

How To Respond When An Athlete Discloses Abuse



You may find yourself in a situation where a swimmer confides in you that he or she has been abused by a teacher, family member, another athlete, or even by a coach. If this happens, follow these four steps:

Step 1: Listen.

Do your best to stay calm and let her talk. Don't pry, but you can ask a few questions that will help you understand what happened.

Can you tell me more about that? What happened next?

Step 2. Reassure.

Your swimmer may be scared, angry, confused and crying. You can reassure him or her with a few simple comments like:

"I know how hard this is to talk about."

"You are very brave for bringing this out."

"Don't worry, you are doing the right thing by letting someone know."

"This isn't your fault. You've done nothing wrong."

"I'm very sorry this has happened to you."

Step 3. Protect.

Make sure your swimmer is safe. Do not let the accused person have any further contact with him or her and tell the athlete you will do everything you can to keep him or her safe. Let the athlete know you must share what he/she has told you with others who can help.

Step 4. Report.

Write down as quickly as you can everything the swimmer shared with you in as much detail as possible, using the swimmer's actual words, not your own interpretation.

USA Swimming requires that its members promptly report any incident regarding sexual misconduct to USA Swimming's Safe Sport staff. Your club may also have its own reporting policies and in most states the law requires you to report suspected abuse to the police or child protection authorities.