

The Vigilant Parent –  
The Most Important Person in Protecting Children

(introduction)

**Presenter: US Youth Soccer and each of our State Associations has done an excellent job of raising the bar to protect our players. The use of disclosure forms – and in many states background checks – is helping us build a wall to keep our youth safe. However, we don't want to build false security. The statistics show us that – even with our best efforts -- we cannot completely protect each player. Each of us needs to make sure that we involve the most important person of all (start slides) the Vigilant Parent.**

The facts speak for themselves:

**(change slide)**

Fact:

- The pedophile child molester commits an average of 281 acts with 150 partners. **(click)**
- In Texas, a convicted child molester told police he molested 240 children before getting caught.

**PRESENTER: AND, HE SAID IF HE WAS RELEASED AND HAD THE OPPORTUNITY, HE WOULD CONTINUE MOLESTING. Sexual abuse is not a problem that just affects girls. (change slide – click for each sentence)**

- 1 in 4 girls is sexually abused before the age of 18. **BUT (click)**
- 1 in 6 boys is sexually abused before the age of 18.
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**Change slide – click for each sentence.**

- 30 to 40% of abusers are a family member. **(click)**
- **50% are abused by someone outside the family whom they trust.**

**Presenter: That's where we're vulnerable. (Change slide.)**

**Pedophiles are drawn to places where they can be around children. All Youth Sports offer such a place – and that includes youth soccer. (Change slide)**

With our Kidsafe Program we're working hard to protect players! If you don't know, US Youth Soccer instituted the Kidsafe Program in 1994 with the expressed purpose to foster safe circumstances for every child who participates in any activity affiliated with US Youth Soccer.

(Change slide)

Kidsafe provides for

- Use of an employment/volunteer disclosure statement for all volunteers, employees, coaches and program administrators who are involved with any sanctioned or sponsored programs of the affiliated organizations.
- Identification of a Risk Management Coordinator (RMC) and an alternate for the organization.

**(Change slide)**

Plus, many of our State Associations, Leagues, Clubs and Teams are taking Risk Management even further. They're doing background checks; they're checking websites of known sex offenders; they're doing everything possible to keep our players safe!

**Presenter: However, as Risk Managers and administrators, you need to cultivate and help create and, as parents, you need to be**

The Most Important Person is –  
THE VIGILANT PARENT!

**Presenter: They are irreplaceable. No rule, law or policy can replace a proactive parent. Criminal record checks only catch someone with a criminal history. Then, he must be tried and convicted for a report to show up in a background check. Remember how many children are harmed on average before a pedophile is arrested. A vigilant parent can stop child abuse before it happens.**

**(Change slide – click for each sentence)**

What You Can Do!

Educate yourself and your parents. (click)

Know the risk. (click)

Understand the types of pedophiles who prey on youth.

**(Change slide – click for each sentence)**

Pedophile – The Fixated, Seductive Sexual Offender

This is the pedophile who:

- Creates and seeks opportunities for access to children **(Presenter can elaborate: He can coach; he can referee.) (click)**
- Has tremendous aptitude for identifying children's needs and vulnerabilities (click) **(Presenter can elaborate: He also may identify parents' needs. For example, offering to coach special skills for a team that's struggling.) (click)**
- Is highly manipulative and seductive

**(Change slide – click for each sentence)**

- Takes the time to gain the child's and parents' trust before acting (**Presenter can elaborate: He works towards his goal. Any of you who have had to deal with this situation know that even after a predator has been charged, there are some parents who have built such trust with this person that they will continue to defend him or her.**) (click)
- Creates “special” relationships (click)
- Convinces child to distrust other adults

**(Change slide)**

Sports success can open the door for this predator. (**Presenter: They say what parents and players want to hear – click to bring up rest of slide. They know by offering success – by taking advantage of the needs and desires of both parents and players – they will have the access they seek.**)

**(Change slide)**

Molester – Abductor, Sexual Psychopath

**(Presenter: This is the one we read about in the newspaper – the reason we don't allow children's names on their uniforms. Because we work with children in public places – such as parks and school grounds, we must be alert to the possibility of a molester)**

This is a parent's worst nightmare, the perpetrator of kidnapping and/or violent assault. Their targets are **(click)**

- Vulnerable, exposed, unsupervised or easily manipulated children, often very young (click)
- Children on whom they have become fixated or obsessed, generally from a distance (**Change slide – click**)

Parks, playgrounds, school yards and sports fields are all places where such a psychopath can strike.

