



Archdiocese
of Chicago

Handbook for Athletic Programs in K-8 Catholic Schools

Handbook for Athletic Directors in Catholic Elementary Schools

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THE MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY OF FAITH BASED INTERSCHOLASTIC PROGRAMMING

Interscholastic athletics is an integral component to the Archdiocese's goal of educating the whole child, and the outcomes from such participation are far reaching. The information presented in this document may be adapted and expanded to fit the needs of local programs.

Each individual school is responsible for developing guidelines for its athletic program that include a Mission Statement and a Philosophy Statement. Naturally, these statements must be congruent with the local school's mission and philosophy statements, as well as the Archdiocese's overarching mission for interscholastic athletics as outlined in this handbook.

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS MISSION, VISION AND PHILOSOPHY

Mission

Athletic programs at the Archdiocese of Chicago are an inclusive ministry serving the physical, mental, and spiritual wellness of every student.

Vision

The Archdiocese of Chicago envisions a fun, dynamic and inclusive sports community deeply rooted in Catholic faith and tradition. Our athletic programs work in concert with schools and parishes to embrace diversity, promoting an environment of inclusivity where every student-athlete feels welcomed, valued, and inspired to reach their fullest potential. Our goal is to provide a transformative and holistic athletic experience that goes beyond the pursuit of championships, focusing on the development of the whole person—mind, body, and spirit.

Philosophy

The Archdiocese of Chicago athletic programs are a ministry that values the dignity and contribution of every person. Through sports, we aim to nurture student-athletes who exhibit integrity, respect, and compassion both on and off the playing field. We believe that the opportunity for participation in athletics should be universally accessible to all families who wish to participate, regardless of skill level, ability to pay, or learning needs. Our athletic programs should be fun and transformative experiences where student-athletes gain life-long skills and produce confident, compassionate, and faithful individuals.

GOALS OF THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

In describing a clear sense of purpose for the athletic program, it is important to identify the goals of the program. These goals should be explicitly stated either in the philosophy statement or somewhere else in the school's athletic manual, and they should be visible to all those involved in athletic programming – the athletes, coaches, and parents.

These goals may include the following:

- developing sportsmanship
- giving students the experience of being part of a team
- fostering school spirit
- promoting the development of strong, healthy and disciplined bodies and minds
- helping students maintain good health through physical fitness.
- providing an enjoyable recreational activity that can be sustained into adulthood.
- encouraging values of self-discipline, self-confidence, fair play, and cooperation
- teaching the proper attitude toward winning, losing and competing with dignity
- further enhancing Catholic values and teachings

DEVELOPING AN ATHLETIC HANDBOOK

It is important that each school that supports and maintains an interscholastic athletics program prepares, publishes, and distributes a Handbook of Guidelines for the program. Ultimately, the written rule is easier to enforce than the one given orally. In addition, explicitly stated rules and expectations provide the necessary protection for the school, the student athlete, and all other program participants.

The athletic handbook should include, but may not be limited to, the following subjects:

- A statement supporting the value of athletics.
- Mission and Philosophy statements of the program
- The goals of the program
- The governance of the program
- Financial guidelines, fees, procedures and accountability
- The selection, training and monitoring of coaches
- Eligibility requirements and regulations for student athletes
- Parent/guardian expectations
- Recognition and awards
- Other local concerns

Schools are welcome to adopt portions of this handbook for their local athletic handbook.

A statement of non-discrimination must also be included in the handbook. A sample of such a statement is:

(School Name) does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national or ethnic origin in its admission or hiring policies, educational programs, loan or scholarship programs, athletics or any other school-administered program.

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Every parent/guardian, student-athlete, and coach should be given a copy of the handbook. They all must sign a form stating that they have read the rules and agree to be governed by them.

Periodic review/revision of the handbook and its guidelines and expectations is imperative.

CREATING A WELL-BALANCED SCHOOL ATHLETIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

When designing an athletic education program, it is crucial to prioritize the holistic development of young athletes, fostering their physical, mental, and spiritual growth with an emphasis on character formation and values-based coaching. A well-balanced athletic education program will include the elements listed below:

- **Emphasize Character Development:** Incorporate character development and moral formation as core components of the athletic education program. Teach virtues such as teamwork, sportsmanship, humility, perseverance, and respect for opponents, officials, and the game itself. Encourage athletes to uphold high ethical standards both on and off the field.
- **Integrate Faith and Spirituality:** Infuse the program with Catholic teachings and values, offering opportunities for prayer, reflection, and spiritual growth. Encourage athletes to see their participation in sports as an expression of their faith and an avenue for building a relationship with God. Provide regular opportunities for Mass, prayer before and after games, and faith-based discussions or reflections.
- **Train Coaches in Values-Based Coaching:** Ensure that coaches are trained not only in the technical aspects of the sport but also in values-based coaching. Collaborate with organizations like [*Play Like a Champion Today*](#), which offers resources and training programs that focus on the moral and ethical development of young athletes. Encourage coaches to be positive role models and mentors, nurturing the personal growth of their players.
- **Foster Inclusivity and Sportsmanship:** Create an inclusive environment that welcomes athletes of all abilities, backgrounds, and skill levels. Encourage fair play, teamwork, and respect among athletes. Promote healthy competition and discourage any form of discrimination, bullying, or unsportsmanlike behavior. Emphasize the value of building relationships and fostering a sense of community among athletes.
- **Prioritize Safety and Well-being:** Ensure the safety and well-being of athletes by implementing appropriate training techniques, injury prevention protocols, and safety guidelines. Provide access to qualified athletic trainers or medical personnel and establish clear protocols for handling injuries and emergencies. Prioritize the physical and mental health of athletes, promoting a balanced approach to training and competition.
- **Engage Parents and Families:** Involve parents and families in the athletic education program, emphasizing their role as partners in their child's development. Provide regular

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communication channels to keep parents informed about team activities, schedules, and program objectives. Encourage parental support and active involvement while fostering a healthy balance between support and letting the coaches and athletes lead.

By incorporating these principles and drawing inspiration from organizations like "[*Play Like a Champion Today*](#)," Catholic schools can create a well-balanced Athletic Education Program that not only focuses on athletic excellence but also nurtures the spiritual and character development of young athletes.

RECRUITMENT OF STUDENT ATHLETES

Under no circumstances can schools recruit student athletes to their schools and/or athletic programs with the promise of tuition, special considerations, or any other incentives. All improper activities should be reported to the proper Archdiocesan and local high school authorities.

ESTABLISHING A CODE OF ETHICS

The athletic program should develop a Code of Ethics that includes the goals and purpose of the athletic program and guidelines for student conduct, parent conduct, and good sportsmanship. This Code of Ethics may be printed in the athletic handbook, communicated at meetings, displayed in the locker room or gymnasium, and reviewed periodically or read before each game.

The Code of Ethics usually contains statements that describe good sportsmanship, playing by the rules in letter and in spirit, positive attitude, trying one's best, displaying honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility, respecting the rights and dignity of others, and bringing honor to one's self, one's team and one's school.

For more information on ethics and examples of codes of conduct, please refer to <https://www.playlikeachampion.org/>.

FEDERAL LAW AND THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

Federal Law prohibits sex discrimination in private schools' education programs or activities. The law allows only one exception – if the private school can prove that compliance with the statute and its regulations would conflict with its religious tenets. The Archdiocese of Chicago, following the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, encourages equal treatment of the sexes. Consequently, all Archdiocesan schools, through their athletic programs, must provide equal athletic opportunity for both sexes.

