

USA Gymnastics SAFE SPORT POLICY

UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL MISCONDUCT

Emotional misconduct is a form of abuse where tactics of intimidation, humiliation, and verbal abuse are used to gain control of another person. It involves a prolonged and repeated pattern of behavior that occurs when a power imbalance exists, such as in a coach/athlete relationship. In many cases, emotional abuse affects more than just the person who is the direct target and it may also create a sense of fear among parents, teammates, and colleagues. In cases of emotional misconduct as either a victim or a bystander, those involved may fear retribution, which could lead to unreported abuse.

Gymnasts who have been the subject of abusive coaching practices may exhibit signs of depression, grief, anxiety and uncontrollable crying. When in the presence of the abuser, they may feel as if they are walking on eggshells and may say things such as, "I don't know what I did wrong."

Behaviors and Statements Often Identified with Emotional Misconduct

- Pattern of verbal abuse such as name calling, yelling, and repeated personal attacks that start with, "You are."

"You are the *worst* athlete I've ever coached!"

"You are *too big* for this sport."

"You're *useless*."

- Statements that attack gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, or body weight
- Striking walls or throwing objects to create an atmosphere of fear
- Isolation from teammates, social circle, or family
- Secrets that are encouraged
- Gaslighting

"It's *your fault* because you don't want it bad enough."

"You misunderstood what I said. I *would never* say that."

"It was a *joke*. You can't take a joke?"

It may take weeks or months for a pattern of behavior to emerge, so it's important to watch out for behaviors that are meant to shame or isolate an individual.

Emotional Misconduct often contains elements of physical misconduct that can include:

- Restricting basic needs such as water, food, bathroom breaks and sleep
- Restricting down time that allows the athlete to manage mental health and stress
- Restricting medical care and/or failure to follow medical orders
- Exercise and conditioning that serves no legitimate training purpose
- Exercise and conditioning conducted for the sole purpose to humiliate the athlete

