

FILM DISCUSSION GUIDE



AT THE HEART OF GOLD

INSIDE THE USA GYMNASTICS SCANDAL

A FILM BY ERIN LEE CARR

COURAGE
FIRST


THE FOUNDATION FOR
GLOBAL SPORTS
DEVELOPMENT


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NOTE FROM A SURVIVOR

Dear Survivors and Supporters,

I've always considered myself a daydreamer. My mind often wanders back to a time when I was dancing my favorite roles in my favorite ballets, but something about that time is dark. What changed my memory of my happy-go-lucky childhood self? Sexual abuse. There is no denying that trauma is detrimental to every aspect of a survivor's life, yet there is something vastly different about my story than that of most survivors.

When I came forward about my abuse from Larry Nassar, I was believed. I was welcomed to speak. I was able to cry and yell in a courtroom and watch my abuser be sentenced to life in prison. This is not what most survivors experience, and I can't imagine how different my journey would have been if I was not believed nor encouraged to speak up.

Throughout my continuum of healing, I struggled greatly, experiencing debilitating migraines and severe anxiety. Even when I dreamt of the happy times, there was a dark cloud over those memories. Although the storms of these struggles have raged, there have also been times when the sun has shone through. I've enjoyed participating in filming *At the Heart of Gold*, speaking at screenings, and being a survivor advocate for *Courage First*. While it is excruciating to watch not only my fellow survivors, my family, and myself, but also my abuser on screen, the film's final moments calm my heart and fill me with hope. The reason for this feeling of peace is you. The survivors. The supporters. The believers. The change-makers. When I look at you, I know that my dark times mattered.

As a teacher, I know the power of education. As a survivor, I know the power of conversation. I've recognized that the largest steps in my healing process have come from connecting and learning with others. My hope is that you will know your power in doing just that. Start the difficult conversation, believe survivors, and be an advocate for change. In doing so, you are turning darkness to light not just for me, but for survivors worldwide.

Truly yours,



Jessica Ann Smith



LETTER FROM THE PRODUCERS

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to watch *At the Heart of Gold: Inside the USA Gymnastics Scandal* (ATHOG). We applaud your initiative to learn more about this case and the complexities within it. This is the first step in curbing the epidemic of abuse in sport.

Our passion for sport extends into everything we do. It drives our mission and objectives as leaders of The Foundation for Global Sports Development, and it inspires the documentaries we produce at Sidewinder Films. Given our love of sports and all its positive benefits, we were devastated to learn the details of the USA Gymnastics scandal as they began to unfold. Trust was broken, athletes were ignored, and institutions prioritized medals, winning, and reputations over the lives and safety of the athletes they were meant to protect.

It became clear there was a larger story, and it needed to be told through the voices of the survivors. Throughout the production of ATHOG, we were impressed by their strength and resilience. We realized that for many of the survivors, the 2018 sentencing hearing – at which 156 survivors delivered victim impact statements – marked the end of one chapter, and the beginning of a new one in which survivors work to ensure that future generations of athletes are protected.

This film and its accompanying discussion guide are a tribute to them. We hope that by raising awareness and offering resources, adults will feel empowered to courageously step forward and end abuse in sport. Together, we can transform the win-at-all-costs culture of sport that has allowed abuse to thrive.

Thank you for joining us in this mission.

Warmest Regards,



Dr. Steven Ungerleider, Producer

David Ulich, Producer



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE FILM

At the Heart of Gold: Inside the USA Gymnastics Scandal chronicles how for more than two decades, Larry Nassar sexually abused hundreds of female athletes as the osteopathic physician for the U.S. Women's Olympic gymnastics team and a Michigan State University (MSU) doctor. The documentary premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival on April 25, 2019 and was followed by an HBO home release on May 3, 2019. Learn more about the film at

www.SidewinderFilms.org.



HONORS
OFFICIAL RECIPIENT
2020





COURAGE FIRST



Courage First, created by The Foundation for Global Sports Development, is a program designed to support youth-serving organizations and institutions in creating safe and abuse-free environments for children and teens.

We believe that by building awareness around child abuse and equipping adults with the knowledge and confidence required to protect youth, every adult can become an advocate for our children and teens.

This guide is a tool to be used in community screenings of the documentary to raise awareness, and deepen understanding, about protecting young people from childhood sexual abuse.

