



Recommended Prevention Policies

Purpose and Goals

Every school or athletics organization should have internal policies governing its operations and the conduct of its members. Policies reflect the values and priorities of an organization. Having specific policies related to preventing assault and abuse as well as promoting gender equity demonstrates a commitment to creating a safe and fair environment for all athletes. These types of policies should also outline how coaches and administrators will be held accountable for following policy expectations.

The following are policy recommendations for a school athletics program or sports organization. The goals of this resource are to give concrete ideas on how organizations can:

1. Institute policies that protect children by preventing sexual misconduct and abuse by adults
2. Respond to and prevent sexual harassment and assault between youth participants
3. Create policies that intentionally promote gender equity for staff and youth participants

Schools and sports organizations should recognize that youth sports teams present unique issues related to child sexual abuse, sexual assault and gender equity. Along with model policy recommendations, we have provided facts on each of the three policy areas. These are intended to provide context for why the particular policies are important specifically for youth athletic organizations.

Definitions

We recognize that different definitions of some of the following terms exist and intend only to clarify the way the terms are meant in this document.

Sexual assault: Used here as an umbrella term for various forms of sexual abuse, rape, exploitation, etc. The term sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without consent of the victim, or when the victim is unable to consent.

Child sexual abuse: A form of child abuse that includes any sexual assault against a minor, including any type of sexual activity between an adult and a minor. This does not have to be physical contact; it also includes digital behavior, child pornography, voyeurism, and exhibitionism.

Sexual misconduct: A form of sexual assault that involves an adult who is abusing a position of power and trust. For example, a coach who is seeking a romantic relationship with an athlete, or a teacher who has sexual contact with a student.

Sexual harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that tends to create a hostile or offensive environment.

Gender Equity: The condition that would be achieved if one's gender could no longer predict one's social outcomes. For example, in a gender equitable society, being a woman would not statistically suggest being paid less than a man. Gender equity takes into account historical disadvantages and distinct needs, allocating resources where and how they are needed most rather than spreading resources equally.

Gender Identity: An individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.¹

Homophobia: A range of negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality or people who are identified or perceived as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.²

Transgender: A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.³

Transphobia: The discrimination of and negative attitudes toward transgender people based on their gender expression.

¹ <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology>

² <http://www.stop-homophobia.com/lgbt-terms-and-definitions>

³ <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology>

Policy Recommendations

1. **Preventing Sexual Misconduct** and other forms of child abuse between staff/volunteers and minor athletes.

Child sexual abuse can happen in any activity where adults have access to children and youth, including in sports. Sexual abuse can occur in any sport with a child of any gender. Research indicates that 2-8% of children experience sexual abuse while engaged in sport.⁴ Children are most often sexually abused by someone they know and research suggests that sexual abuse in the context of sport is most often perpetrated by coaches, teachers and other instructors.⁵

While most coaches never abuse children and most children who play sports never experience abuse, sports are a place where children are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse for several reasons. Some of these reasons include:

- the close nature of the athlete-coach relationship
- the high levels of trust parents place in coaches, who are often highly esteemed in the community
- a culture that encourages secrecy and endurance of pain⁶

The following are some policy recommendations youth sports organizations can implement in order to prevent sexual misconduct and respond to allegations of abuse if they occur. Many of them are adapted from a [document](#) written by the Center for Disease Control entitled “Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-Serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures.”

- 1.1. **Screening.** The following are considerations that can help prevent an athletic organization from allowing adults who are at risk of abusing children from being a part of their organization.
 - 1.1.1. Incorporate child sexual abuse screening (including background checks and extensive reference checks) into routine application procedures for all staff and volunteers who will have contact with youth.

