child would tell you when the coach crossed the line.

### **Disclosure: "Why Didn't My Child Tell Me?"**

Children believe parents know or will find out about abuse.

Research shows that children do not disclose or tell about abuse for many years, if they disclose at all.<sup>1</sup>

Although you unwittingly drop your child off in the care of an abusive coach, many children assume you know about the coach's inappropriate behavior or will find out and rescue them.

Children also want to protect their parents, and therefore silently endure abuse. Children want to avoid conflict and win the approval of their parents and the coach for excelling athletically.

When you finally begin to learn your child was subjected to sexual, physical or emotional abuse, you are shocked and confused about next steps.

### **What Are Your Next Steps?**

"It is not only sexual and emotional abuse that traumatizes survivors; but survivors can also be traumatized by the reaction from the people they love."

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1



## **Step 1**

### **Pause**

The intensity of managing your child's high-level athletic career has led you to regiment and automate daily routines.

Learning of your child's abuse requires you to pause, digest the incident(s), validate your child and then act.

## **Step 2**

### **Banish the Shame**

"You cannot prosecute yourself for crimes you did not commit."

An abusive coach's grooming process is only complete when both child and parent are fully blinded by lies and manipulation.

When you blame yourself for not noticing the actions of a coach, you use emotional energy and intellectual resources that should be directed to manage the crisis.

Remember, the coach violated trust, duty and professionalism towards your child and you.

### **Step 3**

#### **Awareness**

“Awakening to the fact that your child was injured creates a mountain of regret and waves of sadness.”

Parents and athletes should report abuse by coaches.

Reporting abuse includes filing a complaint with U.S. Center for SafeSport, national governing bodies and/or contacting local law enforcement.



**Your options are to:**

- A. Go to local law enforcement to begin a criminal prosecution and/or
- B. File a complaint with the U.S. Center for SafeSport and/or
- C. File a complaint with the national governing body and/or
- D. Speak with an attorney to file a civil lawsuit or
- E. Take less public, but still active measures.

**A. Local Law Enforcement**

What is local law enforcement?

Local law enforcement is the police department where you live or where the incident took place. Law enforcement also includes your local prosecutor's office (i.e., state's attorney or district attorney).

What can my child expect when reporting abuse to law enforcement?

As a parent you can call or go directly to the police station. You and your child will likely be directed to a detective, who will open a case, ask your child questions and gather information regarding the coach.

Speaking with the police can feel awkward and intrusive. Based on the information you provide to the police, a decision will be made to proceed with an arrest, continue the investigation and/or contact a prosecuting agency.

It is unlikely that an arrest of an abusive coach will be made immediately after you speak with the police. Instead, the police investigation will consist of speaking with witnesses (i.e., teammates, parents, gym staff), contacting the coach and verifying allegations.

Should the police have cause and a basis for an arrest, the case will be transferred to the state's prosecutor, where the criminal court process begins.

If the police decline to make an arrest, your case will be closed. You can continue to pursue a criminal investigation by directly contacting the prosecutor's office and other officials within the police department.

## **B. U.S. Center for Safe Sport ("Center")**

In 2017, the U.S. Center for Safe Sport evolved to build "a sport community where participants can work and learn together, free of emotional, physical and sexual abuse and misconduct."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://safesport.org/>

## **What is the Center's process?**

Reports of sexual, physical or emotional abuse can be made by submitting a report online at the Center's website, [www.safesport.org](http://www.safesport.org), or by contacting the Center directly.

Generally, a Center investigator will contact you to speak with you and your child, fellow teammates and the coaching staff.

Statements made by you and your child will be shared with the accused coach. The coach will be given an opportunity to respond to your allegations.

Thereafter, the Center will make a determination as to whether your allegations are substantiated or founded. If the Center does not find your child's allegations to be founded, the case will be closed in favor of the coach.

If the Center determines that the coach *has* engaged in misconduct with your child, there is a range of sanctions that can be levied against the coach. These sanctions include attending classes, mandating that the coach have no unsupervised contact with children and/or being suspended as a member coach.<sup>3</sup>

Findings that are unfavorable to a coach trigger an appeal process, whereby the coach can apply to have the case heard by an arbitrator and, in some cases, by a federal civil court judge.

