

Plum Baseball & Softball Association Child Abuse/Molestation Risk Management Program

Child abuse/molestation can take many forms, including verbal abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. Any form of child abuse/molestation is contemptible and goes against the mission of the Plum Baseball & Softball Association program.

It has become the standard among youth organizations to require volunteers working with children to complete a background check. The purpose of the required background check is to deter individuals who should not be working with young athletes from applying to volunteer. It also serves to identify any unsuitable criminal history of those individuals who do apply as a volunteer.

The Plum Baseball & Softball Association conducts a state-wide unified courts search, a nationwide criminal database search and a PA child abuse search through JustiFacts on all head coaches and board members who provide regular service to the league, and/or have repetitive access to, or contact with, players or teams.

Purpose

Part of creating a safe environment is making sure youth are not harmed in any way while participating in organization-sponsored activities. One risk in any organization working directly with youth is child sexual abuse. The purpose of the Plum Baseball & Softball Association Abuse/Molestation Risk Management Program is to reduce the liability risk and related negative publicity, expense, and trauma to the local sports organization and the children they serve. The likelihood of such can be reduced by making the environment unsuitable for the sexual predator and/or abuser.

This program will key in on education, volunteer screening, policies, and program administration. The purpose of this program is not to be all encompassing but to provide the framework for a basic workable program to be implemented by a group of volunteers with limited resources and time. The simple framework of this program will not address all contingencies likely to be encountered. Therefore, the materials in the conclusion section should be available and consulted frequently.

Policies on Child Abuse/Molestation

Limit One on One Contact: Plum Baseball & Softball Association recommends no activities take place involving one on one contact between a single, non-related volunteer and a child, if such activities can be practically avoided. Two (2) adults should always be present during practices, games, and special events

Prohibition of Sleepovers: It is recommended players traveling to tournaments and staying in hotels either be accompanied by his/her parent or be supervised by two (2) adults who are in each other's presence at all times.

Verbal Conduct Policy: Inappropriate comments of a sexual nature and suggestive jokes are prohibited.

Take Home/Pick Up: Take home/pick-up of athletes by league personnel is prohibited. Parent(s) should make every effort to provide transportation for their own children to and from scheduled events. The Plum Baseball and Softball Association along with the head coach for each team should clearly outline the expected start and end time for all events and communicate this with all parent(s). Parent(s) should be instructed to make back-up plans in the event they cannot provide transportation.

Child Abuse Protection: All forms of sexual, physical, verbal and emotional abuse are prohibited.

Examples of Abuse/Molestation

Emotional Abuse – Yelling or making statements, such as the following:

- You're stupid.
- You're an idiot.
- You're an embarrassment.
- You're not worth the uniform you play in.

Physical Abuse – Besides the obvious examples of coach hitting, kicking, throwing equipment, or shaking a player, watch out for the following:

- Behaviors seem violent versus disciplinary.
- Training practices become abuse.
- Fighting is encouraged or ignored.
- Illegal moves, often associated with injuries are encouraged.
- Coaches teach improper techniques or encourage conduct which violates safety rules.
- Coaches allow athlete(s) to become physically or verbally abusive.
- Behaviors result in injuries to the athlete(s).

Sexual Abuse – An adult may not engage in any sexualize touch by fondling instead of hugging (with permission), kissing, or seductive stroking of various body parts. On the other hand, appropriate touching can be used when a young child needs comfort, reassurance, and support. Appropriate touch is respectful of a person's personal boundaries and comfort level, public (done in front of others and not secretly), and nurturing (not sexualized).

- Misuse of power and authority.
- Misuse of love and affection.
- Manipulation or tricks:

- This is love.
- This is what you need to be part of the team.
- This is what we do for initiation.
- Grooming: desensitization that begins with appropriate touch, then the touch changes.
Examples:
 - You like the touch before.
 - What's wrong? Don't you trust me?
 - Courting (gifts, time, and attention).
 - Romancing (talking of love or attraction).
 - Line (you're special, I don't usually do this sort of thing, you're so mature, you're so attractive).
 - Secrets (this is our special secret, others wouldn't understand, you or I would get in trouble).

