

## **Buckeye Gymnastics Participant Safety and Welfare Policy\*\***

Consistent with the mission of Buckeye Gymnastics\*, the welfare of gymnastics, Ninja, Kidsport and cheerleading participants, especially minors, is of paramount concern. When any student, athlete, participant, coach, official, volunteer or staff member is subjected to abuse, whether physical or sexual, it undermines the mission of Buckeye Gymnastics and is inconsistent with the best interests of the sport of gymnastics and of the students and athletes Buckeye Gymnastics serves.

**Buckeye Gymnastics Standards of Behavior:** To promote a safe gymnastics environment for Buckeye Gymnastics' activities and events and to lessen the likelihood that an abusive situation could develop, participants should be aware of and all Buckeye staff must adhere to the following Buckeye Gymnastics Standards of Behavior:

1. Avoid Being Alone with a Minor. Gymnastics is a sport that lends itself to one-on-one situations between a coach and a gymnast. Avoid being alone with a child or any group of children in a private setting (e.g., bathroom, office, vehicle or residence), and avoid being alone with a child or any group of children in any place that is inappropriate to the coach-athlete relationship. When a one-on-one situation is necessary, such as private coaching lessons or conversations, conduct the activity within the view of another adult. Buckeye Gymnastics staff members will recognize this policy as the Two Adult Rule and are reminded that violation of this rule is specifically listed as grounds for immediate employment termination.

2. Physical Contact. Gymnastics is a sport that creates opportunities for physical contact between a coach and a gymnast. Physical contact is acceptable when it is reasonably intended to coach, teach or demonstrate a gymnastics skill or to prevent or lessen injury (e.g., spotting, catching). However, care should be taken to ensure that such contact is not invasive of sensitive areas of the body.

3. Parental Monitoring. Parents are encouraged to watch practice and training at any time and to become as active as reasonably possible in monitoring the activity/event.

4. Participant Transport: Buckeye teachers, coaches and staff are specifically prohibited from transporting any gymnast, student or participant. Team parents are required to provide transport to and from all competitions and other gym activities. All parents are required to provide transportation to and from the gym for class or practice or any other gym activities. There are a few exceptions including transport to and from National Training Camps and certain elite level competitions and activities. In all cases exceptions will require parents to present a signed "Permission to Transport" waiver.

### **Buckeye Gymnastics Standards Promote a Safe Gymnastics Environment**

1. Criminal Background Checks of Buckeye Gymnastics staff Members. As a condition to being granted the privilege of employment at Buckeye Gymnastics, individuals applying for employment must submit to a criminal background check which is consistent with USA Gymnastics' "Background Screening Policy." In addition, applicants must agree to submit to additional background checks for any reason or no reason should such additional background checks be determined to be in the best interest of Buckeye Gymnastics and its participants.

2. Buckeye Gymnastics certifies that all applicants will undergo references and prior place of employment checks.

3. Buckeye Gymnastics certifies that no persons permanently ineligible for USA Gymnastics membership and no persons listed on a federal or state sex-offender registry are or will be associated with the club/business or its activities in any way.

4. Buckeye Gymnastics will maintain current commercial general liability insurance that includes participant liability and participant accident medical insurances.

5. Buckeye strongly discourages staff from contacting athletes, including personal contact, email, instant messaging, text messaging, cellular/regular phone calls, social networking pages or other communication vehicles, for any reason not related to club business, such as invitations to meals or family gatherings or requests for babysitting. Buckeye related communication to all athletes will be directed to the parents/guardians. If gym-related communication is directed to a particular athlete necessarily, a copy to the parent/guardian will be sent simultaneously.

### **Conduct may be considered abusive:**

#### 1. Physical Abuse.

A. Any physical contact with a participant that intentionally causes or is likely to cause the participant to sustain bodily harm or personal injury, including without limitation, striking, hitting, kicking, biting, shaking, shoving, forcing an athlete to train or compete when seriously injured or mandating excessive exercise as a form of punishment.

B. Any physical contact with a participant that intentionally creates or is likely to create a threat of bodily harm or personal injury. *Physical contact that is reasonably intended to coach, teach or demonstrate a gymnastics skill or to prevent or lessen injury (e.g. spotting, catching) does not constitute physical abuse. Infrequent, non-intentional physical contact, particularly contact which arises out of an error or a misjudgment on the part of the gymnast, participant or coach, does not constitute physical abuse.*

C. Giving alcohol or inappropriate drugs to a participant.

#### 2. Sexual Abuse.

A. Rape, incest, fondling, exhibitionism or sexual exploitation;

B. Any form of sexual contact or inappropriate touching, unwanted physical contact, unwelcome advances or requests for sexual favors;