⁴ <https://www.childhelp.org/subs/speak-safe-athletes/>

⁵ <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/sexual-assault/fact-sheets/sexual-abuse-young-people-in-sport>

⁶ [See 5](#)

- 1.1.2. Consider running additional background checks on a regular basis (i.e. annually) for all staff and volunteers.
- 1.1.3. All applicants should be explicitly educated about how the school or sports organization values protecting children from sexual abuse, and new hires should be asked to sign off on policies related to conduct.
- 1.1.4. Foster an open-door policy where all staff have a responsibility to report any concerns they have related to child safety, even if concerns are with a co-worker or administrator. Make sure that staff and volunteers are willing to comply with this responsibility as a condition of their position.

Make it public and explicit that your organization or school is serious about protecting youth and has rigorous screening procedures. This could help deter some applicants who may be at risk for abusing children. If there is a question of why you are taking a serious stance (i.e. or if there is suspicion that this is reactive because of an incident), reinforce that these policies align with your mission of health & safety for all participants of your program.

- 1.2. **Guidelines for Staff and Volunteer Conduct.** The following are recommendations of guidelines that can help establish appropriate boundaries between adults and youth in a sports organization as well as protect youth from harm.
 - 1.2.1. Limit one-on-one interactions between youth and adults. It can be helpful to have a “rule of three” where there are always three people present (for example, 2 youth and 1 adult). If a coach is doing a one-on-one session with an athlete, request that a parent or another coach be present. If one-on-one interaction does take place, ideally it would be in a public, open space where others can observe, and parents/ other staff are made aware.
 - 1.2.2. Maintain a current list of all athletes and their caregivers. Be sure to ask if there is anyone who should not have contact with the youth (for example, if there is a protection or no-contact order in place). Make a strong effort to engage with parents and caregivers of athletes.

- 1.2.3. Coaches must model appropriate boundaries with athletes. This means developing relationships with youth while at the same time not sharing too much personal information or engaging in any physical touch beyond what is appropriate for teaching the sport. In general, if anyone touches an athlete, it should be with their permission first. Coaches should not meet with athletes during unscheduled times or outside the context of the program.

FACT: Adolescents 14-17 years old are the most likely to be abused.⁷ This is in part because they are at risk for abuse victimization by adults and also by peers (addressed in the next section). Organizations serving high school students have a critical role to play in this issue.

Additional Resources:

For a much more comprehensive document on this topic, see the following CDC resource: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/preventingchildsexualabuse-a.pdf>

[Safe4Athletes](#) is a nonprofit that advocates for sports organizations to adopt policies that keep kids safe, assists sports organizations that have had incidents of child abuse of sexual misconduct and provides a place for athletes who have been abused (and their families) to find support. They have extensive resources on their site including a very comprehensive [model policy](#).

[Safe Sport](#) is an initiative of the US Olympic Committee. Their organization offers many resources for parents, coaches and athletes on locker room policies, hazing, policies around overnight travel, and much more. Safe Sport also provides a [toolkit](#) to assist sports clubs in developing policies that help keep athletes safe.

[Safe to Compete](#) is a program of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® that provides access to resources to help youth-sports organizations protect child athletes from sexual abuse.

The Little League Baseball Association is an example of a sports organization that has specific policies designed to protect children. You can read about their efforts here:

⁷ [Finkelhor, D., Hotelling, G., Lewis, I. A., & Smith, C. \(1990\). Sexual abuse in a national survey of adult men and women: Prevalence, characteristics and risk factors. Child Abuse & Neglect, 14, 19-28. doi:10.1016/0145-2134\(90\)90077-7 F](#)

<http://www.littleleague.org/learn/programs/childprotection.htm>

[University of Washington](#) offers Model Conduct Code: employee/volunteer ongoing interactions with minors.