The United States' courts who have considered the meaning of "equal athletic opportunity" judge school compliance with federal law by the following ten factors:

- Whether the selection of sports and levels of competition effectively accommodates the interests and abilities of members of both sexes
- The provision of equipment and supplies
- The scheduling of games and practice times
- The travel and per diem allowance
- The opportunity to receive coaching and academic tutoring.
- The assignment and compensation of coaches and/or tutors
- The provision of locker rooms, practice and competitive facilities
- The provision of medical and training facilities and services
- The provision of housing and dining facilities and services and publicity

The courts apply one of three tests to determine whether schools are in compliance with factor one. These tests are:

- Whether male and female levels of participation opportunities are proportionate to the male and female enrollment percentages
- Where one sex is underrepresented, whether the school can show history and continuing improvement in program expansion that is responsive to the developing interest and abilities of the underrepresented sex.
- Where one sex is underrepresented and the school cannot show improvement in program expansion, whether the present program fully and effectively accommodates the interest and abilities of the underrepresented sex.

Accordingly, Archdiocesan schools should provide co-educational athletic programs when possible or provide comparable programs according to the factors and tests outlined above.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT COMPLIANCE

REQUIREMENTS FOR EMPLOYEES

[Archdiocese of Chicago Application for Employment or Volunteer Service](#) is to be completed by **all prospective employees or volunteers** at the time of their interview.

When employees or volunteers accept a position in the Catholic School system, they are expected to complete the list of all the tasks/trainings outlined below in order to be in compliance with the Archdiocesan mission to protect children and young people.

The following requirements must be followed by employees prior to hire.

- Complete an application through the AppliTrack system.
- Complete an online criminal background check through [eApps](#).

When hired, but before working with children, employees shall:

- Complete digital fingerprinting within three business days of hire, via [Accurate Biometrics](#).
- Participate in the Virtus/Protecting God's Children program for adults (arranged by the school/parish through the designated Child Protection Coordinator).
- Read and sign the Standards of Behavior Form ([Provided by the local school authorities](#)).
- Complete the Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking Form ([CANTS](#))
- Complete [Mandated Reporter Training](#) (coordinated by the Child Protection Coordinator)

On an ongoing basis, school employees shall:

- Successfully complete monthly bulletins through [Virtus](#).
- Participate in an annual training, provided by local school/parish authorities, on how to identify and report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.
- Complete the Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking Form ([CANTS](#)) on an annual basis.
- Concussion protocol training from [Illinois Elementary School Association](#) every 2 years.

Failure to comply with any/all requirements may result in disciplinary action against the employee, up to and including termination of employment. If the criminal background check or CANTS form reveals that a prospective or current employee has been convicted of an offense that would preclude him/her from working in a school or indicates that he/she has abused or neglected a child, the principal should immediately contact their Regional Director.

It is recommended that principals perform a basic internet search of all prospective employees prior to hire.

REQUIREMENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS

The following requirements must be followed by volunteers before they work with children:

- Complete an online criminal background check through [eApps](#).
- Complete the Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking Form ([CANTS](#))
- Complete mandated reporter training
- Read and sign the Standards of Behavior Form ([Provided by the local school authorities](#))

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- Participate in the Virtus/Protecting God's Children program for Adults (arranged by the school/parish through the designated Child Protection Coordinator).
- Successfully complete monthly bulletins through [Virtus](#).

School officials shall carefully vet volunteers to ensure that they possess the appropriate skills necessary to work with children. Principals have the sole discretion to remove a volunteer from service at Catholic schools.

Volunteers shall not work with children unless they are in the presence of a school/ parish employee. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the principal for certain volunteer roles (e.g., coach-volunteers). Principals shall exercise extreme discretion in making such exceptions.

VOLUNTEERS UNDER THE AGE OF 18

The following requirements apply to coaching volunteers under the age of 18:

- All volunteers, regardless of age, must complete the VIRTUS Protecting God's Children training, which includes age-appropriate modules addressing child safety, appropriate boundaries, and recognizing signs of abuse.
- Volunteers under the age of 18 must be directly supervised by a responsible adult who has undergone a comprehensive background check and completed the necessary safe environment compliance requirements.
- Volunteers under the age of 18 must provide written parental consent to participate in the program and complete any additional training or orientation required by the school.
- The school administration will carefully assess and assign age-appropriate tasks to volunteers under the age of 18, taking into consideration their abilities, maturity, and the safety requirements of the tasks.
- Volunteers under the age of 18 should not be placed in positions that involve one-on-one interaction with a child or require the handling of sensitive information.
- Volunteers must be made aware of the school's policies regarding appropriate use of technology, social media, and personal communication to ensure the safety and privacy of all involved.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION POLICY

No alcohol of any kind may be distributed or consumed at school and/or parish-sponsored sporting events or athletic banquets where children are present, whether on or off campus. This policy is non-negotiable. Parents, relatives and guests attending games and athletic banquets are expected to follow this policy. Expectations and restrictions are the same for indoor and outdoor activities.

EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Emergency Plan, when developed, is an integral part of the in-service of coaches. The coach then rehearses the Plan with the team. Assistant coaches and players are designated to handle specific responsibilities (e.g., calling parents, phoning for medical assistance, taking an injured child for treatment, etc.). All participants should know the name and address of the facility where they are practicing/playing. Student athletes also should know the proper behavior expected of them in the event that the coach might leave the group unattended because of an emergency.

Coaches and other adult participants must be aware of the procedures for reporting accidents and incidents.

- To develop a plan for “crowd control” to be put into effect as needed at home events.
- To provide appropriate discipline to address infractions of the discipline code.
- To establish a procedure for conflict resolution
- To review and evaluate rules, regulations and eligibility standards regularly.
- To perform any other duties to fulfill the program objectives.
- To provide coaches and volunteers with opportunities for continuing education in appropriate coaching techniques and child development related to the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of children.
- To regularly monitor and supervise coaches at practices and at games.
- To oversee practices, intramural and interscholastic games and tournaments
- To provide assistance to coaches working with students with special needs
- To handle conduct reports and keep the pastor and/or principal informed.
- To receive and disseminate communications and information regarding athletic business.
- To update and purchase equipment and uniforms with principal approval.
- To perform any other duties and assignments as designated by the pastor and/or principal.

The Athletic Director, with principal approval, executes the responsibilities listed above, engaging coaches as appropriate to their responsibilities.

CROWD CONTROL AT HOME EVENTS

It is recommended that standard operating procedures for all athletic events be established. The goal of these procedures is to safeguard those present and their reputations, as well as the school’s property, assets, and good name.

In order to ensure safety of all involved in a home athletic contest, school personnel should consider the following:

- Anticipate the size and the temperament of the expected crowd.
- Determine if there have been previous incidents when these two teams or schools have played.
- Assess if there potential for either a highly emotional contest and/or a larger than usual crowd.
- Develop a spectator Code of Conduct. Remind spectators of the expectations of conduct by announcement at the start of each game.
- Exclude students on suspension from attending any school activity during the suspension period.
- Determine if any external local conditions or events might increase the need for security.
- School officials may cancel a game if unruly fans in the stands cannot be brought into control. If a game is canceled due to spectator conduct, the game will be considered a forfeit.

INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC PROGRAMMING GUIDELINES AND RULES

MANAGING AN EFFECTIVE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

It is the responsibility of the athletic director and/ or the athletic board/committee to manage and maintain the interscholastic sports programs. The athletic director and/or athletic board/committee have many important and time-consuming responsibilities. It is critical for school administrators to make sure that the appointed athletic director and/or athletic board/committee members not only have an interest in athletics, but also have the time, expertise, and skills to effectively administer all responsibilities listed below.