DISCUSSION GOALS

Larry Nassar’s sexual abuse of hundreds of young athletes within USA Gymnastics and at Michigan State University garnered a great deal of media attention, and related cases continue to implicate people and institutions who have inflicted and enabled profound harm on countless individuals.

The visibility of the case may be unique, but the nature of his abuse is not. Sadly, neither is the complicity of so many people and institutions around it.

Our vision at Courage First is to use this story and this moment to spark a movement to protect young people in athletics, schools, and other youth programming where children’s care and well-being is entrusted to institutions and adults. We want to create a culture where childhood sexual abuse is rare because communities are working together to prevent abuse, identify and call it out when it happens, believe and support survivors, and hold abusers—and those who enable them—accountable for their actions.



TIPS FOR FACILITATING A SCREENING EVENT

Prepare Yourself

Considering some audience questions and answers will center around the Larry Nassar case, read through this guide, the information at [CourageFirst.org](https://www.couragefirst.org), and [Darkness to Light's material](#) to plan the discussion and be ready to offer attendees supplemental resources to learn more.

Practice Self-Care

Though your role as a facilitator is to guide your group discussion, it is important to recognize that you will have your own response to the film. Take enough time to view it and process your reactions with a colleague or friend beforehand, so you feel prepared to effectively lead the conversation.

Please refer to our screening manual for help with:

- Screening Planning and Promotion
- Logistics
- Post Screening Q&A or Panel
- Responding to Disclosures
- Local resources and support
- After the Screening
- Measuring Impact



INFORMING THE DISCUSSION

The following sections offer information and background to help audiences and facilitators understand the key ideas and concepts introduced in the film.



TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Unless otherwise noted, definitions are from [Darkness to Light](#), a non-profit organization committed to empowering adults to end childhood sex abuse.

Childhood Sex Abuse:

Often a traumatic experience for children and teens, child sexual abuse is a criminal offense punishable by law in the United States.

Child sexual abuse includes:

- Any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors when one forcibly exerts or manipulates their power over the other.
- Forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act.
- Non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or Internet.

Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse:

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse are at significant risk for lifelong challenges such as mental health disorders like post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as physical ailments like chronic illness, heart disease, cancer, stroke and other serious problems.

Surviving childhood sexual abuse may also put a person at increased risk for substance abuse, academic challenges, sexual dysfunction and/or over-sexualized behavior, teen pregnancy, running away, truancy or other criminal behaviors, and more.¹ It is important to note that not all survivors experience these effects, and therapeutic treatment is available for those who do.

Grooming:

Grooming is a deliberate process by which an offender gradually draws a victim into a sexual relationship and then shrouds that relationship in secrecy. The perpetrator may coerce the victim to maintain that secrecy by alluding to dire consequences should they be found out. At the same time, the offender may work to fill roles within the victim's family, making themselves a trusted authority figure and valued friend. These behaviors make it difficult to identify the abuse as it is happening, because the offender establishes themselves as a prominent, friendly, respectable, and even integral part of families and communities. In doing so, the perpetrator makes it tricky for a child to understand they are being abused, because they view this person as a role model or mentor.

In cases where the child reports abuse, the surrounding adults often react with disbelief, because the offender has done such an effective job of embedding themselves within families, workplaces, schools, athletic leagues, faith organizations, or other kinds of communities.

Larry Nassar's behavior is illustrative of grooming. He became an important and respected figure within Michigan State University, USA Gymnastics, and other organizations all while manipulating young women and their families into believing his medical treatment was legitimate, when in fact it was abuse.

Grooming behaviors can include:

- Special attention, outings, and gifts
- Isolating the child from others
- Filling the child's unmet needs
- Filling needs and roles within the family
- Treating the child as if he or she is older than they actually are
- Gradually crossing physical boundaries, and becoming increasingly intimate/sexual
- Use of secrecy, blame, and threats to maintain control

1. https://www.d2l.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Statistics_5_Consequences.pdf

Mandatory Reporters:

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act requires that each state create policies and procedures for certain professionals who work with children to report instances of suspected or known child abuse. Those professionals are known as mandatory reporters, and often include social workers, teachers and administrators in educational institutions, physicians and other medical care professionals, counselors, therapists, childcare workers and others.

