

TAKEDOWN MISCONDUCT

Keeping Young Athletes Safe from Sexual Exploitation



TAKEDOWN MISCONDUCT IN WRESTLING

Keeping Young Athletes Safe from Sexual Exploitation

For many parents, their worst nightmare would be finding out that their child was sexually abused. How did this happen? Why didn't my child tell me? What could I have done to prevent it? These are just a few questions that may run through the mind of a parent whose child has been a victim of a sex crime. Some parents are too anxious or fearful to learn about sexual abuse while others prefer to believe it could never happen to their child. In fact, sexual abuse happens to children from all types of homes. It occurs to boys and girls from all races, ethnic, income, social, and religious groups. This article is intended to educate parents about the crime of child sexual abuse, characteristics of typical perpetrators, and what parents can do to keep their children "off limits" to sexual abusers. Special focus is on sexual abuse of minor athletes by coaches.

Coaches play extremely important roles in fostering the personal as well as the physical development of minor athletes. Their influence goes far beyond developing skills of the sport. Good coaches provide leadership and expertise, and serve as powerful role models. As a group, coaches have a great deal of integrity and have the best interests of the athletes at the center of their work. An athlete's self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect can be nurtured by a good coach or destroyed by someone who takes advantage of the close relationship and the considerable power imbalance.

What is child sexual exploitation?

Sexual abuse occurs when someone uses or exploits a child for sexual or emotional gratification or for financial gain (for example, selling sexually abusive images of a child). Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) can include physical contact between an abuser and a child; there are also types of sexual abuse where there is no physical contact between the abuser and the child. These crimes include exposing the child to pornographic materials, photographing or videotaping a child for pornographic purposes, or exposing one's genitals to a child for the purpose of sexual gratification or arousal.

How often does it happen?

The incidence of CSA in the United States has reached epidemic proportions, resulting in a national public health crisis. Prevalence rates from studies conducted in the U.S. report that one in ten children (10%) are sexually abused before age 18.

There has been minimal research of the prevalence of sexual abuse in sport. Minor athletes, because they are less powerful than adults, are often hesitant to report problems. Thus, most of what we know about sexual abuse in sport comes from media reports, including the exposé of sexual misconduct complaints against [USA Gymnastics](#) and [USA Swimming](#).

Very few studies have examined the prevalence of sexual abuse by coaches, and most have been retrospective studies done in other countries, where adults report about their childhood experiences. For example, in the Netherlands and Belgium, a survey of over 4,000 adults who had participated in organized sport before the age of 18 were asked about their experiences with psychological, physical, and sexual violence while playing sports. Results showed that 38% experienced psychological violence, 11% physical violence, and 14% reported sexual violence. More females (17%) experienced sexual violence compared with males (11%).

As can be seen by these figures, both male and female athletes are sexually exploited. However, because of stereotypes surrounding sexuality and masculinity that are especially pervasive in sports, underreporting of sexual abuse is more common among male victims. Gay and bisexual male athletes appear to be particularly at risk. Although some believe that more girls than boys are sexually abused in sports, other have suggested that boys and girls are at equal risk of being sexually abused in organized youth sports.

Who are the perpetrators?

For most parents, the image of a child molester brings to mind a stranger or a “dirty old man.” In fact, it is estimated that in about 90% (ninety percent) of cases of sexual abuse, the abuser is someone the child knows. Perpetrators may be either male or female, and may be well-respected and highly regarded. Four years of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data found that 35 percent of male victims who experienced rape or sexual assault reported at least one female perpetrator. *The biggest myth about childhood sexual abuse is that molesters are strangers.* Most sexual crimes against children are committed by someone within your child’s circle of trust, including people serving in positions of authority, like teachers and coaches. The following are some notable cases where coaches took advantage of minor athletes.