Warning Signs of Abuse/Molestation

With some forms of abuse, there may be physical indicators (ie. bruises, welts, broken bones) or with sexual abuse venereal diseases, genital swelling/soreness, difficulty sitting or walking, stomach aches, pain/itching in the genital area, and frequently, unexplained sore throats. But most often the effects of sexual abuse are less obvious. For example, sudden shifts in behavior or attitudes when an outgoing child suddenly builds a protected, closed wall or a generally happy kid becomes aggressive and angry or a trusting child becomes fearful, may be an indication of abuse. In sports, this can show up as losing interest or wanting to drop out of sports or a sudden decline in ability or functions.

Please note that no indicators or symptoms are absolute. Many of these could be indicators of problems other than child abuse. However, if some of these things are going on, consider them to be a red flag. One difficulty is that some signs are ambiguous. Children may respond in different ways and some may show no sign at all. Some indicators include:

- Disclosure by child. Most children won't just come out and say they have been abused, but instead, may hint at it.
- Observations, complaints, concerns, or allegations about league volunteers.
- Attitudes/behaviors expressed on the part of an adult that may be associated with inappropriate or abusive behavior (racist, poor sense of athlete development, raging temper, extremely controlling, jealous, hypersensitive, poor sexual boundaries, bullying, intimidating manner, unrealistic or inappropriate training practices and risks, etc.)
- Unexplained/unlikely explanation of injuries.
- Difficulty walking or sitting.
- Sudden loss of appetite or compulsive eating.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Fear of medical treatment or examination.
- Shrinks back from touch.

- Being overly affectionate or acting out sexually.
- Wearing excessive clothing.
- Emotionally abusive towards others.
- Overreaction to mistakes.
- Continual self-depreciation (ie. I'm ugly, I'm stupid, etc.)
- Extreme fear of a league volunteer.
- Extreme low self-esteem, self worth.
- A child's attachment to a coach/staff to the point of isolation from others.
- A coach/staff with an interest beyond caring concerns, special interest in a child (time, gifts, attention, obsession, unrealistic expectations).
- A child's desire to drop out without a clear explanation or without one that makes sense.
- A child that misses a lot of practices or games with suspicious explanations or excuses.
- Despite increased sensitivity to abuse, there is still a tendency to blame the victims instead of holding the person accountable who:
 - Lost their temper.
 - Got a little out of control.
 - Was just having a dispute.
 - Misinterpreted the touch.
 - Is really a wonderful person, etc.
 - Listen to what the athlete is saying.

Allegations of Abuse/Molestation and Other Policy Violations

Monitoring Behavior

Your goal is to prevent, recognize, and respond to inappropriate and harmful behaviors. Monitoring involves observing interactions and reacting appropriately.

- Understand the boundaries and identify when someone has crossed the line.
- All volunteers should be responsible for monitoring behavior and interactions within the league. Everyone needs to know how and what to monitor.
- Define areas for monitoring based on your program's activities.
- Develop a monitoring protocol so volunteers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Volunteers should be prepared to respond immediately to inappropriate or harmful behavior, potential risk situations, and potential boundary violations.

Point of Contact: The President of the Plum Baseball and Softball Association is the appropriate person to whom all reports of child abuse/molestation should be reported. In the event the President is the alleged abuser/molester, the report should be made to the Board of Directors.

Assessing the Seriousness of the Situation: It is useful to differentiate between:

- Concern – When the person just needs to be heard and have some information clarified.
- Complaint – When the person needs you to listen and may or may not want action taken if they feel you listened.
- Allegation – Clarify if the allegation is:
 - Appropriate, but unappreciated act.
 - Inappropriate, but not illegal act.
 - Illegal act that needs to be reported to law enforcement.
- Disclosure – When the person tells you abuse occurred or based on their actions gives you reason to believe abuse has occurred.

