

USA GYMNASTICS

PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE IN GYMNASTICS



*The U.S. Center for SafeSport's
Abuse Prevention Content and Policies*

GROOMING

Sexual abuse of a minor by someone known to the child, is often preceded by grooming behaviors. Grooming occurs when someone intentionally engages in a series of manipulative behaviors to gain a family's or child's trust in order to sexually abuse a child. While sports can help children increase their circle of safe and supportive adults, some may take advantage of a child's trusting instincts to groom children for abuse.

Grooming can occur in a combination of ways such as in person, online, or by phone. Texts, social media, video chat, and messaging apps can give abusers constant (and potentially secret) access to children they are grooming. USA Gymnastics' Prevention Policies are designed to limit one-on-one interactions between Adult Participants and minor athletes, with all interactions always remaining observable and interruptible.

Private lessons, for example, can be very helpful for an athlete's sports performance, but can also be used as an opportunity to groom a child by isolating them from their peers. USA Gymnastics' Safe Sport Policy states that all individual training sessions must follow three rules:

- Be observable and interruptible at all times, with another Adult Participant in the building to observe the training session
- Legal guardian must be allowed to attend the individual training session
- Consent forms must be signed by the guardian at least annually indicating an awareness that such sessions are occurring

A person grooming a child seeks to gain trust with both the child and the family through the process of desensitization. This can be accomplished by offering to take the child home from practice or offering a personal gift that does not align with the system of motivational rewards set by the member club or a gift that no one else receives. USA Gymnastics prohibits Adult Participants from giving personal or individual gifts to athletes. Please see USA Gymnastics' transportation policy on page 19 and gifting policy on page 25 of the USA Gymnastics Safe Sport policy (usagym.org/PDFs/safesport/policy2021.pdf).

In using trust-building actions to groom a child or their family members, abusers often focus on children who are isolated or vulnerable. Younger children, children with disabilities and children facing a personal crisis such as a parent's divorce face increased risk of being groomed.

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IDENTIFYING GROOMING

Since grooming involves manipulation, it can be hard to tell the difference between the actions of a caring adult and one grooming your child for abuse. Instead of focusing on isolated behaviors, look for patterns in which someone:

- **Engages you and your child** to build trust beyond their role in sport by offering special treatment
- **Isolates your child** by setting up ways to be alone with them or interfering with their friend and family relationships
- **Tests boundaries** by blurring the line between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors
- **Sexualizes interactions** by pushing sexual boundaries and introducing sexual topics and actions (many of these behaviors are also sexual abuse)

Parents are more likely to recognize grooming behaviors when they become sexual. Identifying early grooming behaviors, such as those below, can help you stop grooming before it gets that far. Please note several of these grooming behaviors are violations of the SafeSport Code and/or the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies.

- Being overly interested in babysitting or other opportunities to be alone with your child
- Befriending your child by acting like a peer, best friend, or “cool adult”
- Giving your child or family members gifts, private lessons, or privileges no one else receives
- Encouraging your child to spend time with them in secret (in person or online)
- Talking with your child about sexual fantasies or adult and teen relationship problems
- Insisting on physical contact with your child (such as hugging, touching, or tickling)
- Frequently walking in on or undressing in front of your child in bathrooms, showers, or changing areas
- Using power or authority in order to have one-on-one interactions with your child

Talk with your child about grooming and ask if these, or any other, behaviors have made them uncomfortable. If you think someone in your child's sport may be grooming them, talk to your child's coach, an administrator, USA Gymnastics' Safe Sport department (USAGymSafeSport@usagym.org) or the U.S. Center for SafeSport or make a report (usagym.org/pages/education/safesport/).

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Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP)

To keep children safe from abuse in their sport activities, USA Gymnastics has implemented the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP). USA Gymnastics and all our member clubs are required to adopt and follow these policies. You can review USA Gymnastics' Safe Sport policy, which includes our Prevention Policies at usagym.org/PDFs/safesport/policy2021.pdf.

The MAAPP outlines training requirements and limits one-on-one interactions between Adult Participants and Minor Athletes. Adult Participants who have regular contact with or authority over Minor Athletes include coaches, athletic trainers, judges, USA Gymnastics staff and local club staff. The MAAPP applies to all interactions related to your child's participation in gymnastics within the Olympic and Paralympic Movement, including practices and competitions as well as events such as fundraisers, team meals, and celebrations.

Be aware of these MAAPP policies oriented toward keeping kids safe

1. One-on-one interactions between Adult Participants and Minor Athletes must be observable and interruptible.
2. Your consent is required for your child's participation in private training sessions, athletic training modalities, meetings with health professionals, transportation, and lodging. Your club must provide you with consent forms.
3. You must be allowed to watch your child's private training sessions. USA Gymnastics' 2021 Safe Sport policy (page 21) describes acceptable methods for viewing your child's training sessions.
4. A second Adult Participant must be in the room during all massages, rubdowns, and other athletic training modalities—for which your child must be fully or partially clothed, with private body parts covered.
5. Your child must have access to a semi-private or private changing area, and locker rooms and changing areas must be monitored.
6. Adult Participants must never shower with your child, unless they are close-in-age peer athletes or it is a pre/post activity rinse where everyone is wearing swimwear. You can request that your child not change or shower with close-in-age adult peer athletes.
7. You, another adult family member, or another Adult Participant must be included on all electronic communications (including texts, emails, and social media).
8. One-on-one interaction policies apply during club-sponsored transportation and lodging.
9. No Adult Participant can share a room with your child unless an exception exists, and proper consent is obtained.
10. Limited exceptions to some policies (related to youth close in age to peer adult athletes, Personal Care Assistants, and out-of-sport dual relationships) are detailed in the full MAAPP document.

We encourage you and your child to take the U.S. Center for SafeSport's free, age-appropriate online trainings – [Training for NGB Members](#).

To report any concern about abuse or misconduct



USA Gymnastics
usagym.i-sight.com/portal



U.S. Center for SafeSport
uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern
833-5US-SAFE (587-7233)

The USA Gymnastics Safe Sport Policy including prevention policies can be found here.
The Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP) can be found here.

The U.S. Center for SafeSport has developed required policies, training, compliance processes and the SafeSport Code to keep athletes safe within the Olympic and Paralympic Movement. The content presented here is an abbreviated format with the addition of relevant USAG information. For full Center policies and NGB requirements please refer to uscenterforsafesport.org