During his 28 years working as an athletic trainer for the Custer County District High School in Miles City Montana, **James “Doc” Jensen** [groomed and sexually abused as many as 100 boys](#). [See Sidebar]

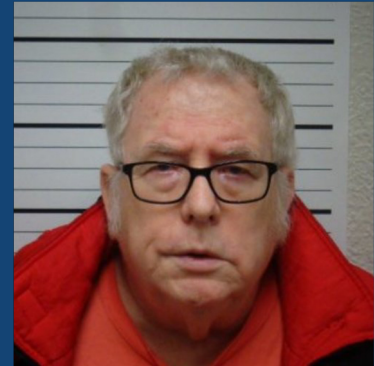
Joshua Dwayne Carrier, a former Colorado Springs police officer was accused of molesting 22 children in his capacity as a volunteer wrestling coach and School Resource Officer at Horace Mann Middle School in Colorado Springs, CO. In October, 2012, he was convicted of abusing 18 boys and sentenced to 70 years to life. Student wrestlers were groped, stroked, and in some cases videotaped in the nude under the pretext Carrier was checking them for ringworm before competitions.

In November, 2011, **Gerald “Jerry” Sandusky**, former Penn State football defensive coordinator, was charged with sexually assaulting several of the young boys involved in *The Second Mile*, Sandusky's charity dedicated to helping troubled young boys. He showered the boys with attention, gifts, and took them to restaurants and to sporting and charity events. Some of the boys shared hotel rooms with Sandusky during road trips and some stayed overnight at Sandusky's home where they reported sexual acts. Multiple victims described working out in the locker room at Penn State and then showering with Sandusky. At least two witnesses saw him committing sexual assaults against victims, but no one called the police. In June 2012, Sandusky was found guilty on 45 of 48 counts of sexually abusing 10 boys and sentenced to life in prison.

How can I spot a potential abuser?

Abusers typically lead double lives, one of public respectability and another of private exploitation. There is no typical sex offender. The saying, “You cannot judge a book by its cover” is especially true when it comes to

WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS



During his 28 years working as an athletic trainer for the Custer County District High School in Miles City Montana, **James “Doc” Jensen** [groomed and sexually abused as many as 100 boys](#).

According to a lawsuit and interviews with several of the victims, Jensen developed an elaborate scheme he called “The Program.” It was a system he promised would enhance the athletic performance of the boys, some as young as age 14, by boosting their strength, fitness and testosterone levels.

The grooming regimen began with annual athletic physical exams in which Jensen touched the boys’ genitals under the guise of a hernia check, although he had no medical training. The suit alleges that the touching escalated to nude massages, masturbating the boys, measuring their penises, collecting their semen for “testing,” along with oral sex and digital anal penetration.

child sexual offenders. Bottom line—abusers can be *anyone*. It’s impossible to identify sexual abusers based on their outward appearance, public behavior, or relationship to your child. They do, however, give clues through their behaviors—actions that reflect a sexual interest in youth. Most abusers carefully select their victims and then go through a process of emotionally and physically “grooming” the child and his/her parents.

The Grooming Process

Grooming refers to the techniques or strategies deliberately undertaken to manipulate a child into engaging in sexual behaviors. Children can be groomed in person and through private communication (through emails or text messages). Through the grooming process, an offender forms a “special” relationship with the child and gains the victim’s trust, then slowly and insidiously breaks down personal and physical boundaries to desensitize the child to sexual behaviors, all the while making sure that the victim keeps the sexual activity a secret. Grooming is a *dynamic process* and pattern of seemingly innocent behaviors exhibited by child sex offenders with the insidious purpose of using children to satisfy their own sexual desires.

Grooming athletes, parents, and organizations. Child sex offenders not only groom children, but also their families and sometimes the whole community. They are skilled at ingratiating themselves with kids and infiltrating into unsuspecting families and organizations, including sports clubs. Grooming of the family or community has a dual purpose: first, to secure the trust and thus cooperation of the parents in gaining access to the child; and second, to reduce the likelihood of discovery by appearing to be “above reproach.” Offenders groom the family and community so well that even if the child does disclose, the family or organization is likely to support the offender rather than the child.

- **Ron Gorman** served as a volunteer wrestling coach in both Pennsylvania and then later in Georgia. Gorman used his position as a coach and mentor to project a father figure image to boys whose own fathers were not present or active in their lives. He made the boys feel like part of his own family, buying them gifts, taking them on trips and telling them he loved them, all in exchange for their silence about his sexual contact with them. One mother said she thought Gorman “was a godsend,” and appeared unaware of being groomed by him at the same time he was grooming her son. It was the boy’s grandmother who observed that Gorman “was taking too much of an interest” in her grandson. Gorman plead guilty to several counts of child molestation and was sentenced to 20-40 years in prison.