The Principal and/or Pastor is responsible for consistently evaluating the athletic director and/or athletic board/committee on their ability to meet all of the following responsibilities:

To act as liaison between all parties – coaches, parents, students and the school

To develop a local handbook and guidelines for the interscholastic program. (This handbook includes the Philosophy of the program, a written code for academics and behavior for student athletes, a code of conduct for coaches and parents and other program volunteers, and other local needs.)

- To set criteria for the monitoring of coaches
- To communicate the philosophy of the program and ensure that it is clearly understood and consistently followed
- To coordinate, schedule and supervise all other program volunteers.
- To determine league participation
- To determine how teams are slated when there is an insufficient number of registered and eligible players per grade or age level
- To determine how teams are slated when the number of registered and eligible players is large, or their skills are greatly varied
- To decide whether an athlete can participate in more than one sport per season
- To coordinate the schedule of practices, games and tournaments
- To prepare and present a budget for pastor and/or principal approval and set participation fees
- To approve expenditures according to local fiscal guidelines
- To submit regular financial reports to the pastor and/or principal
- To communicate and maintain standards of safety
- To develop and communicate an Emergency Plan for unexpected occurrences at games and practices

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL

The principal establishes and implements 1) a comprehensive program of physical education for all students; 2) an intramural program; and 3) an interscholastic athletic program that is in union with the mission and purpose of Catholic education.

In regard to the interscholastic athletic program, the principal should:

- Establish an athletic board/committee and/or hire an athletic director.
- Provide the athletic board/committee and/or the athletic director with a role description.

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- Supervise the athletic board/committee and/ or athletic director's activities and ensure that delegated responsibilities are carried out in an appropriate manner.
- Establish and communicate the Mission/ Philosophy of the athletic program.
- Determine local eligibility requirements for the student athlete and ensure that these are fairly and uniformly enforced.
- Ensure that all legal and safety aspects of the program are in compliance: i.e. verification of athlete's age, insurance coverage, parental permission in writing for participation, yearly physical or other verification of fitness, and emergency information
- Verify that all paid employees and volunteers meet safe environment compliance procedures
- Approve and sign all team rosters.
- Ensure that all adults in the program, especially the coaching staff, uphold and model behaviors that are consistent with Catholic teachings.
- Establish communication and accountability mechanisms among all participants of the program.
- Describe how the finances of the program are integrated into the school budget.
- Receive a quarterly financial report and arrange for a program audit yearly.
- Meet with the parents and review the program expectations, eligibility guidelines and parental expectations.
- Meet regularly with the athletic director and/or athletic committee to monitor the program.

It is imperative for the principal to establish the importance of good Christian sportsmanship in the minds of the entire school community. This is an underlying goal of interscholastic athletic programming throughout the Archdiocese.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

The responsibility to organize and manage the interscholastic athletic program may be delegated to an athletic director, an athletic board/committee, or a combination of the two. The nature of the governance (i.e., whether managed by volunteers or a paid director who performs the duties) determines the kind and amount of responsibility that are given to the athletic director and/or athletic board/committee. For example: the pastor/principal may maintain greater control over a program managed by a volunteer athletic board or an athletic committee. Schools that employ an athletic director may give this person greater responsibility to manage the program. Whatever the model, the Athletic Director or the athletic board/committee administers the athletic program in consultation and collaboration with the pastor and/or principal and is accountable to them.

THE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

Appointing an Athletic Director is the most preferred method for managing and directing the school's interscholastic athletic program. The areas of responsibility of the athletic director are listed in the section titled "Responsibilities of Managing an Effective Athletic Program." Large athletic programs may also employ an assistant athletic director, enabling the athletic director to appropriately assign several tasks and responsibilities to an able assistant. Naturally,

responsibilities must be explicitly delegated and divided, enabling the athletic director and the assistant athletic director to work collaboratively and in unison with one another.

THE ATHLETIC BOARD / ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In some schools where appointing an athletic director may not be feasible, the athletic program must be administered by a volunteer Athletic Board/ Committee. Members of the athletic board/committee, the coaches, and others give their time to organize and maintain such a program. The athletic board may be appointed with the approval of the pastor and/or principal or the board may be chosen by vote once a slate of candidates has been approved by the pastor and/or the principal. The athletic board/committee may be a standing committee of the local school board with appointed board and non-board members. Each school develops broad guidelines for the selection of athletic board/committee members.

The athletic board/committee develops a Constitution/Bylaws that articulates the following:

- organization and purpose
- membership
- selection
- terms of office
- accountability
- responsibilities

The Constitution and Bylaws are approved by the pastor and/or principal and are submitted to the local school board.

ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

The administration of interscholastic athletic programs can be delegated to an athletic director, an athletic board/committee, or a combination of the two. The athletic director and/or the athletic board/ committee, with the approval of the pastor and/ or principal, develops procedures that govern the scope and direction of the interscholastic athletic programs and student participation in such programs. The athletic director and/or board work in cooperation with the pastor, principal, the local school board, faculty and parents.

If the school decides to utilize both an athletic director and an athletic board/committee to administer its interscholastic athletic program, it is critical for each party to understand their specific roles and responsibilities. Responsibilities must be explicitly delegated and divided, enabling the athletic director and the athletic board/committee to work collaboratively and in unison with one another. The strict delegation of important responsibilities will also help ensure that all responsibilities are met in an efficient manner, and all those involved with the administration of athletic programs can be held accountable for their work and evaluated for their performance.

Athletic Directors and/or Athletic Committee members are ultimately responsible for assigning adult personnel to manage specific operational tasks that athletic events require. Naturally, it is

important to assign responsibilities to only those who are capable of physically, mentally, and emotionally handling the required tasks.

CONSIDERATION OF COUNCIL MANAGEMENT

Principals of a Council may develop and communicate athletic program guidelines and procedures for all of the schools within a Council. This uniformity of expectations and procedures ensures that all aspects of the athletic programs within the Council are governed and managed fairly and in the same manner. Schools in a given Council may elect to hire an athletic director to assume responsibility for all interscholastic programs within the Council. The salary and benefits package would be shared among the schools.

FINANCING THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

There are several modes of financing the interscholastic athletic program. If physical education, intramural sports programs, and interscholastic athletic programs are considered a part of the core curriculum, these programs are funded as part of the regular school budget.

Athletic fees should be set to allow as many students as possible to participate. No child or family should be turned away due to an inability to pay athletic fees. The principal and athletic director should establish a process by which families who have a financial burden preventing their child from participating can request assistance. Parent communications should include a contact person to reach out to if they need financial assistance with athletic fees. Matters of financial assistance should always be kept confidential.

Booster Clubs or parent groups may raise additional funds according to local parish and school guidelines for the purpose of meeting program needs. Whenever fees are collected for participation in a particular sport, parents/guardians should be given an itemized summary of what expenses are included in the fees.

A realistic budget to operate the athletic program should be developed and submitted to the pastor and/or the principal for their approval. A good system of accounting, developed in accordance with Archdiocesan and parish guidelines, should be in place as well. Regular financial statements should be given to the pastor and/or principal, and they have the final approval of all expenditures. The salary of an athletic director is part of the school and/or parish budget. Some programs offer stipends for head coaches or persons who are required to put forth a considerable amount of time for the program. These stipends should be included in the budget as well. In the area of frequent concern is the management and disbursement of the funds raised to run the interscholastic athletic program. All income and expenses of the total school program must be accounted for in the line items of the budget. The inclusion of these figures gives an accurate picture of the actual costs to educate a student. While the funds may be raised by an outside group (e.g., Booster Club) it is critical that all monies are properly reflected in the annual budget.

LEADING DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ATHLETIC PROGRAMS

FACTORS FOR PARTICIPATION

Only students in Grades 4-8 may participate in interscholastic play. Participation in interscholastic athletics at earlier grade levels is not permitted, as younger students should be focusing only on instruction rather than competitive play.