To find a list of the mandatory reporting statutes in your state, visit

www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/state/

ChildUSA, a think tank committed to the protection of children, has convened a **Commission to Protect Youth Athletes** to, among other goals, advocate that coaches, athletic trainers, and other athletic professionals be included in mandatory reporting.

REPORTING SEXUAL ABUSE

Reporting Abuse if the Victim is a Minor

First and foremost, we encourage you to call the National Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-4-A-CHILD**, as they can provide guidance specific to your situation.

The pathway to report abuse in the United States typically involves two steps:

- If the offender is a non-relative or relative living outside the home (aunt, family friend, coach, etc.), you would make a report to law enforcement personnel. If there is an immediate threat of harm, dial 911 or your local emergency number. If everyone is out of harm's way, dial your local non-emergency line to report the crime.
- If the offender is a parent, guardian, or someone else living in the home, report the abuse to law enforcement and then contact local child welfare authorities. Call your state or county child welfare agency.

Nothing should keep a person from making a report when they suspect child abuse. Upon reporting, you may be asked for the following details:

- Names and addresses of the child and the child's parents or other persons responsible for the child's care
- The child's age
- Conditions in the child's home environment
- The nature and extent of the child's injuries and information about other children in the same environment.

Reporting Abuse or Assault if the Victim is an Adult

The RAINN hotline is a confidential resource available to help you process what happened, and safely determine next steps. Call 800.656.HOPE (4673) to speak to a trained crisis counselor or visit:

www.rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline

Typically, the method to report abuse & assault in the US is to file a report with local law enforcement. Dial 911 or your local emergency number if there is an immediate threat of harm, or you may dial the non-emergency line to report a crime if everyone is out of harm's way.

CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE STATISTICS

EVERY 9 MINUTES

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES SUBSTANTIATES, OR FINDS
EVIDENCE FOR, A CLAIM OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE.

RAINN

National Sexual Assault Hotline | 800.656.HOPE | online.rainn.org
Please visit rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens for full citation

- About one in 10 children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.
- About one in seven girls and one in 25 boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18.²
- Females ages 16-19 are four times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault.³
- Among cases of childhood sexual abuse reported to law enforcement, 93 percent of abusers are known to the victim.⁴

2. <https://gendersociety.wordpress.com/2014/04/09/normalizing-sexual-violence/> Townsend, C., & Rheingold, A.A., (2013).

Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners: studies. Charleston, S.C., Darkness to Light. Retrieved from www.D2L.org.

3. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens>

4. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement (2000)

<https://gendersociety.wordpress.com/2014/04/09/normalizing-sexual-violence/>

UNDERSTANDING TITLE IX

All Americans, regardless of their sex, are protected from discrimination in education by Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, which states:

*No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.*⁵

The protections afforded by Title IX have proven to be transformative in many ways. With regard to athletics, the number of young women participating in sports in school has increased more than ten-fold since 1972, from just under 300,000 to over 3 million.⁶

Title IX has also transformed the protections against sexual harassment and sexual violence on educational campuses across the country. Requirements include such provisions as an institutional obligation to respond to and investigate reports of harassment and assault, confidentiality protection for survivors, dissemination of Title IX compliance guidelines, and at least one staff person dedicated to coordinating Title IX, grievance procedures, training, and more.⁷ These requirements were published in response to high rates of sexual assault and harassment on campuses:

- 11.2% of all students experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation (among all graduate and undergraduate students).
- Among undergraduate students, 23.1% of females and 5.4% of males experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation.
- 21% of TGQN (transgender, genderqueer, nonconforming) college students have been sexually assaulted, compared to 18% of non-TGQN females, and 4% of non-TGQN males.
- Only 20% of female student victims, age 18-24, report to law enforcement.⁸

Many of the complaints filed against Larry Nassar, and against MSU, were filed as Title IX violations because they took place on campus.

Know Your IX is a national, student-led non-profit agency that strives to improve awareness of Title IX requirements and increase compliance. The website offers toolkits for survivors, students, alumni, and parents to explore current policies where they exist, and demand Title IX compliance at their institutions.



5. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html

6. http://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/TitleIX45-295-FINAL_WEB.pdf

7. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.pdf>

8. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence>

TIMELINE OF THE LARRY NASSAR CASE ^{9,10}

1986

Larry Nassar joins USA Gymnastics as a Sports Trainer.

1992

While still a medical student, Larry Nassar assaults a 12-year-old girl (according to victim's report in a 2017 lawsuit.).

1996

Nassar named the national medical coordinator for USA Gymnastics.

1997

Nassar named team physician and assistant professor at Michigan State University (MSU).

1998

Concerns about abuse raised to MSU gymnastics coaches are dismissed.

1999

MSU cross-country athlete reports to her coach that Nassar assaulted her, and her coach dismisses the complaint.

2000

MSU softball player tells three trainers and one staff person she felt Nassar's treatments were sexually inappropriate. Her complaints are dismissed.

2004

A 17-year-old reports to Meridian Township Police that she was assaulted during a visit to Nassar. He defends his actions as valid treatment and the case is dismissed.

2014

MSU graduate Amanda Thomashow reports to MSU Sports Medicine clinic that Nassar assaulted her. University president Lou Anna K. Simon is made aware of the Title IX complaint, and that a police report has been filed against an unnamed physician.

During the ensuing 16 months-long MSU police investigation, Nassar continues to treat patients, and is later cleared of wrongdoing.

9. <https://www.sbnation.com/2018/1/19/16900674/larry-nassar-abuse-timeline-usa-gymnastics-michigan-state>

10. <https://www.childusa.org/gameover?rq=mandatory%20reporters>

2016

Rachel Denhollander files a police report against Nassar, alleging abuse from Nassar at age 15 in 2000. She and another anonymous gymnast speak to reporters from the Indianapolis Star.

Nassar is relieved of duties at MSU, but not fired, and USA Gymnastics issues conflicting reports that he was either “relieved of duties” or “retired” in 2015.

A civil complaint is filed on behalf of Rachel Denhollander.

Indianapolis Star publishes an article about Rachel Denhollander.

Nassar is fired from MSU.

Nassar is charged with three counts of first degree criminal sexual assault in Michigan with the State Attorney General revealing 50 complaints (a number that increased to more than 100 as the case progressed).

In a separate case, federal child pornography charges are filed against Nassar.

2017

Many survivors file civil claims in federal court against Nassar, Michigan State, USA Gymnastics, and Twistars Gymnastics Club, including sexual assault allegations against Nassar from 1996 to 2016, and claim that the inaction of the institutions enabled the abuse of many more athletes.

MSU Gymnastics coach Kathie Klages is suspended when cases reveal she neglected to follow up on at least two abuse reports in the 1990s.

Kathie Klages announces her retirement.

A state disciplinary board revokes Nassar’s medical license for a minimum of 3 years.

The number of complaints of sexual abuse and/or assault against Nassar grow to more than 100, including Olympians Aly Raisman, Gabby Douglas and McKayla Maroney.

Nassar pleads guilty to child pornography in Michigan federal court and is sentenced to 60 years in prison.

Nassar pleads guilty to seven counts of first-degree sexual misconduct as part of a plea deal in Ingham County Circuit Court.

Nassar pleads guilty to three counts of first-degree sexual misconduct as part of a plea deal in Eaton County Circuit Court.

McKayla Maroney reveals she received payment to sign a 2016 non-disclosure agreement with USA Gymnastics to keep silent about Nassar’s abuse.

2018

Twistars Gym owner and USA Gymnastics coach, John Geddert, is suspended. That same day, the following USA Gymnastics Board Members give their resignations: Paul Parilla, Jay Binder and Bitsy Kelley.

156 women read Victim Impact statements during Larry Nassar's sentencing hearing in Michigan's Ingham County Circuit Court.

Judge Rosemarie Aquilina sentences Nassar to 40-175 years in prison on seven counts of criminal sexual assault, to begin after the 60 years served for child pornography.

The Board of USA Gymnastics resigns, and USA Gymnastics coach John Geddert is suspended.

MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon resigns.

The U.S. Olympic Committee announces new policies to protect athletes, including counseling and support for Nassar survivors, and eventually de-certifies USA Gymnastics as the governing body for the U.S. Artistic Gymnastics program.

MSU agrees to \$500 million settlement in a class-action lawsuit filed by Nassar survivors who claim the University failed to protect them from sexual abuse.