- *James ‘Doc’ [see prior sidebar] Jensen told the victims that he was abusing through his “Program” that these pioneering methods promised such amazing results that the public and other schools would presume it was cheating, so they would have to keep it a secret. He told some of the boys he was compiling data from his program that would eventually be published and marketed and that the boys may be able to share in the royalties, another reason to keep it quiet. Then there were threats that they would be labeled homosexual within the school if they didn’t comply with the program’s demands or didn’t keep the secret.*
- ***Joshua Carrier** was a well-respected community member and law enforcement officer. Like Sandusky, he donated time and money to youth organizations. Carrier purchased wrestling mats for the athletic program and volunteered over 900 hours during one school year. Carrier was given keys to the school, along with the privilege of pulling boys out of class to be examined in his office.*

Grooming strategies include:

- **Selecting a victim.** Any child or teen may be a potential victim. When incarcerated child sexual offenders were asked how they selected their victims, they described targeting vulnerable youth (e.g., those with low self-esteem), socially isolated or emotionally needy youth, innocent and trusting children, and those with less parental oversight or whose families “had family problems.” Abusers may target children based on their family situations, such as those living in single-parent households, as these homes may have less adult supervision or the parent may be open to offers of help with child-care

GROOMING PROCESS



As an example of how offenders groom entire organizations, consider former team doctor for the USA Gymnastics, **Larry Nassar**. The young women trusted him, as did their parents, coaches, colleagues, and administrators.

In a chilling report entitled, [“The making of a monster who abused gymnasts for decades,”](#) Evans and fellow reporters revealed how “the hundreds of girls Nassar molested over three decades were not the only people groomed to perpetuate his abuse.

When the truth came out, parents, coaches, trainers and medical professionals felt they had been duped for years into believing in a man who had carefully cultivated a wholesome, helpful image, and attained near celebrity status as the foremost medical expert in a niche sport.”

responsibilities, including babysitting. In the media report of Ron Gorman, it was noted that the mother was a single parent who was grateful that Gorman appeared to take her son under his wing.

- **Building a “special” relationship.** After selecting a particular child, offenders work on gaining the child’s trust and confidence. They cultivate a “special” relationship by spending excessive time emailing, text messaging, or calling. Abusers may offer special attention, recognition, affection, flattery, kindness, romance, gifts, money, trips, jewelry, clothing, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, or special privileges (e.g., getting to drive a vehicle without a license). Sometimes grooming involves flattery. One young athlete said this about his abusing coach, “I was totally flattered that this smart worldly man was taking an interest in me. He spent a lot of time flattering me about my looks and my hockey skills. He was always there by my side, watching me, criticizing me, flattering me, and trying to make me love him.” The child comes to believe that the coach is the only adult who fully understands and cares about the child. The time, attention, flattery, and gifts are all ways to emotionally seduce the child.
- **Spending time alone with the child.** Engaging a child in sexual activities requires privacy, so the offender arranges to be alone with a child. An offender might ask the child to go to the movies, offer after-school help, take them shopping or out to eat, or offer rides to or from practices or matches. Rides in cars offer privacy, along with staying in motel rooms or visiting the abuser’s residence. A football coach offered to baby-sit one couple’s 13-year-old son so the parents could go out to celebrate their wedding anniversary. While the parents were out, he molested the boy. Fernando Colman was found guilty of sodomizing and sexually abusing six of his soccer players, all young boys aged 11 to 14, during team trips. Prosecutors said that while staying in

GROOMING STRATEGIES



As Sandusky described to Bob Costas, he and the boys were simply "horsing around" in the showers at Penn State. From trial testimony, showering with boys was one of Sandusky's primary grooming techniques, as a way to get the boys naked and vulnerable.

At times he had soap fights or wrestled with the boys, or grabbed them in a bear hug from behind and lifted them up, purportedly to rinse them off under the shower.

These techniques allowed Sandusky to disguise his sexual advances as games and horsing around and afforded him the ability to deny any sexual intent if the child protested or later disclosed.

hotels, Colman encouraged the boys to strip, showed them pornography, and then abused them. He was sent to prison for 66 years.