Guidelines for the participation of transfer students, especially those enrolling after the opening day of school, must be explicitly established. The age when a student becomes too old to play in an elementary program should also be defined and communicated.

The number of practices and games, in addition to the time of the practices and games, are determined in consideration of the student athlete's age, physical development, academic responsibilities, and the opportunity for family life.

GAMES AND TOURNAMENTS

In order to ensure balance in the lives of student-athletes the following are **maximum** limitations for schools to use as they outline participation parameters for their athletic programs. (*Each tournament entered counts as one game.*)

Grade 4:	12 games and 2 tournaments
Grades 5-6:	15 games and 2 tournaments
Grades 7-8:	20 games and 3 tournaments

- League playoffs that follow the regular season are counted as one tournament.
- No more than two games should be scheduled during the school week.
- Grades 7 and 8 games start no later than 8:30 PM on days when there is school the following day and no later than 9:00 PM on other days. For Grades 4,5, & 6, these times are 7:30 PM and 8:00 PM respectively.
- Pre-season/scrimmage games played before the start of the season should be limited to three games. These games are included in the maximum totals.
- Tournament participation takes into consideration the distance traveled and whether or not tournaments are held within the regular season. Every effort should be made to keep the expectation of participation "family friendly."

It is understood that scheduling is an intricate process. Game schedules created by league directors not affiliated with the Archdiocese, cancellations and make-up games, and limited gym/field availability further complicates this process. As a result, situations may arise where programs are faced with the reality that they may have to play one additional game during the week or a few extra games for the season. However, situations such as these should be the exception, not the norm. When these situations arise, common sense needs to be applied while keeping the spirit of the rule in mind.

GUIDELINES FOR SCHEDULING PRACTICES AND LEAGUE PARTICIPATION

No practices or games should be scheduled at the same time Mass is scheduled on Sunday morning, as families should be allowed the opportunity to attend Mass together. Teams may not participate in more than 2 leagues within a season.

- Grades 4-6: 2 Practices per week (not to exceed three hours per week)
- Grades 7-8: 3-4 Practices per week (not to exceed six hours per week)

**Practice sessions should include warm-up and cool-down times.*

PLAYING TIME GRADES 4-6

Every student enrolled in the program who meets eligibility requirements will play a reasonable amount of time in every game and have **equal** playing time throughout the season.

Playing time is a frequent source of misunderstanding and conflict among coaches, students and parents. The athletic director or the athletic board/committee, with the approval of the pastor and/or the principal, must develop detailed guidelines for playing time and clearly communicate these guidelines to all parties.

In grades 4, 5 and 6, coaches are expected to do the best they can with awarding equal playing time for all participants over the course of the season. There is a significant difference between competitive play at the high school and college level and competitive play at the youth level. The focus at this level is on development, therefore every player at the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade level who meet their academic and athletic responsibilities as outlined in the school's student-athlete code of conduct must get an equal opportunity to play.

While it can be challenging for coaches to give each player equal playing time, coaches at this level must understand that the opportunity to participate in sports with meaningful playing time is essential to childhood development, confidence building, and overall athletic development. **Students who have attended practices regularly and are eligible to play, should play in every game.**

Below are other reasons why equal playing time is the expected strategy at the 4th - 6th grade level:

- **Maximizing team development:** While giving everyone equal playing time may cost the teams a few wins early in the season, the team will be much more well-rounded at the end of the season when the games count more.
- **Minimizing player fatigue:** In tough physical games, coaches will lack skilled players if the top players are exhausted and the remaining players have limited game experience.
- **Recognizes equal investments:** Players and parents make equal financial and time commitments to the team and program and should have equal opportunity to play.
- **Improves team chemistry:** When players feel everyone is treated fairly, they are more likely to focus on working together.

- **Wins mean more to everyone:** When everyone contributes to a win, the whole team will feel included and celebrated.
- **Better reflects coaching abilities:** Winning games by developing all the athletes on the team is a better test of a coach's abilities.

Equal playing time can be applied in a variety of different ways. Coaches can award equal playing time on a game-by-game basis, or, perhaps easier, award equal playing time over the duration of a season. For example, coaches can use lopsided games as an opportunity to get less skilled players in the game.

PLAYING TIME GRADES 7-8

In grades 7 and 8, playing time should reflect ability, effort, attendance at practices, and commitment to the team. Coaches at the 7th and 8th grade level should work collaboratively with parents in helping all student athletes understand that not everyone who is on the team will play equal amounts. However, playing time for all is expected at the 7th and 8th Grade Level. A reasonable guideline is for each athlete to play for the equivalent of at least one quarter of each game. "Winning at all costs" or the exclusion of participation of eligible players, is never tolerated. Athletic guidelines should clearly state consequences for coaches who repeatedly ignore this directive.

Instances of noncompliance are to be carefully documented with a written notice given to the offending coach.

Missing practice without cause or excessive absences can result in reduced playing time. Playing time may also be reduced as a disciplinary action, most especially when a player loses self-control or engages in other conduct unbecoming a Christian student athlete. Generally, however, every eligible athlete plays in every game (including tournaments).

TRYOUTS AND CUTS

The focus of Archdiocese athletics at the 4th - 8th grade level is on development, rather than winning. Coaches should find a spot for everyone who shows the willingness and desire to be a part of a team. Being a part of an interscholastic athletic team is a major component to the school experience; preventing any aspiring student athlete from participating denies them of this right. Evaluations of athletes to determine their skill level are permitted.

CREATING AND DIVIDING TEAMS

Dividing teams according to skill level is highly discouraged. However, when schools have a large number of participating student-athletes **in the same grade level**, it may be necessary to create two teams for the sole purpose of ensuring a significant amount of playing time for all. The only acceptable instance where schools can offer an "A" Team and a "B" Team is if they are competing in a league that offers similar team structures to ensure the highest quality developmental experience and play time for student athletes.

If teams are formed by skill level, (an “A” team consisting of more game ready players and a “B” team consisting of players who need additional skill development) it is still expected that students would see a **fair amount of playing time** on either of the teams for which they qualified.

In addition, parent/guardian coaches (most especially those who are coaching their own children) should **never** be responsible for dividing up teams based on skill level. Deciding who plays on the “A” Team and “B” Team must be made by the Athletic Director, Athletic Board, and/ or school principal. Lastly, consider using an alternate name other than “A” Team and “B” Team, such as a color, to differentiate the two teams to reduce the focus on skill level.

Publishing “won-loss” records and team standings is discouraged and **only permissible for teams in Grades 7 and 8**. Additionally, “all-star” games featuring select athletes are inconsistent with the goals and values of elementary and middle school interscholastic athletic programs and are prohibited.

FOSTERING ATHLETES

Talented athletes should never be asked to play up with older players unless he/she is needed to play with the older team due to a lack of participating athletes at that level.

Younger athletes can be placed on a roster with older players if there is a lack of participants at the older level. In such cases, athletes can be on the roster for two different teams, the older team and the player’s age-appropriate team. If an athlete is playing for two different teams, then the athletic director is expected to create and enforce specific playing time restrictions for those athletes rostered on two different teams to prevent overuse and reduce the likelihood of a particular athlete taking playing time away from other participants who are only rostered on one team.

Without exception, the same athlete cannot be rostered on two different teams within the same grade level. In other words, if a school has two 5th grade teams, the same athlete cannot compete for both 5th grade teams.