The President of the Plum Baseball and Softball Association must take the appropriate action depending on where the situation falls in the above mentioned categories.

Information Gathering

Upon receipt of a disclosure of child/sexual abuse or of a policy violation, the President of the Plum Baseball and Softball Association should gather all pertinent facts in a fair, respectful, and confidential manner and review with both the accuser and accused.

The President of the Plum Baseball and Softball Association must immediately report to the authorities when there is reasonable cause to believe physical abuse or sexual abuse has occurred. At this point, the President should never investigate, as this is the role of the law enforcement authorities. Furthermore, allowing the law enforcement authorities to investigate helps to shield the association against potential lawsuits for defamation of character.

Suspension/Termination: The findings of the President of the Plum Baseball and Softball Association should be reported to the Board of Directors and all proceedings should be confidential. If the alleged abuser or policy violator admits to the conduct, the Board can employ the most appropriate punishment. If the alleged abuser or policy violator denies the conduct, the Board can conduct further investigations (except when reasonable cause of physical or sexual abuse exists, that should be reported to the authorities) deemed necessary prior to rendering any appropriate punishment or exoneration. Remember, the alleged violations range from inappropriate, but not illegal behavior to clear cut child/sexual abuse, and the punishment must be tailored to the violation.

Suspension: Less egregious conduct on the part of the volunteer will result in written reprimand. If more than two (2) written reprimands are received in a three (3) year time period, this will result in termination of the volunteer. Slightly more egregious conduct will result in both a written reprimand and suspension. Upon the second suspension in a three (3) year time period, the volunteer will be terminated.

Termination: All volunteers are subject to immediate termination based on the disqualification criteria outlined below.

Duty to Disclose/Immunity/Confidentiality: All volunteers may be required by state law to report suspected cases of child/sexual abuse. Any person(s) who makes or participates in the making of a good-faith report of abuse/neglect, participates in the investigation, or in the judicial proceedings shall, in so doing, be provided with complete and absolute immunity from civil liability.

The identity of the Volunteer reporting a case of suspected child/sexual abuse should not be revealed. All records and reports concerning investigations and their outcome are protected by various confidentiality laws. Unauthorized disclosure of such records is a possible criminal offense which could subject the violator to fines and/or imprisonment.

Volunteer Screening

All board members and head coaches/managers who provide regular service to the league and/or have repetitive access to, or contact with, players or teams, are required to complete the background check. Refusal to comply will result in immediate dismissal from the sports organization even if the volunteer has been allowed to participate in the past. The President and Secretary of the Plum Baseball and Softball Association will conduct the criminal background checks and may conduct a follow-up interview to clarify questions to determine whether or not the candidate is disqualified based on this information.

Disqualification Criteria

Individual volunteers found to be guilty of the following crimes will be disqualified as a volunteer as outlined below. Guilty means the applicant was found guilty following a trial, entered a plea, entered a no contest plea accompanied by the court's finding of guilty, regardless of whether there was an adjudication of the guilt (conviction) or a withholding of guilt. This policy does not apply if criminal charges resulted in acquittal, dismissal, or in an entry of "nolle prosequi" (decision not to proceed the case: an entry made in a court record when a plaintiff or a prosecutor decides not to proceed further with a case or action):

Ever Found to be Guilty Of:

- All sex offenses, including child molestation, rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, sodomy, prostitution, solicitation, indecent exposure, etc.
- All felony violence, including murder, manslaughter, aggravated assault, kidnapping, robbery, aggravated burglary, etc.

Should any pending charges described above be uncovered, or should any of the above charges be brought against an applicant during the season, the applicant shall be suspended from serving until such time as the charges have been cleared or dropped, and the President of the Plum Baseball and Softball Association has approved reinstatement.

Appeals:

Candidate(s) disqualified due to unsatisfactory Background Check and/or other reason(s) will be given the right to appeal upon written notification to the President of the Plum Baseball and Softball Association.