- **Crossing boundaries.** Through a gradual process of desensitization, offenders begin to violate boundaries using inappropriate touches and talk. Offenders desensitize youth to sexual activity through non-sexual touching (being 'overly touchy and affectionate'), eventually **crossing the line** and touching a victim sexually. Manipulation may begin with “innocent” touching (putting an arm around the shoulder or placing a hand on the knee or leg while driving). Some begin the touching through the use of games involving a lot of body contact—hugging, tickling, wrestling, or giving massages—even when the child doesn’t ask for or want this physical affection. These non-sexual touches may, on the surface, appear innocent in nature, but they have a definite purpose—to *desensitize the child to touch*.
 - ✓ Track coach [Conrad Avondale Mainwaring](#) initiated sexual contact with athletes—some as young as 14—under the guise of “mental training” that focused on getting them to control erections and testosterone levels as a means of improving athletic performance. His “treatment” included massage and manipulation of the genitals to enhance performance. Victims said Mainwaring convinced them that none of the acts was sexual, rather that they were “all clinical” and designed to make them superior athletes. One recalled Mainwaring telling him, “You can be an Olympian too, you know. You can get to this level.” When touching the body is part of an adult’s responsibility (e.g., doctors, physical therapists, or coaches), the lines between appropriate and inappropriate touch can be easily blurred.
 - ✓ Larry Nassar convinced the girls that his touching them (on breasts, in vagina) was a legitimate medical treatment. Joshua Carrier was accused of performing inappropriate physical exams (in his role as volunteer wrestling coach) and drug searches (in his role as School Resource Officer) of 22 boys attending Mann Middle School in Colorado Springs.

Like touches, conversations can cross over into personal and inappropriate territory. The abuser might begin sharing personal matters and introducing sexual topics into conversations. They might comment on a child’s developing body (“Your muscles are developing nicely” or “You have just the right body for gymnastics”) or the child’s appearance (“You look sexy in your shorts” or “You have a nice body and ought to show it off”). Abusers might sexualize conversations by telling risqué jokes, show pornographic pictures or websites, describe their own sexual experiences, or “teach” the child about sex. Text messages begin including sexually explicit talk and images. They can also break down the boundaries that usually exist between adults and teenagers by lowering inhibitions (by providing drugs or alcohol), talking about or encouraging masturbation and/or sex, or supplying pornography.

- **Maintaining Cooperation and Secrecy.** Sexual abuse is nearly always carried out in great secrecy. It's pretty easy to get a child to keep the activity a secret. Young children may believe they did something "wrong" or "bad" and don't tell because they are afraid they will get in trouble. If the abuse is prolonged, victims may feel they cannot tell because they "went along with it" or "didn't say 'no' or try to stop it" and, therefore, will be blamed. Some abusers will threaten to expose the "relationship" or make the child feel responsible for the abuse. When their abusers are men, boys are reluctant to tell out of embarrassment or fears that the abuse was evidence of homosexuality, or of being labeled homosexual. NHL superstar Sheldon Kennedy was abused by former junior hockey coach Graham James from 1984-1990, starting when Sheldon was 14. Kennedy reported that James constantly used the threat of revealing him as homosexual to ensure his silence. "I was afraid that if I told, I would have been shut up and sent home, the other players would call me gay and shun me, my hockey career finished." Boxing legend Sugar Ray Leonard never told when his coach sexually abused him. "I told no one...A guy don't talk about those things, especially me, as a fighter." U.S. gymnastics champion Chris Riegel did not tell anyone about [being abused by his coach Larry Moyer](#) for fear people would think he was gay. Especially in the highly macho world of sports, it's difficult for males to acknowledge being a victim. Boys sexually exploited by women may not view their experiences as abuse. For all these reasons, very few teens tell anyone about the abuse.

How can you use this information to protect your child from being sexually exploited? Here are some behavioral warning signs that an adult may be grooming your child.

