Given the recent news of child abuse occurring within prominent youth development programs and organizations, it is imperative that all program administrators and leaders improve policies and procedures related to both identifying and reporting child abuse and/or neglect. Specifically, youth programs must begin to train all frontline and administrative staff in the signs and symptoms of child abuse and/or neglect and inform them of the procedures for reporting suspected abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglect. This policy brief is intended to provide a concise overview of the types of child abuse and neglect, as well as the associated signs and/or symptoms. Additionally, this brief overviews the primary steps to be taken when reporting suspected abuse and/or neglect. These steps serve as a helpful guide for youth serving organizations as they improve their practices and policies. Last, a training program at the OSU Buckeye Sports Camp is highlighted as an example of how critical training on this topic for staff is helpful in better preparing youth workers, coaches, and others working in youth development programs.

What is Child Abuse and/or Neglect?
Child abuse and/or neglect takes on four main forms: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and various types of neglect. Physical abuse is defined as any physical injury or death inflicted other than by accidental means. Sexual abuse occurs when a person uses power over a child, and directly involves the child in any sexual act, involves the child in pornography, or forces the child to witness sexual acts. Emotional abuse is a pattern of harmful interactions between the parent and child such as criticizing, belittling, rejecting, or withholding love resulting in impaired psychological growth and development. Finally, neglect is the failure of a parent or guardian to provide for a child’s basic (i.e., food, shelter, supervision, and clothing), educational or medical needs. Neglect may be due to refusal to provide, faults, habits, or abandonment on the part of the parent or guardian.

What Does Child Abuse and/or Neglect Look Like?
There are several signs and symptoms of physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect. The chart below highlights the major signs and/or symptoms of each type of abuse. Please be aware however that each child has a different reaction to experiences of abuse and/or neglect. A child’s signs and/or symptoms may not always mirror the expected type of abuse.

A youth worker may suspect child abuse and/or neglect if the child demonstrates signs and/or symptoms, a child discloses abuse to the worker, or the worker witnesses an incident of abuse and/or neglect. If a child begins to confide in you about suspected abuse, be sure to follow these steps:

- Listen to the child
- Reassure the child
- Remain calm and collected
- Provide any immediate help you can offer the child to ensure safety
- Report the case; do not promise the child you will not tell anyone
- Do not share the information learned from the child with the alleged perpetrator

Who Can Report Suspected Child Abuse and/or Neglect?
There are many misconceptions related to who can report child abuse and/or neglect. Many citizens believe that only social workers, medical professionals, police, or educators may report child abuse. The reality is that EVERYONE CAN AND SHOULD report suspected child abuse and/or neglect.

### Signs & Symptoms of Child Abuse and/or Neglect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Abuse</th>
<th>Sexual Abuse</th>
<th>Emotional Abuse</th>
<th>Neglect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Unexplained burns</td>
<td>• Suddenly refuses to participate in physical activities</td>
<td>• Eating disorders</td>
<td>• Begs or steals food or money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unexplained bruises on the face, lips, mouth, back, buttocks, and thighs</td>
<td>• Exhibits unusual sexual knowledge or behavior</td>
<td>• Speech disorders</td>
<td>• Poor hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human bites</td>
<td>• Frequent and unexplained sore throats</td>
<td>• Nervous disorders</td>
<td>• Unsuitable clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multiple hospital visits</td>
<td>• Yeast or urinary infections</td>
<td>• Habit disorders</td>
<td>• Low height and weight average Excessive school absences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seems frightened of parents and does not want to go home</td>
<td>• Torn or bloody underclothes</td>
<td>• Cruel behavior</td>
<td>• Chronic hunger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aggressively initiates sexual contact with another child</td>
<td>• Lack of emotional attachment to parent</td>
<td>• Assuming adult responsibilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, there are professions that are mandated (required by law) to report. Some of these professions include: attorneys, physicians, day care center staff, social workers, speech pathologists, school personnel (educators and administrators) and children services agency staff. Please note that mandated reports vary by state.

**How Do You Report Suspected Child Abuse and/or Neglect?**

If you suspect child abuse and/or neglect may be taking place, the first step should be to call your county or state Children Service Agency and make a referral. Most Children Service Agencies run a 24-hour hotline where suspected cases may be reported. When reporting the abuse, you will be asked for some basic information, such as: name and/or address and/or the location of the child victim, age of the child, names and addresses of the child’s parents or caregivers, description of the alleged abuse and/or neglect (e.g., what you witnessed, what a child told you), and name and address of the alleged perpetrator(s), if known (Franklin County Children Services, 2011). The Children Services Agency keeps the referral source (you) confidential. Once you have reported the suspected abuse, it is then up to the Children Services Agency to determine whether or not an investigation should be opened.

**LiFE Sports Role in Raising Awareness and Knowledge in Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Training Youth Workers**

Coaches, afterschool program and child care staff, volunteers, and other caring adults working with youth build strong, long-term relationships with youth in the out-of-school time. In many cases, these front-line youth workers interact with youth at least weekly and can see signs and symptoms, if knowledgeable of these signs and symptoms. Oftentimes, youth organizations only require that staff have recent background checks to ensure they are not a perpetrator and have no offences. We advocate that staff be not only fingerprinted, but that they also be educated about the signs and/or symptoms and the procedures for reporting suspected child abuse and/or neglect.

For the first time in 2011, the OSU Buckeye Sports Camps in partnership with LiFE Sports piloted a two-hour training for camp staff focused on both general youth development programming principles and risk management. The risk management portion focused on training staff in how to ensure physical and emotional safety of youth participants. Following the training, staff members (OSU student-athletes) were asked to complete a brief survey related to the training. Results from this survey indicate both the underestimation of importance of physical and emotional safety issues, as well as document the impact the training has on increasing knowledge of this topic. Staff members who completed the survey reported an improved understanding of factors and issues related to child abuse and/or neglect. We will continue to implement this training in the future and are open to sharing our materials with organizations so they may improve their practices.

**Conclusion**

It is evident that training opportunities for staff, as well as the adoption of clear policies and procedures, need to be put in place to better ensure the safety of our youth today. Youth development organizations and other youth service agencies must prepare their staff in identifying the signs and symptoms of child abuse and/or. They need to educate their staff on the proper procedures for reporting suspected abuse. Policies that enforce these efforts and responsibilities are essential for institutionalizing priorities related to preventing and deterring child abuse and/or neglect today.

**References**