C. Any form of wanton or obscene gesturing, lewd remarks or indecent exposure;

D. Sexual abuse of a minor includes, without limitation:

i. Touching a minor participant for the purpose of causing the sexual arousal or gratification of either person; or

ii. minor participant touching any person, if the touching occurs at the request of or with the consent of such other person, for the sexual arousal or gratification of either person;

iii. Neither consent of the participant to the sexual abuse or contact, mistake as to the participant's age, nor the fact that the sexual abuse or contact did not take place at or in conjunction with a gymnastics function is a defense to a complaint of sexual abuse;

iv. Engaging in any behavior that utilizes the influence of a staff members position as teacher, coach, office staff or administrator to encourage sexual relations with a participant; or

v. Engaging in sexual harassment by making unwelcome advances, requests for sexual favors or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, where such conduct creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment; or

vi Any violation of applicable law directly or indirectly involving or related to sexual misconduct or child abuse, or that is specifically designed to protect minors.

**Reporting Suspected Abuse.** Any parent who reasonably and in good faith believes an employee of Buckeye Gymnastics has abused their child, whether physical or sexual, such parent should notify a Buckeye Gymnastics administrator, a trusted Buckeye teacher or coach, and/or local law enforcement.

1. Confidentiality: Any allegations of misconduct brought to a Buckeye staff member will remain confidential except that all such allegations will be shared with the gym owner.
2. Initial evaluations will center on the following:
  - A. Encouraging the victim(s) to seek professional help, if needed.
  - B. Evaluate referral to local law enforcement.
  - C. Evaluate need to further educate staff member or recommend employment termination.
  - D. Evaluate referral to USA Gymnastics as suspected physical or sexual abuse.
3. Coordinate, cooperate, communicate and act in consultation with the parent(s) on referrals, training, termination and reporting evaluations and actions.

**Clubs, coaches and PARENTS can take steps that will help prevent sexual abuse. One current prevention technique is understanding, watching for and interrupting predatory tactics, such as “grooming.”**

### **Grooming**

Abusers can use a subtle and gradual process known as grooming on children and their families. Grooming is a systematic process typically done over weeks, months or years to slowly lure and manipulate children into abuse. There is no “checklist” that can be used to identify an offender. However, there are red flags that can help clubs and coaches recognize predatory behaviors that may lead to abuse. Common grooming techniques can include the following:

Befriending the youngster and their family to slowly gain trust.

Giving gifts, money, trips, and/or performing special favors for youngster.

Promoting the notion that the relationship with the boy or girl is special.

Encouraging harmless secrets, laying the foundation for future sexual secrets.

Taking pictures/video of the child.

Communicating with the boy or girl excessively; texting, emailing or calling.

Desensitizing the child through nonsexual touching, “accidental” touching of privates and/or walking in on bathroom or dressing time.

Testing a child’s boundaries by using inappropriate language and/or telling dirty jokes.

Playing body contact games with children; tickling, backrubs or wrestling.

Making alcohol/drugs available to the youth.

Introducing pornography to initiate sexual interest or normalize the behavior.

Offering to babysit, including overnight trips or sleepovers.

Individual behaviors may occur that can seem like grooming without being part of a predatory process. They certainly require attention, but do not necessarily mean the person is abusive. It is important to understand these red flags so that gymnastics professionals can closely observe such individuals and, when needed, intervene to disrupt and/or report abuse in an effort to protect the athlete.

### **Signs of Abuse**

In addition to understanding grooming, watching for signs of abuse can help distinguish between a proper coach-athlete relationship and predatory behavior. Physical signs of sexual abuse are usually not observable (especially to adults other than parents, guardians and health professionals), but may include pain, injury, bleeding, discharge or disease in the private parts and/or mouth. Behavioral and emotional signs are typically more evident and can include:

- Sudden withdrawal from close ties.
- Disinterest or sudden inability to concentrate.
- Uncharacteristically aggressive or disruptive behavior.
- Sudden change in eating habits; drastic weight loss or gain.
- Marked fear or reluctance to be at a certain place, or alone with a certain person.
- Repeated health complaints, e.g., stomach aches, headaches.
- Depression, lethargy and weepiness.
- Noticeable change in dress; may include baggy, dark clothing.
- Interest in or knowledge of sexual matters beyond the boy's or girl's years.
- Using sexual language or acting out sexually.
- Touching other kids sexually. Follow up if you see such signs, especially multiple signs

**\*Our Mission.** We exist to develop talent. We believe that the development of the talents, aspirations, and dreams of our students and staff through gymnastics and related activities is the highest endeavor to which we can aspire. To that end we will create and thrive in a positive environment that applauds the attempt, encourages the dream, and values the individual.

\*\* The Buckeye Participant Safety and Welfare Policy is modelled on the USA Gymnastics Participant Welfare Policy and from the USA Gymnastics Clubs Care Campaign.