## **What should my child expect after filing a complaint with the Center?**

Sadly, the Center is woefully underfunded and understaffed, as reported in 2019.<sup>4</sup> Athletes and parents who filed complaints with the

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<sup>3</sup> Note: Coaches suspended by the Center can still coach privately and some coaches have avoided the Center's sanctions in this manner.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sportstravelmagazine.com/juriese-colon-the-challenges-ahead-for-the-u-s-center-for-safesport/>

Center report frustration, disappointment and the Center's failure to protect athletes' interests.<sup>5</sup>

If your case involves allegations of physical, emotional or verbal abuse, and does not involve allegations of sexual abuse, the Center will likely send your matter to the sport's national governing body for investigation.

### **C. National Governing Bodies ("NGB")**

What is the NGB process?

Filing a report for physical, emotional and/or verbal abuse is similar to the process followed by the Center. Some NGBs conduct administrative hearings before a volunteer panel, who determines whether the coach has violated rules, policies or ethical codes of conduct.

### **D. Filing a Civil Lawsuit:**

Filing a lawsuit in civil court involves prosecuting a case with the assistance of an attorney. You and your attorney take action to hold the coach accountable, not a government attorney who acts on your behalf in a criminal case. In a civil case, your child may be able to recover a monetary award for emotional, sexual and/or physical injuries.

You should interview attorneys to determine whether you and your child can work with that counselor.

The relationship with your attorney is ongoing and you and your child must be comfortable freely discussing intimate aspects of your case.

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<https://www.oeregister.com/2019/10/28/parents-frustrated-with-u-s-center-for-safesport-for-delays-in-anna-li-jian-i-wu-abuse-case/>

How will a court case disrupt my life? How much time and money will it take?

Lawsuits are not a quick fix. A civil case can end with dismissal, settlement or a trial verdict. Any of these resolutions can take 12 months or more.

In the civil process, your attorney will draft a complaint, which then must be shared with the coach or the coach's attorney.

Thereafter, discussions, exchange of documents and even requests for your case to be dismissed, may take place by the opposing attorney.

Most lawsuits filed for physical, sexual or emotional abuse are based on a contingency agreement with the attorney. A contingency agreement is a written contract that requires you to pay legal fees, costs and expenses only in the event your child is awarded a monetary recovery.

Filing a lawsuit may result in you and your child being negatively scrutinized within the sport community, by "friends" and former teammates.

### **E. Less Public, But Still Actionable Options:**

Some families pursue one or all of the above options to hold a coach accountable for abuse. However, there are other families that, for a variety of reasons, decide not to publicly report the abuse.

All families seeking to move forward and manage abuse are encouraged to build a supportive team of professionals to help the child and the parent process the abuse in healthy and safe ways.

Your team may include such professionals as cognitive behavioral therapist, adverse childhood experience consultant, psychotherapist, psychiatrist, anxiety coach, nutritionist, functional medicine practitioner and guided meditation consultant.

## The Road Forward

The good news is that your child has options. Your child's athletic career or life does not have to stop due to physical, sexual or emotional trauma.

More good news is that you do not have to make these decisions alone. You can navigate the path forward with an attorney trained in the complexities of childhood trauma. Abusive coaches and sporting institutions have attorneys to advise and guide them, and so should you and your child.

Call me today to discuss an Action Plan for you and your child.



## **Your Action Plans**

All Action Plans are customized to your child's circumstances and will include such items as:

- 1. A One-time All-inclusive Flat Rate Fee.**
- 2. Live Legal Coaching.**
- 3. Document Preparation.**
- 4. Professional Strategy sessions.**
- 5. Bi-Weekly Live Conference Call Check-ins.**
- 6. Unlimited Emails and Texts Communications.**

Get additional information on my practice advising athletes who have suffered abuse by coaches at [jsaunderslawfirm.com](http://jsaunderslawfirm.com)

Listen to the Child Athlete Abuse Podcast [here](#).

To start building your team and new community, connect with me and start [here](#).

Best regards,

Judie Saunders, Esq.