[The Chicago Catholic Youth League](#) uses the following guidelines to determine eligibility to play in each grade:

*4th Grade players cannot be 11 before November 30th and cannot be above 4th grade in school.
5th Grade players cannot be 12 before November 30th and cannot be above 5th grade in school.
6th Grade players cannot be 13 before November 30th and cannot be above 6th grade in school.
7th Grade players cannot be 14 before November 30th and cannot be above 7th grade in school.
8th Grade players cannot be 15 before November 30th and cannot be above 8th grade in school.*

AWARDS/ TROPHIES

Awards, trophies, and letters of recognition are frequently given to student athletes for program participation. Awards recognizing individual accomplishments is inconsistent with the team first concept that coaches demand from their players. If championship trophies are presented, they should be presented to teams at a league tournament. Medals, certificates or other acknowledgment of participation for all players is encouraged over individual awards such as “Most Valuable Player”.

UNIFORMS

Schools are encouraged to purchase uniforms that student-athletes return at the end of the season. In order to promote consistency and equity throughout the program, schools are expected to issue similar styles and quality of uniforms regardless of gender or age level. An athlete’s last name should never be on the back of any team uniform. Placing an athlete’s last name on the back of a jersey emphasizes the individual as opposed to the team and could potentially be a safety risk.

A team uniform is defined as any article of clothing that can be acceptably worn during competition. Team warm-ups that are worn prior to competition but removed once the game begins do not fall into this category of team uniforms. While it is acceptable for parents of a particular team or sports booster club to purchase warm-ups for a particular team, it is encouraged that if one team has warm-up attire, then every participant in the program across all age levels, male and female, be awarded the same opportunity.

A student athlete must be allowed to modify his or her athletic or team uniform for the purpose of modesty in clothing or attire that is in accordance with the requirements of his or her religion or his or her cultural values or modesty preferences provided such uniform modifications do not contradict or create confusion as Catholic social teaching. The modification of athletic or team uniform may include, but is not limited to, the wearing of a hijab, an undershirt, or leggings. If a student chooses to modify his or her athletic or team uniform, the student is responsible for all costs associated with the modification of the uniform and the student shall not be required to receive prior approval from the school for such modification.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL COACHES

SELECTION AND TRAINING OF COACHES

The coach has the greatest responsibility as well as the greatest opportunity to guide and influence the student athlete. Coaches assume the role of teacher, mentor and minister to the athletes in their charge. A coach’s attitude and spirituality are critical to modeling good Christian faith-based sportsmanship, both in word and deed. The careful selection of coaches is vital if the athletic program is to reflect the Mission and Philosophy of the school’s interscholastic athletic program. [Play Like a Champion Today](#) is recommended as a quality training provider to support coaches, parents and student-athletes.

Criteria for the selection of coaches must include:

- The ability to model Catholic values

- The ability to articulate and model the school's Mission and Philosophy and goals of the program
- The ability to responsibly supervise and instruct the youth in his/her care
- An understanding of the basics of the sport to be coached
- The ability to develop the potential, confidence and skills of each athlete
- The ability to separate winning from the important goals and values of the program

After a careful screening and selection process, coaches are appointed by the athletic board/committee or by the athletic director with the approval of the pastor and/or the principal. Head coaches should be 21 years of age, and they all must submit all the necessary documentation and training.

Before coming into contact with any children, all coaches must complete the safe environment requirements outlined in the Safe Environment Compliance section of this handbook.

Each school must conduct their own coach training program prior to the start of the sport season as a means of making sure each coach understands his/her responsibility as an extension of the school, the staff, and the religious tradition of the Parish Community. In addition, the school should make arrangements for coaches to attend a formal clinic or in-service in their particular sport.

The benefits of sending coaches to a professional organization that focuses on appropriate teachings and principles of effectively leading youth sports programs are extremely significant. It is recommended that the coaches are certified by a national governing body or a national coaching program in the sport they coach. In addition, it is recommended that coaches receive training in first-aid, CPR, and on blood-borne pathogens. Of equal importance, all coaches must be familiar with the Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act, and every coach must clearly understand their legal responsibilities as mandatory reporters.

More information about being a mandatory reporter can be found at <https://dcfs.illinois.gov/safe-kids/reporting.html>. Additional resources and further training opportunities can also be found in the appendix of this handbook.

COACH RESPONSIBILITIES

Coaching is not just about winning games. In fact, winning is a very small component to the job. Successful coaches help athletes master new skills, enjoy competition with others, and help young athletes feel good about themselves. Successful coaches are not only well versed in the techniques and skills of their sport. They also understand how to effectively teach those skills through age-appropriate exercises and drills. Most importantly however, successful coaches go far beyond teaching athletic techniques by teaching and modeling skills needed for successful living in our society.

Below is a list of major responsibilities and behaviors that all coaches **MUST** adhere to. The athletic director and/or athletic board/committee is responsible for consistently evaluating each coach on their ability to meet all of the following responsibilities:

Act in Accordance with Catholic Character

Coaches are expected to model Christian sportsmanship knowing that the school is judged more by the coach's sportsmanship than by their record. The coach must instill and guide the team members with a sense of fair play and model winning and losing in a respectful, courteous and gracious Christian manner.

Model Superior Sportsmanship, Humility, and Graciousness, both in Victory and Defeat

Coaches should never instruct or encourage student athletes to violate either the spirit or the letter of the rules of the sport or of the league. It is unethical to "run up" the score where there is a clear ability gap. Coaches are expected to substitute players when the opposing team is significantly behind.

Coaches must demonstrate respect for game officials and opponents at all times. Gestures such as publicly shaking hands with the officials and the opposing coach before and after a game gives clear witness to this respect. All coaches must refrain from public protest that may lead to similar behavior from students, parents or other spectators.

Properly Supervise Student-Athletes

Student-athletes should never be left unsupervised. It is recommended that at least two qualified adults always be present for supervision and safety of the team. In addition, coaches must be physically and mentally present when supervising athletes. Being preoccupied, completing unrelated tasks, using cell phones, texting, or engaging in conversation with others does not allow adequate supervision.

In the event of a serious emergency, the coach should attempt to get another adult to supervise the team. If this is not possible, athletes may have to be left alone for a reasonable period of time, providing that the athletes have been instructed on what to do in the coach's absence. Clear expectations of behavior in emergency situations should be reviewed with the athletes.

Adhere to Professional Conduct

The coach is responsible for student conduct and behavior during practices and games. Under no circumstances should coaches tolerate words that demean other players (name-calling, taunting, etc.). Likewise, any action that is physically dangerous, for example deliberately trying to injure an opponent during a game, is absolutely prohibited. Coaches must strive to be fair and unbiased in their relationships with student athletes and their parents.

Equal Opportunity for Students and Families

Coaches must also strive to faithfully and fairly adhere to the guidelines for "playing time" referenced earlier in this handbook, for each student athlete, giving each athlete an appropriate and equal opportunity to participate. It is expected that coaches emphasize the development of self-confidence, self-discipline and sportsmanship, and that they make team participation a learning experience for all.

Possess Basic Knowledge in Skills, Tactics, and Strategies

It is to be expected that coaches are knowledgeable of the rules of the sport and techniques for teaching the fundamentals of the sport. They should use tactics and strategies that are appropriate for the age and skill levels of their athletes. **WINNING TAKES SECONDARY IMPORTANCE TO THE ATHLETIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ALL THOSE INVOLVED.** Coaches should teach the rules of the sport and develop each player's skills within the framework of a team concept.

Possess Basic Knowledge in Training, Nutrition, and Injury Prevention

Proper physical conditioning of the student athletes must be emphasized. All practices should begin with dynamic stretching and warm-up exercises and end with cool down activities. Water must be made available to all participants, and coaches should allow athletes to take as many water breaks as needed. Coaches should never allow injured players to return to competition unless cleared by a physician or certified trainer.