Warning Signs of Potential Abusers

Be on the lookout for an adult who:

- Singles out your child for a relationship or special attention (obvious preferential treatment)
- Tells you how 'great' your child's potential is, and wants to spend extra time training alone
- Gives your child gifts
- Overly affectionate and physical behaviors (caressing, excessive touching, tickling)
- Inappropriate calls, texts, or emails to your child
- Offers to spend time alone with your child outside of wrestling-related responsibilities (offers to drive the athlete to or from practices or games; go to movies or out to lunch)
- Sends sexually explicit text messages or photos to your child or is requesting that your child do the same
- Interacts with minors in a way that makes him/her seem like one of them; or, socializes with children outside of sanctioned activities
- Purchases drugs, alcohol, or marijuana for youth
- Allows children to do questionable or inappropriate activities
- Asks children to keep secrets from parents

- Shares or asks your child about inappropriate personal or private information
- Your child talks a lot about his or her "special friend," but when you ask for details about their relationship, he or she gets defensive
- Teammates suspect an improper relationship between the coach and the minor, and post comments on social media

Parenting Tips

Suggestions for parents of young children:

1. Be very careful and selective about with whom you leave your child alone. Almost all sexual abuse happens when a child is alone with an adult. Although you obviously cannot be with your child all the time, careful screening of anyone who is to be in a caretaker role is important. USA Wrestling does background screens on all coaches. However, these screenings only detect those who have been convicted of a crime. Ask questions of a coach, and other parents who have been around the coach.
2. Teach your children the correct names of their genitals. Most parents do not teach their children the correct names for their genitals and instead teach them silly or slang words. This can be harmful on many levels. First, a child will not be able to report or disclosure sexual abuse if he or she does not have the correct vocabulary. Second, convicted sexual abusers have reported that they are less likely to victimize a child who knows the correct names of their genitals, as that suggests the child comes from a home where sexuality is openly discussed. Third, this knowledge provides the necessary foundation for subsequent sexuality education. An appropriate time to do so may be when you are beginning toilet training, as the opportunity to label these body parts occurs.
3. Teach children the Body Safety Rule: The body safety rule is simple: No one should touch your private parts, except to keep you clean and healthy. Dr. Sandy K. Wurtele, sexual abuse prevention expert and author of the *Body Safety Training Workbook for Parents* (<http://sandywurtele.com/>) developed this rule to assist parents in teaching their children body safety. This rule helps children understand that no one should ever be touching or looking at their private parts, unless they need help during bathing or they are injured or hurt in that area. Your child should also be taught that no one is allowed to take pictures of their private parts and that they are never to take pictures of anyone else's privates.
4. Establish a "no secrets" rule. Sexual abuse occurs in an atmosphere of secrecy and many victims are sworn to secrecy by their offenders. They may threaten the child or tell the child that he or she will get in trouble or their parents will be very mad at them if they find out. Parents--tell your children that they should not keep secrets from you, and that no one should ask them to keep activities, *especially involving the private parts*, a secret. Explain to your child that there is nothing they cannot tell you and that you will always believe them when it comes to body safety.

5. Talk to your child, a lot! Sexual abusers are often seeking a child who craves love and attention. As parents, the most important thing you can do is engage your child in conversations, and do it often. Encourage your child to share his or her feelings with you. Inquire about your child's day and what transpired. Try to be the kind of parent a child wants to come and talk to and confide in.

Suggestions for parents of pre-teens and teenagers:

1. **Talk about who sexually exploits children.** You might start by defining *sexual exploitation*. ("It's when one person uses another person to get something sexual, without regard for that person's feelings or safety.") Stress that sexual contact between an adult and a minor is a crime, even if the child is willing, since minors are legally incapable of consenting to sexual activities with adults. Explain that offenders are most likely to be family members, acquaintances, and authority figures.
2. **Describe grooming.** Use some of the cases of adult perpetrators presented in this chapter or in media reports to explain how adults can exploit teenagers' sexual curiosity and take advantage of their normal needs for affection, intimacy, and companionship. Help your teen understand how it can feel flattering or exciting when an adult takes an interest in them. Describe what you consider inappropriate behavior or violations of boundaries by an authority figure (for example, improper touching, showing them pornographic material, talking to them about sexuality, constantly texting or calling). Likewise, encourage children to trust their instincts if they ever feel uncomfortable with or have suspicions about a person.
3. **Point out warning signs.** Describe how offenders violate boundaries, both in conversations and touches. Point out red flags like "sexting," being asked personal questions, or talking about sex. Alert your child that if an authority figure says, "Don't tell your parents or anyone" about the relationship, the first thing the child should do is to tell you or another safe adult.
4. **Create a safety plan.** Make sure your child knows how to resist an offender's sexual advances. You might say, "You are a special person who deserves to be treated with respect and not to be abused—physically, emotionally, or sexually. No one has the right to force, threaten, or trick you into having sex of any kind. If someone tries to push you into doing something sexual, try to get away from the person and then tell me or another trusted adult." Generate a list of safe adults to whom your child could turn for support. Emphasize that, "Even if you went along with their requests, it is never your fault. Sexual abuse is always the responsibility of the abuser."
5. **Don't fall for flattery yourself.** Recognize that it can be flattering when an authority figure takes an interest in your child, especially someone who is held in high regard or who promises to make your child a star. Try to see beyond this "interest" and trust your intuition. If this person seems too good to be true, he or she probably is.