2. Policies Related to Preventing Peer-on-Peer Sexual Harassment and Violence

According to research, 21% of high school females and 10% of high school males who dated experienced physical and/ or sexual dating violence.⁸ Teen dating violence can have serious impacts on a young person's health. For example, youth who experience dating violence are more likely to experience mental health symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.⁹ Experiencing dating violence also increases the likelihood that a teen will engage in unhealthy, risky behaviors like using drugs, drinking alcohol or smoking.¹⁰

The team environment is a great place for teens to practice skills they can use in healthy relationships and to learn important lessons from caring adults, such as coaches. For more specific information on why athletic teams are a great place to implement sexual violence prevention strategies for high school students, see the Sexual Assault Prevention Philosophy at the beginning of the Implementation Guide.

The following are ways that sports organizations and schools can promote healthy relationships and create an environment where violence and sexual harassment is less likely to occur.

1. Many sports organizations have a Code of Conduct for athletes. These should include how athletes are expected to treat others. Foster a climate that promotes respect, equality, consent, and safety. Make sure these codes explicitly address prohibited behaviors such as hazing, sexual harassment, bullying, and sexual assault. Disciplinary action should be taken any time an athlete violates the code.

⁸ [1. Vagi KJ, Olsen EOM, Basile KC, Vivolo-Kantor AM. Teen dating violence \(physical and sexual\) among US high school students: Findings from the 2013 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey. JAMA Pediatrics 2015; 169\(5\):474-482.](#)

⁹ [Exner-Cortens D, Eckenrode J, Rothman E. Longitudinal associations between teen dating violence victimization and adverse health outcomes. Pediatrics 2013; 71:71-78.](#)

¹⁰ [Roberts TA, Klein JD, Fisher S. Longitudinal effect of intimate partner abuse on high-risk behavior among adolescents. Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine 2003; 157:875-881](#)

- 1.1. Set the tone for the season by proactively making sure that athletes and their caregivers understand the Code of Conduct. One way to do this is going over it specifically in a meeting with athletes and with caregivers. Have the athletes sign off that they agree to the Code of Conduct.
- 1.2. All coaches, assistant coaches and regular volunteers should be trained to intervene when they see any incident of harassment or bullying. The training should explain the connections between homophobia, transphobia, sexism and sexual violence. It's a good idea for the training to point out some specific phrases that are commonly used in sports, like "girl push-ups" and "playing like a girl" so that coaches can begin to recognize these phrases as well as their effects.
- 1.3. After being trained, staff should be responsible to intervene in some way when they see serious conduct violations such as harassment, bullying, abuse or violence. Depending on the incident, this could include: saying something in the moment, notifying an athlete's caregiver, checking in with the victim/ target of bullying, talking to the aggressor, or seeking support if unsure how to handle the situation. It is important for adults to take action in some way in order to foster a culture where such behavior is not normalized or tolerated.
- 1.4. All coaches, staff and volunteers should receive information appropriate to their position regarding the athletic program's sexual assault and abuse prevention efforts, including the Athletes As Leaders program.
- 1.5. Adults should be expected to act in a supportive manner if an athlete makes a disclosure that they have been victimized. While that adult is not expected to handle the situation alone, it is that adult's responsibility to make sure the athlete receives appropriate connections to resources.

Additional Resources:

[Break The Cycle](https://www.breakthecycle.org/developing-policies-and-programs) has several resources to aid schools in developing programs and policies to address dating violence and sexual assault:

<https://www.breakthecycle.org/developing-policies-and-programs>

The [Framework for Developing School Policies to Address Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking](#), which will assist schools and school districts in developing comprehensive policies addressing healthy relationships and abuse intervention and response. The guide also offers ideas and examples for developing procedures that are responsive to the needs of all student survivors.

[University of Washington](#) offers a comprehensive guide to creating conduct codes, including sample conduct codes for youth participants.

3. Policies Related to Gender Equity

Sexual violence is a widespread issue and is a product of many cultural, community, and societal factors. Research shows that certain conditions, or *risk factors*, make sexual violence more likely to occur. Some of these risk factors include: societal norms that support male superiority and women's inferiority, a general tolerance of sexual violence within the community, and weak sanctions against those who perpetrate sexual violence.¹¹ Policies related to gender equity are an important component of a comprehensive strategy to prevent sexual violence and can work to protect against some of these risk factors. Furthermore, these types of policies can help organizations comply with legal mandates (i.e. Title IX and anti-discrimination laws).