**(Change slide)**

Sexual Harasser, Sexual Exploiter

This is the person who most often preys on older adolescents and young adults. This person makes: **(click)**

- Sexual behavior, sexual advances or romantic involvement a part of the terms and conditions for participation (**Presenter can add that he may simply allow inappropriate behavior; thus, setting the stage**) (click)

- Youth feel that playing time, team membership, recommendations and other benefits will be affected or based on an intimate or sexual relationship **(click)**

(Presenter: There is no such thing as a consensual relationship between an adult and a youth, a coach and a player. It is the responsibility that each adult working with youth to maintain firm boundaries within the relationship.) **Change slide**

**(Presenter: Modern technology create new ways to reach youth. Parents should be aware and (CLICK to bring up remainder of slide) monitor their use)**

**(Change slide)**

**(Presenter: Let's take a little quiz -- click)**

- You're driving to practice, you bring: **(click)**
- a) A debit card – you have groceries to buy. **(click)**
- b) A really good book so you can sit under a tree, read, relax & still keep an eye on things. **(click)**
- c) An overnight bag. You've had enough soccer, you're spending the weekend at the beach.

**(Presenter: Correct answer – and perfect parent – is B. This is the vigilant parent who respects the coach's right to run a practice without interference, but stays available in case the coach has an emergency and needs another adult and stay vigilant to protect the players.) (change slide)**

As you get ready to leave practice, you realize Tommy is still waiting for a ride:  
**(Presenter: What do you do?) (click)**

Be thankful you're not coaching & leave. **(click)**

Tell the coach you'll give Tommy a ride. **(click)**

Wait with the coach until Tommy's parents arrive. **(click)**

**(Presenter: This is the classic two wrongs don't make a right. C is the correct answer. Don't leave the coach alone with a child and don't put yourself at risk by taking the child yourself. Wait it out!) (Change slide)**

You notice a stranger watching the game intently: **(Presenter: What do you do? click)**

Figure he's a college coach watching your child, after all he's the best U-6 player around. **(click)**

Leave him alone. It must be a parent from the other team. Don't start a fight. **(click)**

Say "Hi!" and strike up a conversation. **(click)**

**(Presenter: This is the vigilant parent at their very best – aware of their surroundings, aware of the people around them. C is the correct answer. By being friendly and engaging a stranger, you’re serving notice that these children are being watched and protected. And if it is someone from the other team – don’t start that fight!)**

**(change slide)**

**Presenter: What Can You Do? As a vigilant parent use these strategies. (Presenter can expand on any of these)**

- Check references thoroughly. Don’t be afraid to ask a coach, assistant coach, trainer or administrator about their previous experience.
- Question expansion of the coaching relationship into other areas such as social interaction. There is a difference between team activities and coach/player activities.
- Do not encourage activities that leave a coach or trainer alone with a single child.

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**(Change slide)**

- Be wary of a coach with rigid age preferences.
- Help create an open environment that makes sure players know that they will be supported for seeking help with anything that makes them uncomfortable. Assure them that there are multiple avenues of support.
- Conduct “exit interviews” with players who withdraw from a team without explanation.

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**(Change slide)**

**(Presenter: Be involved. (click for “talk to your child) First be involved with your child. Talk to him or her. Know what’s happening in their life. (click for “be visible”) That means being there. You don’t have to be intrusive – you just have to be visible so people know you’re there. (click for “be active”) Be active. Your child will appreciate it and, in the long run, it will help keep your child safe.**

**(Change slide) (Presenter can elaborate on any of these)**

Protect youth from molesters/abductors.

- Never leave young children unsupervised, even in a “safe” place.
- Teach children to check with a parent before going anywhere with another adult.
- Give your child permission to run away from adults who make them feel uncomfortable.

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**(Change slide) (Presenter can elaborate on any of these)**

- Never let children go to public restrooms unescorted.
- Never leave a child alone waiting for transportation after a practice or game. This includes not leaving a child alone with any single adult in this situation.