Officials at USA Gymnastics and MSU continue to be charged with criminal counts.

2019

Mediations continue with USA Gymnastics and the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee.

PRE- AND POST- SCREENING SUGGESTIONS



PRE-SCREENING: INTRODUCE THE FILM

At the beginning of your event, it may be helpful to share the reason for your screening, offer a reminder that the content may be difficult to watch, that support is available, and give your group a glimpse of the follow-up activities they can expect. Here are some sample scripts to adapt for your audience:

Share Your Purpose:

Thank you for coming. We are showing this film because we believe that the more we bring sexual abuse and assault into the open, the better we will become at protecting our children from it.

Content Warning:

Given the subject matter, you may have a strong reaction to parts of the film. Though there are no graphic visuals, much of the information in the documentary is of a sensitive nature. We encourage you to practice self-care as you watch the film; feel free to come and go as needed.

After the Film:

Please stay for a short discussion immediately following the film. There is no pressure for you to participate in the discussion if you don't feel ready or comfortable, but we do hope you'll stay to learn more about how you can become part of the movement to protect young people.

Pre-Screening Discussion Questions:

- What brought you here to see the film?
- How would you describe a healthy relationship between a child and an authority figure like a coach?
- What do you know about the Larry Nassar case? How do you think child abuse like that can happen?

POST-SCREENING: TAKE A MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

After watching the film, it may be helpful to invite your group to take a few moments for self-care and reflection. Providing pens and paper for people to write down questions or feelings can support the audience in thinking through their reactions. It may also be helpful to lead your group in some mindfulness exercises such as deep breathing and quiet meditation to process their emotions.

Post-Screening Discussion Questions:

- Before watching the film, how concerned were you with the issue of child sexual abuse? What was your definition of child abuse?
- Did the film change your mind or shift your perspective about how and where child sexual abuse happens? If so, how?
- How might the film change the way you address the issue of potential abuse in your children's lives?
- In what way might the film influence how you monitor your children's relationships with adults in their lives?
- Do you think anything was missing from the film? Is there anything you'd like to discuss that was not brought up in the film? What further information would you want?
- This case was specific to athletes, but abuse extends to other areas, such as private music lessons, religious youth programming and other types of youth activities. What might you take from this film that you'd like to apply in your own life and the lives of children you care for?
- Think about times when your child, or children in your care are alone with other adults. How can you monitor these situations and talk to children about them?
- What are ways to encourage children to feel comfortable sharing concerns or feelings of discomfort with you?
- If you work with children, what steps can you take to ensure their safety?
- What aspects of the Karolyi Ranch and the Twistars gym do you think allowed Nassar to operate undetected? Some considerations may include relationships between coaches and athletes, "no pain, no gain" attitudes, access to athletes.

Reporting

- Have you been trained to know what to do if you see potential abuse, or if abuse is reported to you?
- Mandated reporters are professionals who are required by law to report suspected or known abuse to authorities. Do you know who are mandated reporters in your state, and how to reach one? ChildWelfare.gov publishes state-by-state lists, and ChildUSA.org is advocating for sports professionals to be included in that list.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

FACILITATE A PANEL DISCUSSION

Convening local stakeholders for a panel discussion followed by a Q & A session is a reliable format to use for community conversations. Inviting leaders of advocacy groups with expertise on sexual assault, scholars, and other community partners, helps build a local audience and inform the community. These discussions offer a chance for multiple perspectives to be shared, respected, and heard in an open and safe forum.

Offer your group the opportunity to focus on particular topics that were raised in the film and coach them through a deeper understanding.

Consider a “World Cafe” structure where facilitators sit at different stations and audience members move from table to table to discuss specific topics in the film. Have stations report back to the larger group.

Grooming

Many of the survivors in the film shared that their parents knew Larry Nassar and sometimes were even in the room when the abuse occurred.

In the film, attorney Mick Grewal describes this as part of grooming, where a predator elicits trust with a victim’s family. He says, “The parent’s sitting there. The child’s watching the parent. The child doesn’t want to tell the parent this is going on but believes the parent must know because it’s happening right in front of them, so it’s okay. So, guess what happens later on? Parent doesn’t come into the next session and instead of it being a two-minute procedure it ends up being a forty-five-minute procedure. The young girl thinks it’s okay ‘cause mom and dad were sitting in the room before.”