Comply with Established Policies, Philosophies, and Procedures

All coaches must adhere to and support the local interscholastic athletic Mission and Philosophy Statements, as well as all local and league policies and guidelines. Coaches should attend various information meetings to become familiar with these prior to assuming coaching responsibilities. In addition, all coaches are expected to publicly support the school's administration, athletic director, and/or athletic committee.

Possess a Basic Understanding of Risk Management Procedures

Coaches are responsible for the safety and welfare of the team. Coaches must ensure the proper use of the facilities where practices and games are held. Coaches practicing at parish/school facilities should understand the proper procedures for entering and securing the building. Coaches should be familiar with the School Emergency Plan and periodically rehearse the plan with the team. Coaches must carry with them pertinent information on every athlete in their care in case of an emergency. The emergency card should list obvious problems such as asthma, heart problems and diabetes. The card should also specify allergies, including bee stings and foods, as well as a list of emergency phone numbers for each athlete. A FIRST AID Kit should be at all games and practices. However, coaches should never administer medication. Coaches must document all injuries by filling out an accident report and/or other necessary paperwork with the school office.

Possess Basic Athletic Administration Skills

Coaches should keep a written documentation of accidents and injuries and notify the parents and the school administration when these occur. While it may be impossible to document every injury and its source, an honest effort to document and notify parents and the school administration in a timely manner is important for the safety and well-being of the student athletes. Coaches should keep objective and factual written documentation of problems concerning student athletes' attitude and/or behavior. These records are important when discipline matters might lead to the suspension and/or expulsion of a student from the program. It is important for coaches to communicate the schedule of practices and games (or any

cancellations or alterations to the schedule) in a timely manner. Coaches cannot assume that players will get an oral message home; written communication, including e-mails, is highly encouraged.

Understand Appropriate Disciplinary Procedures

Coaches must discipline inappropriate student behavior or disrespect. Every coach needs to understand the difference between and corrective action. The following guidelines should apply to all staff, coaches, volunteers or supervisors involved in athletic programs:

Consistent Discipline Approach:

Discipline within the athletic program should be consistent with the school's general disciplinary policies, reflecting the Catholic values of respect, integrity, fairness, and accountability. Coaches and staff should ensure that student athletes are aware of the specific expectations, rules, and consequences for behavior both on and off the field. Discipline should be age-appropriate, considering the developmental stage and maturity of the student athletes.

Positive Reinforcement and Education:

Coaches should strive to create a positive and supportive athletic environment, focusing on encouragement, sportsmanship, and character development. Student athletes should be educated about appropriate conduct, teamwork, and the values associated with being part of a Catholic school athletic program. Recognize and celebrate positive behavior, effort, and achievement to reinforce desired conduct.

Fair and Proportional Consequences:

Consequences for disciplinary infractions should be fair, reasonable, and proportional to the nature of the behavior and the student's age. Coaches and staff should apply consequences consistently and avoid singling out individual athletes or displaying favoritism. Consequences may include, but are not limited to, verbal warnings, temporary suspension from practice or games, mandatory participation in character-building activities, or meetings with parents or guardians.

Respectful Communication:

Coaches and staff should model respectful and constructive communication with student athletes when addressing disciplinary matters. Discussions about discipline should be conducted in private, maintaining the confidentiality and dignity of the student athlete. Communication with parents or guardians should be timely, clear, and respectful, ensuring they are informed of any disciplinary incidents involving their child. Encourage parents to wait 24 hours before contacting a coach about a non-emergent concern about an incident or game. Conversely, coaches should wait 24 hours before responding to a potentially contentious email from a parent or guardian.

Reporting and Response:

Any concerns, suspected abuse, or inappropriate behavior, whether related to disciplinary matters or otherwise, should be reported immediately to the appropriate authority as outlined in the Archdiocese of Chicago's safe environment compliance policies. The

school will follow established protocols for responding to and investigating any reports, taking appropriate action to ensure the safety and well-being of all individuals involved.

By implementing these discipline guidelines, the Catholic elementary athletic program demonstrates its commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for student athletes while upholding Catholic values and the principles of fair and effective discipline.

MONITORING COACHING PERFORMANCE

The athletic board/committee or athletic director should develop guidelines and procedures to regularly monitor and evaluate their coaches. While the specific procedures for disciplining and discharging a coach may vary within different school communities, all schools must document all incidents of misconduct. If a coach is unable to perform his/her duties according to the spirit and guidelines of the local athletic program, a process for disciplining and/or removing a coach should be clearly outlined and followed by the athletic board/committee or the school principal. Coaches who have been negligent or deficient in carrying out their responsibilities should not be retained. Ordinarily, coaches who have been removed from their position should not be involved in any other aspects of the athletic program.

It is the responsibility of the pastor, principal, athletic director, and/or athletic board/committee to thoroughly investigate all potential instances of coach misconduct and swiftly remove coaches whose actions have created a physically and/or emotionally unhealthy environment for all student- athletes involved.

COACH'S CODE OF CONDUCT

(Source: Play Like a Champion Today)

The Play Like a Champion approach to coaching means understanding your role as a minister in promoting the moral and character development of our youth. As such, a Play Like a Champion coach must exemplify the GROW approach and cardinal virtues in his or her work. We have created the Coaches' Code of Conduct to represent the core teachings of this program and serve as a reminder of your responsibilities.

As a Play Like a Champion Coach...

1. I will uphold the teachings of the Catholic Church and strive to help participants grow in their faith through athletics.
2. I will embrace the mission of (enter name of school or league) and promote this mission through my coaching ministry.
3. I will embrace the Play Like a Champion philosophy in my coaching ministry, including a commitment to sport as play, the cardinal virtues, and the GROW approach.
4. I will remember that sports are games meant to be played by and for children.
5. I will encourage all the athletes on my team to GROW by:
 - Helping athletes set goals that are physical, mental and moral in nature
 - Building positive relationships on our team, with our opponents and officials
 - Providing athletes ownership over their play and their team.
 - Guiding athletes in winning and losing gracefully
6. I will respect the dignity of participants at all times and use language appropriate to an educator, including the use of positive strategies while avoiding practices that belittle or humiliate young people. I will not swear or be verbally abusive in any way.
7. I will respect the dignity of all parents, officials and other persons involved with the athletic environment, both during games and practices. I will promote a healthy relationship and foster good communication with parents of participants.
8. I will promote the physical well being of participants through an understanding of appropriate safety precautions and proper athletic technique.
9. I will commit to playing all individuals in practice and games, regardless of skill or ability, recognizing that sport is play.
10. I will live by the Catholic cardinal virtues in my own behavior/attitude at athletic events. I will always strive for virtue and excellence in my own life, understanding that as a coach I am a model to our youth at all times.

11. I will respect the game officials and their decisions at all times, recognizing that they work hard at a challenging task and that everyone makes mistakes.

12. I will strive to improve the skill of all participants in a sport, no matter how talented, and to help them reach their athletic potential.

Coaches' Code of Conduct Contract

By signing this document, you agree to uphold all parts of the "Coaches' Code of Conduct" for the (enter name of school/league). You acknowledge that you have read and understand this code and make a commitment to living the mission of Play Like a Champion in your coaching ministry.

Coach Name (Printed): _____

Coach Parish: _____

Coach Signature: _____

Date: _____

UNDERSTANDING A COACH'S ROLE IN ADMINISTERING SPORTS FIRST AID

Studies have shown that any delay in first aid care can cause further injury or prolong an athlete's recovery time. At minimum, all coaches must possess basic knowledge in sports first aid and CPR, in addition to being equipped with the proper supplies at every practice and game to treat all injuries, or, in the most serious situations, stabilize the athlete until help arrives. Coaches are often the first to witness injuries. In more cases than not, medical personnel are not present at practices or games, so it is the coach's responsibility to appropriately administer first aid care. In addition, it is usually the coach who is responsible for determining if and when the athlete should return to competition.

