
TOUGH COACHING OR EMOTIONAL ABUSE: KNOWING WHEN THE LINE HAS BEEN CROSSED

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“Slowly over time, my thoughts became silent and my dreams were only shared with myself. After a while, I started to believe that there were no choices and it just became easier to stay compliant. Heaven forbid I told anyone.”



INSIDE THE TEENAGE BRAIN

Adolescents are prone to high-risk behaviour

Prefrontal Cortex

Its functions include planning and reasoning; grows till 25 years

Adults Fully developed

Teens Immature, prone to high-risk behaviour

Amygdala

Emotional core for passion, impulse, fear, aggression.

Adults Rely less on this, use prefrontal cortex more

Teens More impulsive



Parietal Lobe

Responsible for touch, sight, language; grows till early 20s

Adults Fully developed

Teens Do not process information effectively

Ventral Striatum

Reward centre, not fully developed in teens

Adults Fully developed

Teens Are more excited by reward than consequence

Hippocampus

Hub of memory and learning; grows in teens

Adults Fully functional; loses neurons with age

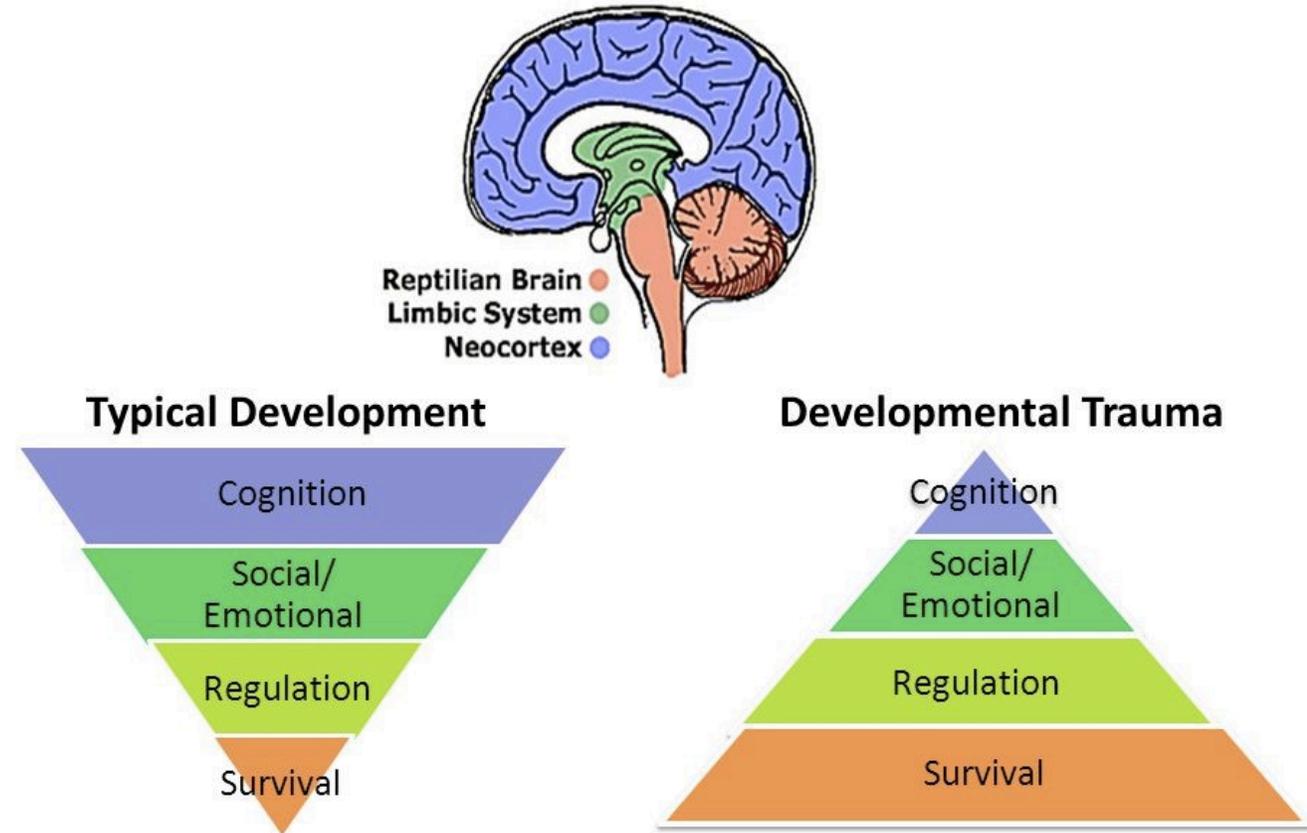
Teens Tremendous learning curve

WHAT THE BRAIN SAYS

THE TRAUMATIZED BRAIN

Victims of children who were severely bullied were found to have significant shrinkage in the corpus collosum. This makes it difficult for victims to process and respond.

