



## **ATHLETE ASSISTANCE FUND AND THE NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN LAUNCH SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION E-LEARNING MODULES FOR GYMNASTS AND PARENTS**

*As part of the Athletes are Children First initiative, the program provides on-demand, interactive and age appropriate sexual abuse workshops for gymnasts grades K-12 and their parents and caregivers*

*The New York State pilot project will begin in-person and virtual sexual abuse prevention trainings for gym owners and coaches in September*

**New York, NY — September 17, 2021** — The **Athlete Assistance Fund** (AAF) and **The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children** (The NYSPCC) announced today the launch of on-demand and interactive sexual abuse prevention e-learning modules for gymnasts grades K-12 and their parents and caregivers, as part of the next phase of their ***Athletes are Children First*** initiative, a child sexual abuse prevention program specific to the sport of gymnastics that debuted earlier this year.

The new e-learning modules complement the first phase of the initiative—sexual abuse prevention trainings for gym owners, coaches and staff—by educating gymnasts about the difference between appropriate and inappropriate interactions they may experience as athletes and ways in which to protect themselves from potential sexual abuse, through age appropriate content. There is also a module for parents and caregivers which provides them with the necessary resources to keep their children safe as they enjoy the sport of gymnastics. The [modules](#) are as follows:

- **[Safe Touches \(K-4th grade\)](#)**: This module follows siblings, Brandon and Isabel, and their friends as they practice gymnastics and learn that their bodies are their own special property, the difference between safe and not-safe touches, and what to do if they ever feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
- **[Keeping Our Bodies Safe \(5-8th grade\)](#)**: This module follows six friends as they learn how to set and communicate their boundaries, spot signs of grooming or abusive behavior, and protect themselves in situations where they feel unsafe in and out of the gym.
- **[Know Your Rights \(9-12th grade\)](#)**: This module includes scenarios and answers to common questions teens may have about sexual abuse, including statistics and common dynamics, why it's hard to speak up about sexual abuse and how they can help a friend who may be experiencing abuse.
- **[Keeping Our Children Safe \(Parents & Caregivers\)](#)**: This online course teaches parents and caregivers about child sexual abuse and how to keep their child safe. It was developed by child sexual abuse prevention experts and is intended to support parents

and caregivers by providing them with the knowledge, skills and additional resources to talk with their child about body safety concepts and sexual abuse, and to implement protective factors to prevent sexual abuse from occurring.

The e-learning modules will be housed and accessed through the AAF's website [here](#). A parent or caregiver must register through the site to log their child on to any course.

"The Athlete Assistance Fund seeks to eradicate all forms of abuse in the sport of gymnastics and safeguard athletes through a combination of critical abuse prevention education and counseling services, and the new education modules are an essential part of this education," said Tina Ferriola, Athlete Assistance Fund Board Chair, CEO of NYC Elite Gymnastics, and former competitive gymnast. "My hope is that the age-specific education and guidance provided by these training modules will spark a robust and healthy dialogue among athletes, parents and coaches as we all work together to protect and educate the gymnastics community."

"The *Athletes are Children First* initiative is a 360 degree approach to preventing child abuse in the sport of gymnastics," said Dr. Mary L. Pulido, Executive Director of The NYSPCC. "From training gym owners and coaches to recognize and report child sexual abuse to giving parents and the gymnasts themselves the ability to identify abuse when it occurs, this initiative ensures that every player in these children's lives is equipped with a comprehensive safety tool kit. Whether they are just starting out in the sport or are on an Olympic journey, fostering a safe environment for our children to enjoy the sport is of the utmost importance."

Additionally, the AAF and The NYSPCC announced today that the *Athletes are Children First* New York State pilot project, the first phase of the initiative to provide child sexual abuse awareness and prevention workshops for gymnastics clubs, will begin trainings in September after being delayed this spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project connects gym owners and coaches with local child protection experts to provide them with the knowledge and tools they need to keep child athletes safe. The AAF and The NYSPCC selected seven child advocacy centers and child welfare agencies in New York State to spearhead the project including, **Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf Behavioral Health, Inc.**, **Child Advocacy Center of the Finger Lakes**, **Albany County Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center**, **The Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse**, the **Suffolk County Child Advocacy Center**, and the **Child Advocacy Center of Putnam County**, which will work in collaboration with the **Child Advocacy Center at the Westchester Institute for Human Development**. Trainings will be offered in-person and virtually.

The *Athletes are Children First* initiative also provides bi-monthly virtual training sessions for gymnastics club coaches and staff nationally, to ensure comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention education is available nationwide and in order to help club owners and coaches understand appropriate athlete-coach boundaries, and create and implement child safety policies and report practices that will safeguard gymnasts and foster a culture that promotes athletes' wellbeing.

All child sexual abuse prevention trainings through the *Athletes are Children First* initiative are available free-of-charge across the country. For additional information on this initiative and the e-learning modules, please visit [athleteassistancefund.org/training/](http://athleteassistancefund.org/training/).

### **About The Athlete Assistance Fund**

The Athlete Assistance Fund (AAF) seeks to eradicate all forms of abuse in the sport of gymnastics through a combination of critical abuse prevention education and counseling

services. An independent, not-for-profit, the AAF delivers comprehensive abuse prevention education for gymnasts, parents, coaches and gym owners and provides free counseling services to any current or former USA Gymnastics member or gymnast who suffered sexual abuse within the sport of gymnastics. Read more about the AAF at <http://www.athleteassistancefund.org>.

### **About The NYSPCC**

The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children ([The NYSPCC](http://www.nyspcc.org)) is one of the most highly respected child protective agencies in the world. Founded in 1875, The NYSPCC helps the most vulnerable children of our community recover from trauma. And, more importantly, it helps prevent child abuse through its work with parents, teachers, children and foster care agencies. The NYSPCC's amazing work is used as a model for child welfare agencies across the nation. The NYSPCC has investigated more than 650,000 cases on behalf of over two million children and has educated over 53,000 professionals working with children on child abuse and neglect issues. Read more about The NYSPCC at <http://www.nyspcc.org>

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