Discussion Prompts

What do you understand about grooming behavior?

If the parents in the film had the opportunity to educate other parents, what do you imagine their message would be?

How do you talk to your children about healthy relationships with adults? With you?

Reporting

Larry Nassar's abuse was reported several times before he was finally brought to justice.

Child Health and Safety Advocate Marci Hamilton says, "Adults prefer and protect adults. We say we protect children, but children are second-class citizens. They don't vote. They don't have power and it's so much easier to let a child's needs go. It's really denial, but it's also they're protecting the adult's livelihood. No one wants to destroy a successful adult's life. And so we put it off and we put it off."

Discussion Prompts

Marci Hamilton asserted that "Adults prefer and protect adults." Does that resonate with you? Why or why not?

What professional and personal dynamics did you see in place at MSU, at Twistars Gym, and elsewhere that enabled Nassar to escape multiple charges?

How can institutional policies and training support better responses to reporting?

What would it take to shift our priorities from protecting perpetrators to believing survivors?

Healthy Bodies and Relationship

The young athletes in the film report that it was difficult for them to believe their own experience of abuse because they had been taught to respect the doctors, the coaches, and other authority figures around them.

"I felt violated but he's a doctor. It's got to be for some reason. So, I just never said anything and I just kind of accepted it." - Isabell Hutchins

Discussion Prompts

How do we teach young people to understand what is and isn't appropriate?

What is the balance between believing in and trusting authorities, while maintaining body autonomy and trust in self?

How do we vet coaches, trainers, and other adults in trusted positions?



IN THEIR OWN WORDS – LEARNING FROM SURVIVORS

Post or read aloud the following quotes from survivors in the film.
Invite audience members to talk about which quote they respond to,
and why.

“I actually defended him at first ‘cause I knew that, well I was told, that this was a valid medical procedure and I was brainwashed and conditioned into believing that for the past twenty years in, I think, in order to just survive through it. And so, I defended him.”

Larissa Boyce

“I was so embarrassed when it first started coming out, I didn’t want to say anything. I was like, how did I let this happen? How did I not know? The thing is like, my whole life like I’ve trained to be smart as I can, as strong as I can, and as fearless as I can. And like in moments like that where those things happen, I was none of those things. And to me that was like soul crushing.”

Taylor Livingston

“I thought that training for the Olympics would be the hardest thing that I would ever have to do. But in fact, the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do is process that I’m a victim of Larry Nassar.”

Jordyn Wieber

“My parents had become close friends with Larry and his wife Stephanie. It was during this time, I estimate I was approximately six years old, that Larry Nassar began to sexually abuse me. He first exposed his penis to me in a dark boiler room in the basement of his home...Let me remind you of the interests of a six-year-old girl. My favorite TV show was “Clifford The Big Red Dog” and my favorite book was Junie B. Jones. I could not do a multiplication problem and still had not lost all my baby teeth. Someone of this maturity level should not be sexually active, but I was. Without my knowledge or consent, I had engaged in my first sexual experience by Kindergarten....Due to complex details that I won’t get into here, my parents chose to believe Larry Nassar over me. I spent the years between twelve and eighteen avoiding and detaching from my family.”

Kyle Stephens



“I started to get anxiety after seeing all the news reports about him. I felt like I couldn’t breathe, and I would tremble in fear. I have nightmares about what happened and have troubles with sleeping. I’ve been put on anxiety pills just so I can function throughout the day. It’s hard for me to trust people because of you. I get scared and uncomfortable when I have to go to the doctor’s. I get scared that I will be taken advantage of once again by another doctor, just like you did. I’ve tried my best to gain back the strength I once had. I am a survivor. Here I am today facing my abuser. I’m finally being heard. I’m no longer hiding my story.”

Chelsea Zervas

“When the adults in authority do not respond properly to disclosures of sexual assault, when institutions create a culture where a predator can flourish unafraid, this is what it looks like. It looks like a courtroom full of survivors who carry deep wounds, women and girls who carry scars that will never fully heal, but who have banded together to fight for themselves because no one else would do it. Women and girls who have made the choice to place the guilt and shame on the only person to whom it belongs, the abuser. But may the horror expressed in this courtroom over the last seven days be motivation for anyone and everyone, no matter the context, to take responsibility if they have erred in protecting a child, to understand the incredible failures that led to this week, and to do it better the next time.”

