

# A Safeguarding Checklist:

## 12 questions every parent *and coach* should ask.

We assume that all children's activity centers and your local high school are doing the right thing to protect kids from predators, the same way we assume restaurants are following food safety standards. We don't go into a restaurant and demand to check the kitchen, because the government has already inspected it. Regrettably, even though the US Olympic Committee was created and is governed by a federal statute, there is no agency that oversees how the USOC or national governing bodies like USA Gymnastics are run. While students can take their complaints to the Department of Education; employees can go to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, no comparable government agency oversees athletes. Most countries have a "Minister of Sport" position, but the US does not. Even more unfortunate is the fact that [predators](#) always find a way to be near kids, which means parents and coaches looking for a safe environment are not only within their rights, but most definitely **should** be "checking out the kitchen" in gymnastics training facilities.

The annotated guidelines below, adapted from leading organizations, protect not only the child, but *also the staff*. Predators can be manipulative, gregarious and very hard to convict. These guidelines help identify and eliminate grooming behavior before it reaches the criminal level. Here's how to order your gymnastics with a heaping helping of safety!

### Questions that everyone should be asking when choosing a school or gym:

\* *Absolute best practices*

+ *Bonus best practices for extra points*

Club/School Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Spoke With \_\_\_\_\_

- Are *all* of your staff (administrative staff, volunteers, cheer, recreational, and competitive coaching staff) USA Gymnastics Professional members in good standing or equivalent?\***

USAG professional members must pass a bi-annual background check and take a safety certification course which includes education on safety and preventing sexual abuse. An equivalent would be USA Parkour which at least has safety education.

- Are all of your staff CPR and First Aid Safety certified?\***
- Does everyone who works at the gym (including coaches, volunteers, front desk etc.) have a current criminal background check on file?\***

- Does your background check cover both misdemeanors *and* felony convictions? \* \_\_\_\_\_

If they use the USA Gymnastics background check, it includes both misdemeanor (referred to as “lesser” convictions in their documentation) and felony convictions. Misdemeanors can be sex crimes against children. Remember, a background check does not ensure safety, in the case of a predator, it just means the very high criminal threshold for conviction hasn’t been met. This is why code of conduct that identifies and eliminates grooming behavior must be enforced.

- How often is the background check rerun? \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have a *written policy* that clearly defines coach misconduct?**

**Including:\***

- Prohibits staff from using electronic communications (including social media) with students or staff members in a way that could be seen as insulting, disruptive, offensive, sexually-explicit, racist, sexist, homophobic, trans-phobic or in any other way that can be construed to be harassment or disparagement of others.
- Prohibits one-on-one transportation of athletes or overnights without a background-checked chaperone/parent..
- Prohibits coach-athlete dating, regardless of age
- Prohibits being alone with an athlete
- Has specific rules about massages and stretching
- Defines and prohibits grooming behavior, emotional, verbal, and physical abuse, bullying, hazing, initiation rituals, harassment, and physical punishment by staff or athletes.

**Do you have a safety officer(s) or manager(s) on staff to enforce the misconduct policy; and what do their duties include?+**

- There are present in the gym even during private lessons.
- The safety officer(s) duties should include regular equipment checks and maintenance enforcement, as well as ongoing safety training for staff.
- A safety officer should be assigned to every shift, private lessons, and closed team practices.
- Policies without enforcement are useless. The safety officer should be empowered to immediately intervene, document and report inappropriate behavior at all times.
- Is the safety officer’s name and their contact information clearly posted at each session?

**Do you allow an athlete to be alone with a staff member?\***

The answer to this question should always be NO. Not ever, not anywhere inside the gym or outside of the gym. This does not imply guilt towards a staff member, but merely offers a safe, comfortable environment for the athlete, *and* the staff member.

**Do you have security cameras in the facility?+**

Video surveillance can provide an objective record of misconduct and protect both gymnasts and coaches if a question of inappropriate behavior is alleged.

❑ **Do you have rules about photography and videography in the gym?**

During enrollment the gym should offer you photo release documentation. If you choose not to sign that authorization, your child's photo may not be used in *anything*. Their image may not even be in the background for a marketing image. Any photographs or videos of gymnasts and storage of those images should be closely monitored.

❑ **Can I watch practice?\***

The answer should be yes and please feel free to drop in unannounced. Some teams have rules about parents camping out or creating a gossip-free environment. Those guidelines are great, but parents should be able to drop in to watch.

❑ **What is your policy on drug testing or impaired coaching?**

If a coach seems drunk, high or just out of sorts, everyone should be trained on what to do about it.

❑ **Do you offer education sessions for athletes, parents and coaches to help them identify inappropriate behaviors; what to do if they see it along with a process to report such behaviors?+**

- ❑ Education on spotting should be offered not only for safety, but also to identify appropriate hand-on-body placement, specifically off limits areas of the body. This will also prevent false accusations by un-educated onlookers.
- ❑ The gym should have an *open, positive culture* with an open door communication policy.

❑ **Do you have an independent athlete welfare advocate or athlete protection officer who athletes know they can go to in complete confidence to help them address concerns?+**

This is often a parent or booster whose profession requires mandatory reporting of crime or abuse.

**Now that you have chosen a gym with safety standards in place, here's your job:**

1. Never put a single goal above child safety. Putting a meet or medal above all else puts children at risk for abuse.
2. *Listen* to your child. Just as you ask your child to demonstrate respect for their coach, offer your child the same level of respect. Kids are good judges of character. Talk to your kid about how they feel. Make sure they feel good about going to practice. If they don't or something seems off, ask questions.
3. Choose a gym that has an *open, positive* culture with an open door communication policy. If something doesn't seem or feel right, ask questions until you're 100% comfortable--and if you aren't comfortable, go with your instincts and make changes. **Never** feel badly about asking hard questions. Your child is relying on you to do so.