- Approach adults who appear to be observing children at a game or practice. Strike up a conversation; ask them who they are and why they're there.

**(Change slide) (Presenter can elaborate on any of these)**

Protect youth from sexual exploitation and harassment.

- Monitor situations closely.
- Establish boundaries between team activities and activities that are purely social.
- Do not tolerate flirtation, banter, teasing or any conduct that blurs the boundaries between youth and adult.

**(Change slide) (Presenter can elaborate on any of these)**

- Make sure that parents are involved and included in team activities that are social in nature.
- Be available as an adult/parent to take part in team activities, to wait for that late parent to pick up their child and to observe practices – but don't interfere in the coaching!

**(Change slide) (Presenter can elaborate on any of these)**

- Watch for indicators
  - Coach/adult who seeks personal intimacy with a player or discloses intimate, personal or emotional feelings to a player
  - Coach/adult who "courts" a player or responds in kind to flirting or seductive behavior
  - Coach/adult who makes physical contact excessively or disproportionately with one player

**(Presenter: You've educated yourself. You have been vigilant. Now what do you do if you suspect a child is being harmed?) Change slide**

If You Suspect a Child Is Being Harmed.

**(Presenter: Start with what not to do. (click) Don't jump to conclusions. (click) Don't gossip. (click) Don't speculate. Any of these actions will only make the situation worse. But, most importantly (change slide) – Don't be afraid to act. As adults we all have the responsibility to protect youth. As a soccer administrator, coach, team parent – or as a vigilant parent – you must take this responsibility seriously. (CLICK)**

**MOST IMPORTANTLY, DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ACT!**

**(Change slide: Presenter: If you have a concern, keep track. Make notes of what you observed, when you observe it)**

DO:

- Document concerns carefully.

**(Change slide: Presenter: If you have documented your concerns and you feel they are legitimate, (Click) take your concerns forward. Speak out.)**

- Speak out.

**(Change slide: Presenter: If you are comfortable, (CLICK) speak to the child or have another adult speak to the child. Most likely, this would be a parent talking to their own child or having someone trusted speak with their child.)**

- Talk to the child -- or have another respected adult talk to the child.

**(Change slide and click again. Try to normalize the conversation for the child. Do not lead the discussion. In fact, if you feel your suspicions are being confirmed, let the child know you believe him or her and will help. Then, involve a qualified adult such as a CPS employee or a law enforcement officer to talk to the child.)**

- It may be helpful to normalize your questions by saying “sometimes, kids feel uncomfortable...” and then asking them if that is how they feel.

**(Change slide and click again: Let parents know if your concerns are for another child. Your conversation may help them to be more vigilant.)**

- Talk to the parents – if your concerns are about another child. Be specific in describing things you have observed and express your concern for the child’s well being.

**(Change slide and click again: Bring your concerns forward.)**

- Talk to the coach/adult – if you’ve observed red flags, it may be appropriate to let the individual know that you have concerns. Address the subject from the perspective of concern for THEM.

**(Change slide and click again: Finally, if you have genuine concerns, don’t stop if a parent or coach or someone else says ‘not to worry.’ Start at the appropriate level – most likely, with a club administrator -- but don’t be afraid to go forward)**

- Report.
  - If you are reasonably convinced that there is a problem, report it to the club administrator.

**(Change slide and click again: If you feel the need, continue to talk to the chain of adults put in place by your State Association to handle these concerns.)**

- If you do not feel your concerns are taken seriously or adequately investigated, keep going up the ladder. Report to the league or district administrators. Report to the State Association. Report to the Regional Risk Management Director.

**(Change slide and click again. There are experts and they are the people in the Child Protective organization in your State. Don't be afraid to call. If you feel your concern is valid, report.)**

- Involve authorities. **(CLICK)**
  - If you have genuine concerns, contact your state's Child Protective organization. You may be able to do this anonymously.

**(Change slide: And, for your own protection know your State Laws and follow them carefully.)**

- Know your responsibilities. **(CLICK)**
- It may be mandated that your report suspected child abuse and neglect. Check you local and state laws.

**REMEMBER, THE INVOLVEMENT OF HEALTHY, CARING ADULTS – OF VIGILANT PARENTS – IS THE BEST FORM OF RISK MANAGEMENT!**