PROACTIVE MEASURES FOR REDUCING INJURIES

The severity and frequency of sports related injuries can be significantly reduced if coaches understand and proactively perform the following duties:

Properly plan the activity:

- Make sure that athletes are conditioned properly to begin activities.
- Incorporate stretching, warm ups and cool downs in your planned activities.
- Teach athletes the sports skills in a progression so that they are adequately prepared to handle more difficult skills.
- Match the athletes according to size, physical maturity, skill level, and experience.
- Have and enforce rules and expectations of conduct for athletes.

Provide proper instruction:

- Keep up to date on better and safer ways of performing sport techniques.
- Teach athletes the rules and the correct skills and strategies of the sport.
- Teach athletes how to fit, use, and inspect their equipment regularly.
- Always supervise athletes when using sporting facilities or equipment.

Provide a safe environment.

- Inspect playing and training areas for hazards.
- Immediately remove athletes from the activity if they are unable to compete without pain or loss of function (i.e., inability to walk, run, jump, throw, without restriction)
- Monitor current environmental conditions (i.e., wind chill, temperature, and humidity)
- Provide parents and athletes with both oral and written statements of inherent health risks of their particular sport.

From a legal standpoint, coaches are expected to take action when needed and provide a certain standard of care. This includes performing basic first aid care for any injury or illness suffered by an athlete, in addition to CPR if necessary.

**It is strongly encouraged that every coach be certified in CPR. See Appendix for recommended training resources.*

KEEPING ATHLETE'S HEALTH RECORDS

It is critical for coaches to know if any of their players have certain health problems that could affect their sport participation or medical treatment. Completing a Health History Form can document these various health related issues. Diabetes, asthma, epilepsy, heart murmurs, allergies, and skin conditions are just some health problems that coaches and first aid responders must be made aware of. Furthermore, an Emergency Contact Information Card must be always on hand. **Coaches must be able to immediately contact the athlete's parents, guardian, or other family contacts in case of an emergency.**

PRESEASON PHYSICAL EXAM

Athletes who are not in shape are more likely to get hurt. In order to proactively prevent injuries, it is **required** that athletes complete a preseason physical exam. This should be a thorough exam performed by a physician to check for problems in the following areas: circulatory, respiratory, neurological, orthopedic, vision, and hearing. The physician should note any pre-existing conditions or other potential health problems when deciding if an athlete is cleared to participate. **All athletes must turn in these physical cards prior to participation.**

PRESEASON SCREENING

While a physical exam will detect specific health problems, it does not provide insight about an athlete's overall fitness level. Preseason screening, which can be conducted by a trained fitness professional, can evaluate athletes in the following areas:

- Strength in the muscle groups most often used in the particular sport – for example, a football player's neck strength or a basketball player's ankle strength.
- Flexibility or tightness in the majority muscle groups.
- Cardiovascular endurance
- Body composition or percent body fat

Ultimately, these tests pinpoint fitness deficiencies that could lead to future injury. It is in this area where having a sound physical education program can be so important. Physical education teachers can implement various physical fitness testing programs, such as [FitnessGram](#), which can help athletes and parents pinpoint and address potential problems in these critical fitness areas, or following the guidelines outlined by [SHAPE America](#).

STOCKING THE FIRST AID KIT

Coaches must have a first aid kit on hand for all practices and games. A well-stocked first aid kit should include the following items:

- List of emergency phone numbers
- Face shield (for rescue breathing and CPR)
- Bandage scissors
- Plastic bags for crushed ice
- 3 inch and 4 inch elastic wraps

- Triangular bandages
- Sterile gauze pads – 3 inch and 4 inch squares
- Saline solution for eyes
- Tongue depressors
- Cotton swabs
- Bandage strips – assorted sizes
- Alcohol or peroxide
- Antibacterial hand sanitizer
- First aid cream or antibacterial ointment
- Athletic tape
- Pre-wrap
- Sterile gauze rolls
- Insect sting kit (for outdoor sports)
- Safety pins
- Examination gloves
- Thermometer
- Access to an AED machine on premises

HANDLING MINOR INJURIES

Most injuries do not require emergency medical attention. However, it is important for coaches to not take minor injuries lightly, as they can impair performance if not treated correctly. For minor injuries, coaches should take the following steps:

1. Evaluate the injury.
2. Administer sport first aid.
3. Remove the athlete from participation if the athlete is in a great deal of pain or suffers from a loss of function (cannot walk, throw, jump, etc.)
4. Contact the athlete's parents and discuss the injury.
5. Ask that the athlete see a physician to rule out serious injury and obtain clearance before returning to play.
6. Under no circumstances should an injured athlete return to competition. While injured athletes return to competition at the professional level, youth league coaches must not confuse managing a team of adolescents with leading a team of grown men and women.

HANDLING SERIOUS INJURIES

Unfortunately, serious injuries are an inherent risk associated with sport participation. To minimize confusion and ensure that an injured athlete receives prompt medical attention, all coaches must develop an Emergency Response Plan. In particular, coaches should determine who is responsible for what duties, how a duty should be carried out, when certain actions should be taken, and what paperwork needs to be completed.

In order to remain in control of the situation, it is critical for all head coaches to have an athlete's Emergency Contact Information Card at every practice and game. This is especially critical if an athlete is unconscious and unable to tell the coach who to contact or the contact person's phone

number. Coaches should also have with them a Health History Form which details an athlete's pre-existing condition, medical issues, and/or allergies.

When a serious injury does occur, it is the coach's responsibility to lead and direct the response effort.

Each emergency plan should follow the sequence below:

1. Check the athlete's level of consciousness.
2. Send a contact person to call 911 and the athlete's parents. This can be an assistant coach or parent.
3. Send someone to wait for the rescue team and direct them to the injured athlete.
4. Assess the injury and administer first aid care or CPR if necessary.
5. Assist emergency medical personnel in preparing the athlete for transportation to a medical facility.
6. Appoint someone to go with the athlete if the parents are not available. This person should be calm, responsible, and familiar with the athlete. Assistant coaches or parents are best for the job.
7. Immediately report the injury and incident to the school principal, who in turn reports to the Archdiocese.

CONCUSSIONS

A concussion is a complex injury that causes a disturbance in brain function. It usually starts with a blow to the head, face or neck, and is often associated with temporarily losing consciousness. However, a concussion can also occur when an area of the head or upper body moves rapidly or violently. While some concussions can cause a loss of consciousness, most do not. A child may have a concussion and not realize it because they did not lose consciousness.

However, it is important to understand that a blackout is only one possible symptom. When an athlete suffers concussion, the brain suddenly shifts or shakes inside the skull and can knock against the skull's bony surface. If left untreated, a concussion can lead to a slow brain bleed.

The CDC has additional information available regarding concussions through the [HEADS UP](#) campaign. There are various materials available to help coaches, parents and athletes further understand and respond appropriately to concussions. Further information on IDPH's policies can be found [here](#).

Symptoms

Concussion symptoms may be mild, moderate, or severe. Common mild concussion symptoms can include headache or migraine, temporary memory loss, and nausea. Moderate to severe concussion symptoms can include dizziness, dilation of pupils, migraine, convulsions, and temporary changes in vision, smell, and taste. A person may also lose consciousness.

The concussion symptoms outlined below are from the CDC's website. They contain concussion symptoms that can be observed by coaches, and symptoms that may be reported by students.