- 1.1. All athletes, regardless of gender, should be held in an equitable way to the standards of an Athlete Code of Conduct. If your organization already has a Code of Conduct, consider reviewing it regularly and gathering input on it from staff and athletes at all levels of the organization. In particular, focus the review on ensuring the Code is unbiased.
- 1.2. It is important to keep accurate records of incidents of athlete misconduct and review them periodically. See if any particular group of athletes is more often disciplined, or vice versa, more often receives lighter discipline. All athletes should be subject to the same standards, expectations and consequences, regardless of their gender, race, sport or level of talent. The star of the football team with a scholarship to college should be held to the same standards as the athlete who never leaves the bench.
- 1.3. Examine your dress code and uniform policies. If a dress code exists, make sure that it is not biased against girl athletes and transgender athletes. Make sure that it is enforced equitably. If an athlete's uniform makes them uncomfortable, allow for accommodation. Make sure that athletes on girls' sports teams can wear clothes that they feel comfortable in and that allow them to perform their sport. For more

¹¹ [Tharp AT, DeGue S, Valle LA, Brookmeyer KA, Massetti GM, Matjasko JL. A systematic qualitative review of risk and protective factors for sexual violence perpetration. *Trauma Violence Abuse*. 2013; 14\(2\): 133-167. Available from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23275472>.](#)

ideas on creating inclusive dress code policies, refer to this [article](#) and helpful [infographic](#) from Teaching Tolerance.

- 1.3.1. Example: Female wrestlers may be uncomfortable wearing the traditional singlet. These athletes should be allowed the choice, but not forced, to wear a shirt under their singlet or to wear a modified singlet. Considerations should also be made regarding uniforms for transgender athletes. Uniforms and dress codes should not be based on gender and rather based on function for the sport and comfort of athletes. Make accommodations for what the athlete herself finds uncomfortable, not what others find uncomfortable.
- 1.4. Examine your payroll and recruitment practices for coaches. Conduct an analysis of how male coaches and female coaches are recruited, retained and compensated. Processes should ensure equity for male and female coaches. If you have fewer female coaches than male coaches, particularly for girls' teams, figure out why.

FACT: As of 2012, 57% of female sports were coached by men, 40 years after Title IX law passed. In 1973 when the law was passed, 90% of female sports were coached by women. While it is great that more girls have the chance to play sports, shouldn't they see females like themselves coaching too?¹²

- 1.5. If your school or sports organization has never or has rarely had a female in leadership (i.e. as the Athletic Director), analyze this inequity. This will likely mean consulting the community and listening especially to female and other marginalized voices. While inequities are often created unintentionally, focused attention is required in order to undo them. These can be difficult conversations, but meaningful change often starts with a willingness to start a discussion.
- 1.6. Analyze policies related to conduct, discipline and promotion of coaches. Notice if there are any patterns of disproportionate practices based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or sport. Sometimes people are unfairly suspected or disciplined based on stereotypes or biases against certain groups and communities.

FACT: Female coaches are disproportionately accused, reprimanded and fired for reports that they are being verbally harsh. Female coaches

¹² <http://www.npr.org/2012/06/21/155504670/title-ix-turns-40-but-has-the-field-leveled>

*are also more likely to be fired for speaking up about inequities they see, such as being paid less than male coaches.*¹³