6. **Monitor and screen your child's activities and companions.** As much as possible, try to monitor the whereabouts of your teen—know where your child is, what they are doing, and with whom. Before allowing your child to participate in extracurricular activities (sporting leagues, youth clubs, faith-based groups, scouting) ask the directors of the youth-serving organization what they are doing to protect children from sexual victimization. USA Wrestling requires all coaches to be Safe Sport trained and background screened. We also have Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies in Section II of our Safe Sport Handbook. Parents are encouraged to be Safe Sport trained as well, or take the free education for parents at safesport.org. It may be challenging, inconvenient, or embarrassing to question authority figures about your child's safety, but your extra effort will go far in protecting your child.

7. **Help your teen help a friend.** Your child may need to help a friend (or family member) who has been sexually exploited. Teens are more likely to confide in their friends than adults if they are being sexually abused. Brainstorm ways your teen could help, such as:

- Believe them. People rarely lie about sexual abuse.
- Reassure your friend that the abuse was NOT their fault. Even if they took "stupid" risks like being alone with the person after their parents forbid them to do so.
- Encourage your friend to tell an adult, so that your friend can get help and the offender does not abuse anyone else. Offer to go with your friend to talk to a counselor, doctor, faith leader, or police officer. Be sure your teen knows that even if their friend refuses to report, your child must tell an adult, even if it means losing the friendship. The friend's safety is much more important.
- Do not offer to confront or beat up the offender. It may get you hurt or in trouble with the law, and will only make matters worse.
- Keep the information confidential. Do help your friend tell an adult who can help. But don't tell other friends or classmates—do not betray your friend's trust.

8. **Know how to report.** The USA Wrestling Safe Sport Handbook has information on how to report suspected misconduct. Know where to report and educate your child on the multiple ways misconduct can be reported. Reporting is confidential.

What do I do if my child reports being sexually abused?

First, stay calm and believe your child. Some adults believe that children create stories about being sexually abused. In fact, it is extremely rare for children to lie about sexual abuse when it has not happened. Young children do not have the sexual knowledge or experience to “make up” stories of abuse. Also know that while children rarely lie about sexual abuse when it has not happened, it is quite common for children to lie by denying that abuse has occurred, when it has. Children may recant their disclosure for fear of harm, disbelief or shame. The single most important factor in a child’s recovery from sexual abuse is the support that child

receives from his or her family. Parents must tell their children they are proud of them for telling and emphasize that the child did not do anything wrong or bad. Refrain from investigating. Do not ask for any in-depth details and do not ask any leading questions. Just listen, be supportive, and see if you can get the “minimal facts” – who, what, where, and when. Then, report your concerns to child protection services and/or law enforcement.

Our Safe Sport Program is the cornerstone of USA Wrestling’s commitment to ensure a safe, healthy and positive wrestling environment for all of its members and volunteers. Our Safe Sport Program Handbook (www.takedownmisconduct.com) provides clear guidance on the core policies and procedures for athlete safety, and how to report your concerns to law enforcement, child protection services, and the U.S. Center for SafeSport. The Handbook serves as a road map for State Affiliates, chartered clubs and members in meeting these key responsibilities for athlete safety.

We would like every member of USA Wrestling to be familiar with the core policies and procedures in the Safe Sport Program Handbook. In order to be successful, we all have a role to play.

Special thanks to Dr. Sandy Wurtele at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs for her assistance and expertise in creating this pamphlet.

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To report misconduct, or for further questions on Safe Sport,
contact: safesport@usawrestling.org