Trauma & Brain Development



Adapted from Holt & Jordan, Ohio Dept. of Education

DEFINING EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Sustained Abuse of Power

Repetitive, non-contact/possibly contact based experience meant to induce **fear** by exposing the victim to **ongoing** attacks, meant to **belittle** or **humiliate**, and must include an **imbalance of power**.

Power, Control, and Fear

CRITERIA FOR ABUSE

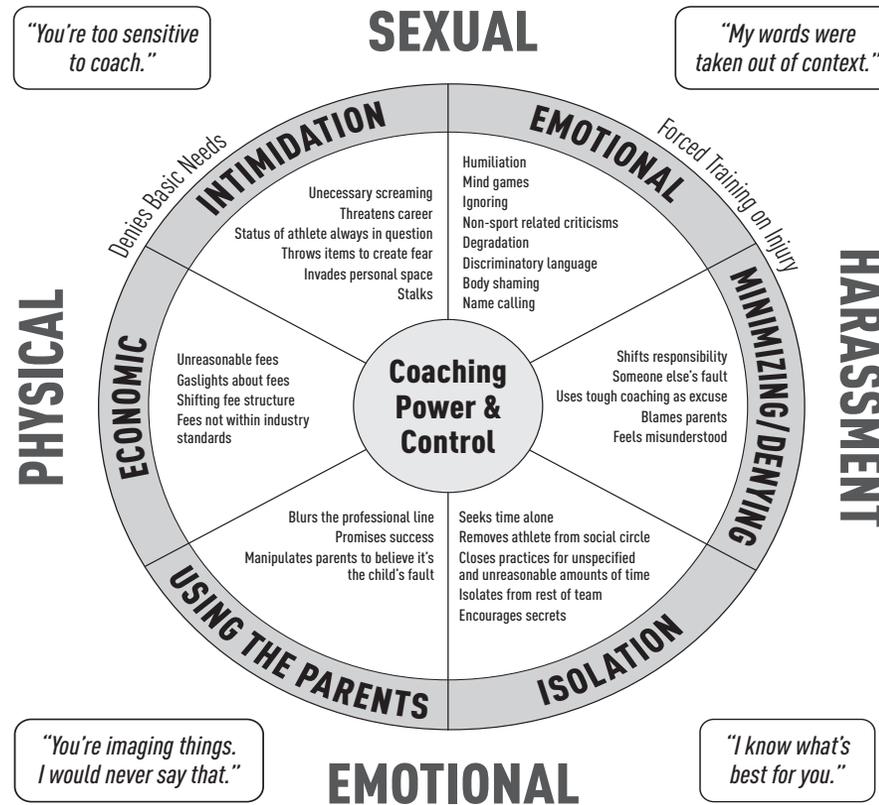
- Imbalance of Power
- Repetition
- Intent to induce psychological harm
- Unsolicited/unwelcome
- Acts meant to intimidate
- Underlying threat of harm to body, social, financial or career status
- Intent to create fear

“You’re worthless.”

“You’re a waste of my time.”

“You don’t get it dear, because you just aren’t that smart.”

- Intimidation
- Emotional
- Economic
- Minimizing
- Economic
- Using the Parents
- Isolation



- Positions themselves as first in the life of the athlete. They are coach, parent, doctor, educational advisor and friend.
- Uses "Mine" and "My" more than "You" and "Us."
- The athlete is treated as a commodity more than a person.
- Relationship is built on fear.
- Ego statements based on the "I" and the talent of the coach, over the talent of the athlete.

METHODS OF ABUSE

- Yelling/Screaming
- Hot/Cold actions to keep the victim guessing
- Name calling/Mocking
- Offhand jokes
- Humiliation
- Using body language to create fear for safety (cornering victim, hitting wall about the head, throwing items)
- Manipulating the victim to keep secrets
- Constant criticism
- Isolation
- Gaslighting

**I know what is
best for you.**

***“Let me see if I can
put this in simple
terms that even you
understand.”***

WAS I RUSHING OR WAS I DRAGGING?





COMMON TRAITS OF ABUSER MENTALITY

- Ability to manipulate perception of authorities
- Moral Justification
- Backhanded Apologies
- Savior
- Gaslighting
- Words of Absolute



"I wasn't yelling. I was helping her understand."

PHRASES TO GAIN CONTROL

I know what is best for you.

What happens in the gym stays in the gym.

Stop crying and grow up!

Want me to call your mother?

You can either have friends or gymnastics.

This is our secret.

I got you this far.

"You misheard me. I would never say that."