- 1.7. If the organization is co-ed or the school has both boys' and girls' sports teams, make sure that the girls' sports teams get as much recognition as the boys' teams. Regardless of the team's record or popularity, all sports should get equal publicity. Traditionally, many high school athletic programs favor boys' sports, which get more publicity at the school, more fans and game entertainment, bigger budgets, more media coverage, etc. Find ways to promote female athletics and build leadership in female athletes.
- 1.8. Make sure that the equipment and fields the boys' teams and the girls' teams play on are equally well-kept and updated. Sports should have equitable facilities, regardless of their popularity.
- 1.9. Train coaches to avoid using hurtful language as a way to encourage athletes, and instead focus on positive motivational coaching techniques. Some of the traditional phrases used in sports culture can be sexist and homophobic, and coaches and athletes may not be aware of the effect this can have on athletes. (i.e. locker room talk that is degrading or objectifying of women and girls; calling push-ups from the knees "girl push-ups," telling an athlete they are playing "like a girl" or calling boys sexist or homophobic names when they aren't playing well (i.e. "man up," "pussy," or "gay").
- 1.10. Analyze the costs associated with playing each sport. Recognize that these expenses may be harder for some families to afford than others, and can even have the effect of deterring athletes from low-income families from participating. If expensive equipment is required, find resources to make it affordable. Develop a scholarship fund. Or, as an organization, consider investing in equipment that all athletes can use rather than requiring individual families to purchase it.

Fact: Research shows that pay-to-play fees disproportionately affect the opportunities girls have to play sports.¹⁴ Societal beliefs about gender roles result in a somewhat greater value of sports placed on sons, making sports a more likely investment families make for boys than for girls.

¹³ <http://thinkprogress.org/sports/2016/05/05/3775760/title-ix-female-coaches/>

¹⁴ <http://yas.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/10/17/0044118X14553580.abstract>

- 1.11. Proactively create a policy regarding inclusion of transgender athletes. These types of policies ensure that transgender athletes are included, welcome, comfortable and able to play to their potential.

Additional Resources:

[The Tucker Center at the University of Minnesota](#) is an interdisciplinary research center leading a pioneering effort to examine how sport and physical activity affect the lives of girls and women, their families, and communities.

[This article](#) from the National Federation of State High School Associations introduces six important principles to consider when developing transgender inclusion policies for high school sports.

Produced by the Transgender Law and Policy Institute, [this report](#) highlights research on the issue of transgender athletes and offers helpful guidelines for creating inclusive policies.

[On the Team: Equal Opportunity for Transgender Student Athletes](#) is a report that provides a comprehensive overview of transgender athlete issues as well as an outline of policies for K-12 athletic organizations.

Legal Requirements to Consider

This section gives a brief overview of mandates that your school or sports organization may be required to follow.

For Schools: Title IX

Every school receiving federal funding is required to follow Title IX. Title IX is a federal law mandating gender equality in K-12 schools and college campuses. Title IX requirements include having a grievance procedure for student claims and mandatory posting of Title IX information so that students, parents and staff know who to contact in case of a gender inequality claim.

Title IX Resources:

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-title-ix-coordinators-guide-201504.pdf>

Official guidance on Title IX

https://www.atixa.org/documents/ATIXAModelPolicy_000.pdf

This is a comprehensive Title IX model policy created by the Association of Title IX Administrators. It uses “university” but the same requirements to high schools that receive federal funding.

<http://knowyourix.org/>

Know Your IX is a survivor- and youth-led organization that aims to empower students to end sexual and dating violence in their schools.

Mandatory Reporting

Certain professionals working with children, youth and vulnerable adults may be mandated by law to disclose concerns about the abuse or neglect of a youth with whom they interact. In many states this includes athletic staff.

This website allows you to search for your state’s specific regulations regarding mandated reporting:

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/sgm/>

Even if your state’s law says coaches are not mandated reporters, it is still a good idea to have an internal policy giving coaches guidance on how to handle reports of abuse and assault, and detailed a process to do so.

It is a good idea, particularly if an organization/ school serves teens, that youth be made fully aware of these policies. Youth should know who is a mandated reporter, and what that means, so they can decide how much, or if at all, they want to report a concern. Youth should be empowered and educated regarding what their rights are under certain laws and policies that affect them.