Rachael Denhollander

In closing: Discuss the value of prioritizing the voices and experiences of survivors as a way for communities to respond to, learn from, and prevent sexual assault.

JOIN OUR MOVEMENT

There are many ways to get involved and take action to protect young people.

SPEAK UP AND SPEAK OUT

The primary goal of our campaign is to raise awareness of sexual abuse in sports and other youth activities, and to encourage adults to think about and advocate for practices, policies, and procedures in these programs that will protect the young people in them. Ask the leaders of the organizations you are involved with what protocols are in place to protect the youth you care about.

GET CERTIFIED

Courage First has partnered with Darkness to Light, a non-profit committed to empowering adults to prevent child sexual abuse, to offer online training and certification opportunities for our community to learn how to prevent, identify, and respond to abuse. The online format allows adults access to top-of-the-line training anytime, anywhere.

Learn more at [CourageFirst.org/training](https://www.CourageFirst.org/training).

#PLEDGE**COURAGE**

Join us as we encourage and empower all adults to become vigilant protectors of youth. Any and every adult can learn how to prevent, recognize, and respond to abuse. Post a selfie to your social media using the hashtags #pledgecourage #couragefirst and explain why protecting youth is important to you.

Tag @CourageFirst and visit [CourageFirst.org/pledgecourage](https://www.CourageFirst.org/pledgecourage) for more info.



SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Responding to a Disclosure Handout

Please visit www.CourageFirst.org.

Courage First's Preventing Abuse in Sport: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/Otcd0jxnzpz41i8/Courage%20First%20Guide%20for%20Parents.pdf?dl=0>

Violence and Abuse Prevention in Sports

<https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/2789/3/Violence%20and%20abuse%20prevention%20in%20sport%E2%80%99%20in%20K%20Kaufman%20.pdf>

Brackenridge investigates how the foundation of sports, analogous to the structure of the church, provides easy access for sex offenders. The author asserts that, while the research on sexual exploitation of youth athletes falls slightly short, a myriad of prevention policies and techniques can help rectify the issue of sexual abuse within sports. These techniques include but are not limited to: shifting the focus from protecting coaches to protecting children, education on the prevalence of abuse within sports, and universal definitions of abuse.



Playing safe: Assessing the Risk of Sexual Abuse to Elite Child Athletes

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a1fe/585a19259091d9598e0f5ac63523e0ba0211.pdf>

This white paper puts forward the concept of “sport age,” which considers the fact that peak performance occurs at different ages in every sport and proposes that the risk of abuse within each sport depends on the trajectory of athlete development specific to the sport. The “stage of imminent achievement,” when athletes have reached a high level but are just under elite (maybe about to be selected for a national team) is the most vulnerable, because these athletes have the most to lose (as opposed to novices or already established elites).

Disclosure of Sexual Abuse in Sport Organizations: A Case Study

Abstract available for free at:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sylvie_Parent/publication/51208239_Disclosure_of_Sexual_Abuse_in_Sport_Organizations_A_Case_Study/links/00b7d53c577da2ff46000000/Disclosure-of-Sexual-Abuse-in-Sport-Organizations-A-Case-Study.pdf

This case study provides a theoretical model of sexual abuse in sports, including victim selection, grooming, barriers (and lack thereof), power dynamics, and disclosure. Sports “stakeholders” (athletes, parents, coaches, administrators) were interviewed about child sex abuse in sports and the author found that obstacles to disclosure include “prejudice, beliefs, and myths that seemed to perpetuate a culture of inaction and silence.” The results showed that stakeholders (including the athletes themselves) “minimized and trivialized problems experienced by victims, blamed victims for the acts perpetrated against them, and even challenged the victims’ credibility.”

VICTIM SUPPORT RESOURCES

RAINN

National Sexual Assault Hotline:
1-800-656-HOPE
www.rainn.org

National Center for Victims of Crime

(202) 467-8700
www.victimsofcrime.org

ChildHelp

National Child Abuse Hotline:
1-800-4-A-CHILD
www.childhelp.org

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

VictimConnect

1-855-4-VICTIM
www.VictimConnect.org

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