



Sport as a Force for Good

Creating an environment that fosters character.

Make a promise. A promise to your athletes, your organization, and yourself. Let's eliminate bad behavior and grow positive values that last a lifetime.



Youth sports organizations and clubs should be an environment designed to nurture good character. Determination, courage, respect, teamwork, humility and passion are a few of the traits that naturally grow in a carefully maintained sporting community. Unfortunately, like any “eden” it only takes a little bad to spoil everything. Make a promise to your athletes, your organization, and yourself that you’ll do everything possible to use sport as a force for good in your community.

Let’s start with the truth. It should go without saying that leaders, coaches, trainers, volunteers, and anybody working with children and youth should act in a way beyond reproach. But it needs to be said. And said again.

According to a 2013 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, **one in four U.S. children** experience some form of child maltreatment in their lifetimes. According to the CDC, in 2012 **over 686,000 children were abused** (enough to pack 10 modern football stadiums). Over 90% of perpetrators are parents, family members, and family friends. **A report of child abuse is made every 10 seconds.** Regretfully, the CDC and Child Protective Services admit that their numbers are low because most abuse goes unreported.

The factual truth is ugly. It’s natural to want to look away from these facts. We’re wired to look for the best in each other. However, in order to protect young athletes and our sports organizations, we need to confront the truth with eyes open.

As a force for good, let’s promise to prevent bad behavior, offer training and dialogue, and expose abuse immediately.

Prevent Bad Behavior

One of the best ways to prevent future bad behavior is by not giving those who have lost trust in the past a chance to repeat their actions. Use a sensible screening process before allowing adults to fill positions that interact with your youth.

Background Screening

The internet, along with social networking, has created a digital world where information of all kinds is easily available. In some ways, too available. Even though searching for someone on Google or with social media may seem sensible, it could also lead to unsubstantiated information or information that should not factor into your decision-making process. The Federal Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) contains strict rules about what can and cannot be used in hiring decisions (even for volunteer positions). In addition to ever-changing FCRA rules, most states have additional rules that must be followed.

You can't unsee anything.

Conducting your own background screening using the internet or a low cost online data broker puts the responsibility of knowing and following all laws solely on you and your organization. Thorough records that show your hiring decisions were based on unbiased, legal considerations must be maintained. Unfiltered searches require you to do extra work in order to document and show that legally inadmissible information did not factor into your hiring decisions.

We're all feeling people led by emotion. It's what makes life worth living. At the same time, we can agree that we've all fallen short at one time or another and wouldn't want every small past indiscretion to define our future.

Unfiltered searches tend to expose personal information that is extraneous to our hiring decisions, but is still sure to impact us emotionally. If you see someone has been charged with a crime, you can't help but be emotionally impacted by that information. But, being charged with a crime isn't the same as being convicted. Further, what if you connect a crime to a person's full name and it even happened near where they live. We have to admit, our brain starts to connect the dots and wonder... "Could this be the same person?" Without a professional check that includes multiple data points (like, name, address, date of birth, and social security number) that can be double-checked against national, state, and local databases, it would be better that we didn't see such information in the first place.

Use a professional background screening service.

Instead of depending on yourself, low-cost data brokers, or even your local police department (who typically conduct limited, local searches), use a professional background screening service.

Professional background screeners will:

- use enough data to legally confirm someone's identity,
- search as wide and deep as needed, into national, state, and county databases,
- confirm information with the individual being screened,
- understand and follow the FCRA and your state's laws,
- maintain legal search records on your behalf,
- help you with policies to handle pre-adverse and adverse actions.

Make rules and policies public

As a deterrent, make sure you publish your policies about what is and is not appropriate behavior within your organization. Be transparent about background screening rules, definitions for mental, physical, and sexual abuse, and the consequences for breaking your policies. Openness about who and who cannot volunteer within your club helps to deter obvious abusers and well-meaning individuals who may have made past life choices that prevent them from volunteering.

The person you're trying to deter is rarely the mass-murdering crazed psychopath that the media and hollywood typify. Instead, it is probably someone like "Joe". Although not his real name, "Joe" is a real dad to two children that are both involved in youth sports in the New England area. "Joe" is employed, provides for his children, and has friends in the community. Unfortunately, a few years ago "Joe" was convicted for felony criminal threatening with a firearm. "Joe" served his time, reformed his behavior, and moved on with his life. Now, "Joe's" children really want him to coach with their club. "Joe" seems like, and probably is, a great guy. Other parents like him. You'd like him.

"Joe" has worked hard to reform himself for the sake of his family and the community. It makes sense to publicize your policies so "Joe" knows up front that he fails to meet the criteria to volunteer within your club. You save a well-meaning parent added embarrassment while protecting your athletes and organization from any future implications.

Open and Ongoing Education

Preventative measures only work to find and deter individuals who have already been caught and convicted for past abuses. Creating a positive sporting environment while discouraging bad behavior, requires ongoing dialogue with coaches, volunteers, parents, and athletes.

Volunteer and Coach Training

Require all volunteers and coaches to understand your safety policies. Give them access to tools and training that enables them to encourage safety and good behavior. A good resource for policies, information, and training programs is the U.S. National Olympic Committee's SafeSport website at <http://training.teamusa.org/resources>.

Pre-season Parents Night

Host a "get to know our club" style event for parents of young athletes. Give your board members, coaches, and parents a chance to connect faces with names. Make sure you take a serious moment to review policies and procedures you have established to keep athletes safe throughout the season. Then, make sure parents leave knowing how to communicate with your club and coaches. Share your "mobile phone tree" and any social media groups (like a Google+ or a private Facebook group) where parents can have continuing dialogue with your club.

Rewarding Sportsmanship

Nurturing good behavior takes more than preventing bad behavior. While recognizing sports ability, establish awards for good sportsmanship. Throughout the season and at closing banquets, treat character building equal to technical ability. Our athletic ability is short-lived, but good character will define our entire life.

Expose Bad Behavior

Despite your best intentions, abuse can and probably will eventually occur within your organization. If you've been diligent about prevention and created open, ongoing dialogue with volunteers, parents, and athletes, then you've created an environment where no one should "look the other way" or cover up bad behavior.

Planning for the Worst

Design and promote an internal reporting structure within your club. Make sure athletes and parents have access to your board members and not just coaching staff. Make sure there is an immediate plan to report serious behavior to the proper authorities rather than handling it within your organization. Remember, you're good at teaching and promoting sports. Leave investigation and legal issues to professionals like the police. As recent media abuse stories have demonstrated, one of the worst things you can do is wait after abuse has been reported. Don't leave yourself open to a "cover up" accusation. Visit the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services www.childwelfare.gov for specific federal and state reporting information.

Access to Anonymous Reporting

One of the best ways you can demonstrate that your club is serious about stopping abuse is to offer anonymous abuse reporting from your website. Organizations like the [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](http://www.nccmec.org) (NCMEC) offer toll-free hotlines and online forms to which you can link. The NCMEC's online reporting form is Congressionally-authorized and is operated in partnership with the FBI.



VERIFY BACKGROUND SCREENING

Verify works seamlessly with your Sport Ngin online registration tools to simplify the background screening process for everybody involved.

Prospective coaches and volunteers can start the screening process as part of their registration session. Administrators can view, sort and run instant reports on data updated in real time. And when the tough questions come up, you'll get the support you need to get them answered.

Verify is so much more than background screening. It's an active partner in your total risk management strategy.

Schedule your meeting now to get started on a personalized Verify plan for your organization:

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