- Identification of the abuse isn't recognized by the victim or parents until after multiple incidences have occurred.
- Victim will hide the abuse from friends and family, because of letting people down.
- Victim will often state they are "walking on eggshells."
- Victim will often state they deserved it or that it's their fault. They frequently use the phrase, "I should have done better."
- Will lie to authorities when asked if help is needed out of fear for future retribution.
- Love/hate relationship with the coach

COMMON BEHAVIORS OF ATHLETES EMOTIONALLY ABUSED

**"It just became
my normal."**

COMMON STATEMENTS OF VICTIMS

“I always feel I’m walking on eggshells when I’m there.”

“I couldn’t figure out what I did wrong.”

“I’m sorry. It was my fault.”

“I couldn’t tell anyone, because I would look weak.”

“It just became my normal.”

“No one would believe me.”

“I would just let everyone down if they knew.”

“I didn’t want people to worry.”

“She’s right. I am....”

“I just wish I would die.”

SOCIETAL RESPONSE

“I don’t see the problem. Look how successful he made you.”

- “Why won’t you just stand up for yourself?”
- “Why don’t you just leave?”
- “If that was happening to my kid...”
- “Back in my day.”
- “You need to toughen up.”
- “If they aren’t being hit, I don’t see what the problem is.”
- “It will toughen you up.”
- Why didn’t you speak up sooner?

ATHLETE CENTERED COACHING

It's about the athlete experience, not the brand of the coach

- Doesn't dissolve into personal attacks, belittling, or degradation
- Focus stays on sport specific corrections
- Training isn't a zero-sum game
- Athletes look forward to practice even when it's tough
- Raising the voice may occur, but it's not the driver of training
- Build self-worth even when training becomes tough
- Relationship is built on mutual respect
- Seeks to solve problems when questioned
- Mistakes are owned
- Health and welfare are first priority!

An abusive coach is rigid and destroys the person inside the athlete.

A tough coach shapes the person inside the athlete.

Discourages outside interests



Outside interests are supported and encouraged

Monitors non gymnastics time



Understands that everyone deserves a private life

Basic needs are threatened



Health, wellness, and basic needs are priority

Relationship is built on fear



Trust is central to the coach/athlete relationship

Parents concerns are discounted



Parents are valued as a stakeholder in the process

Athlete's status is threatened when they want to leave



Athlete is free to make choices

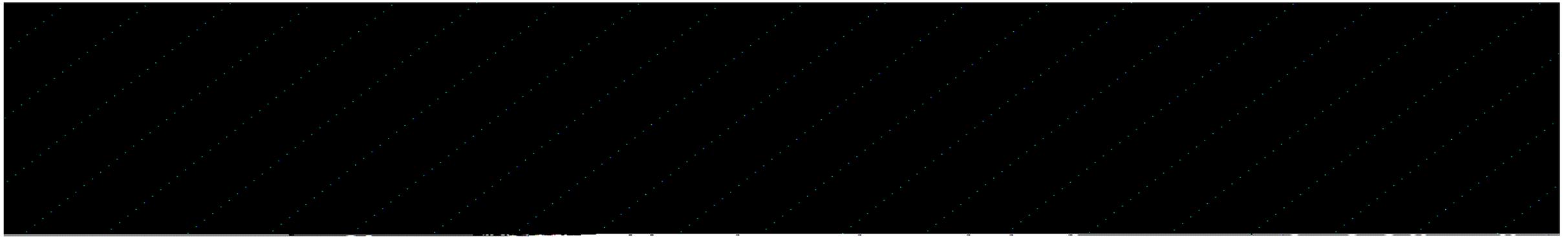
PARENT CHECKLIST

- Is this ongoing and not a one-time incident?
- Are words of absolute used such as always, never, everyone, no one, and nobody?
 - “You will never be a good gymnast.”
- Is hateful, discriminatory or belittling language used?
- Does your child report feeling scared or anxious before or after practice?
- Does your child blame themselves?
 - “He was right. I did fall off the beam. I deserved it.”
- Is your child encouraged or expected to perform when injured?

PARENT CHECKLIST

- Do you fear retaliation will occur if you make a report?
- Is your child isolated from you or are secrets encouraged about what happens in practice?
- Does a coach or other person in power try to make medical, education, or other decisions that isn't part of their job?
- Are athletes threatened with their spot on the team if they attend school functions, church functions, dates, or family vacations?
- Are basic needs denied until "something is accomplished?" Are the athletes refused bathroom breaks, water, sunscreen, protective equipment or meals as punishment?
- Are there frequent injuries that would cause a reasonable person to be concerned about the coaching techniques?
- Has this been reported to the club management and been dismissed or ignored?





For more information
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**WE DON'T MAKE BETTER
CHILDREN BY MAKING
THEM WORSE**