Concussion Signs Observed

- Can't recall events prior to or after a hit or fall
- Appears dazed or stunned
- Forgets an instruction, is confused about an assignment or position, or is unsure of the game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes

Concussion Symptoms Reported

- Headache or "pressure" in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness, or double or blurry vision
- Bothered by light or noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
- Confusion, or concentration or memory problems
- Just not "feeling right," or "feeling down"

Symptoms may be immediate, or they may not show up for a few hours or days. Continuing to check on a child who sustained a head injury for a concussion in the upcoming days is best practice. If an athlete exhibits any concussion symptoms, call their parents/guardians immediately. They need to be seen by a physician in order to return to play.

No players with even the MILDEST concussion symptoms should return to a game or practice. They should be assessed by a physician immediately. If symptoms do not appear until several hours after the game, the child should still seek medical assessment.

Return to Sport

Anyone who has suffered a concussion needs to rest their brain until all the symptoms are gone. This means they should be able to read, do math and think at their usual pace with no headaches, fatigue or other symptoms. This can mean a few days resting at home, not doing schoolwork and no exercise.

There is no timetable chart to follow; each child needs a treatment program tailored to their symptoms and circumstances. Younger children may take longer to recover than adults and it is not unusual for children to be out of sports for a month after suffering a concussion. If a player suffers a concussion, they are more likely to sustain future concussions. Researchers believe the younger the child, the more vulnerable the brain may be to these repeated concussions.

Second Impact Syndrome:

If someone with a concussion too hastily returns to contact sports or activities, a second concussion can result in Second Impact Syndrome — a potentially fatal condition. Second Impact Syndrome is when another blow to the head (even a minor one) results in the brain losing its ability to control its own blood flow, which increases pressure in the head and can lead to

death, usually within 2 – 5 minutes. Second Impact Syndrome most often affects young athletes (in junior and senior high school), but any athlete who returns to a sport too soon is at risk.

Under no circumstances can an athlete return to action without clearance from a medical professional. A signed [Return to Play Form](#) must also be obtained from the athlete's parents or guardians in addition to medical clearance.

Administering First-Aid for Head & Spine Injuries:

The first step in administering first aid to an athlete suffering from head trauma is to **send for medical assistance**, regardless of whether the athlete is conscious or not. Stabilize the head and neck of the athlete, monitor the ABC's (airway, breathing, circulation – particularly in an unconscious athlete), and provide rescue breathing and CPR if necessary. In many cases, because of their structural and functional interconnections, an injury to the head will cause damage to some portion of the spine, and vice versa. Regardless of the type and site of the injury, the initial evaluation of a suspected spinal injury should be conducted in the same manner. In addition, because it is difficult to differentiate between a sprain, fracture, contusion, and strain, initial treatment should be the same for all.

Never move the athlete during the evaluation unless it is impossible to check the ABCs or unless the athlete is in danger of further injury. If an athlete walks off the playing area and complains of pain anywhere along the spine, coaches should perform the evaluation with the athlete in the position in which they initially see him or her. For example, a standing athlete should remain standing. Also, if an athlete is wearing a helmet, leave it on. Removing it can cause further harm. If an athlete suffers a serious head or spine injury, call for help, immediately stabilize the head and spine, check the ABCs, and treat the athlete for shock and other injuries as necessary.

CITY OF CHICAGO ORDINANCE CONCERNING HEALTH CARE OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

Athletes who show symptoms of a concussion cannot under any circumstances return to action without the permission of a medical professional. This is non-negotiable. Schools that do not comply with this measure run the risk of being billed by the City of Chicago for their otherwise free water and sewer services.

The following Ordinance was passed on 11/10/2010 by the City of Chicago to amend Title 7 of the Municipal Code by the addition of new chapter 7-22 concerning healthcare of student athletes. All principals, athletic directors, and athletic coaches should be aware of this ordinance.

WHEREAS, concussions are one of the most commonly reported injuries in children and adolescents participating in sports and recreational activities;

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that as many as three million nine hundred thousand sports-related and recreation-related concussions occur in the United States each year; and

WHEREAS, the risk of catastrophic injuries or death are significant when a concussion or head injury is not properly evaluated and managed; and

WHEREAS, continuing to play with a concussion or symptoms of head injury leaves a young athlete especially vulnerable to greater injury and even death; and

WHEREAS, research indicates that young, developing brains take longer to heal, requiring that treatment must be tailored to specific ages; and

WHEREAS, cognitive exertion, such as going to school, can delay recovery just as physical exertion can; NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF CHICAGO:

SECTION 1. Title 7 of the Municipal Code of Chicago is hereby amended by adding a new Chapter 7-22, as follows:

7-22-010. The provisions of this chapter shall be applicable to any elementary, middle, or secondary school in the City of Chicago, public or private, which sponsors athletic activities for its students, and, by order of City Council, is exempt from City water or sewer charges.

7-22-020. A student athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion, including loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, problems with immediate recall, disorientation as to time, place or person, fatigue, blurred vision, or balance problems, shall be immediately removed from the contest. If no health care professionals are immediately available and an injured student athlete has any of the described signs, symptoms,

or behaviors, he or she shall be promptly taken to a facility for appropriate medical care. For the purpose of this Chapter, “health care professionals” shall be defined as “physicians licensed to practice medicine in all its branches in Illinois and certified athletic trainers.”

7-22-030. A student athlete who has been removed from play may not return to play until the athlete is evaluated by a healthcare professional trained in the evaluation and management of concussion and receives written medical authorization to return to play from such health care professional.

7-22-040. Upon proof of a violation of Section 7-22-020 or 7-22-030 by any school exempted from City water or sewer charges, through its responsible agents, including coaches, athletic directors, or any other similar personnel, such exemption shall be revoked, and such school shall become liable for all such charges from and after the date of the injury, or the return of the student to play without written authorization by a healthcare professional. n 2: This ordinance shall be in full force and effect on and after its passage and due publication.

RESPONSIBILITIES & EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

The expectations and responsibilities of the student athlete must be clearly stated and published before inviting students to make a decision to participate in the interscholastic athletic program. These expectations are to be a part of the school handbook and the athletic handbook.

It is important for the principal, athletic director, and/or the athletic board/committee to establish criteria for eligibility. These criteria could include, but are certainly not limited to, the following provisions:

- Submitting all documentation within an established timeline
- Meeting basic academic requirements
- Turning in all necessary permission forms
- Signing acknowledgments of expectations of behavior, effort and attitude
- Signing an agreement of support of the guidelines and policies of the athletic program
- Undergoing a physical examination or present a letter attesting to the athlete's physical fitness.
- Meeting age and weight requirements of league/ conference regulations
- Paying all required fees

Below is a list of major responsibilities and behaviors that all student-athletes **MUST** adhere to.

Return all uniforms and/or borrowed equipment by the specified dates for each sport.

The athlete is responsible for the uniform issued. If it is lost, stolen or damaged, an appropriate assessment can be made to replace the uniform. It is a good idea to publish the cost of uniform replacement. At the end of the season, uniforms should be returned in clean, reusable condition.

Maintain a solid academic and behavioral record in and out of season.

Participating in an interscholastic athletic program is a privilege, not a right. Athletes must be held to personal, academic and behavior standards. Students who choose to participate in the school's athletic program are representing their school and parish at all times. They must act in a manner that reflects favorably upon the school and on themselves. This expectation is not limited to the sports arena, but should also be evident at school, in the community, and at other schools before, during, and after the games.

Attend school the day of a game and/or practice.

An athlete who was absent from school due to illness is not allowed to attend practice or play in a game on that given day. Students should attend more than half of the school day in order to attend an after school game or practice. Absence from school on a Friday should not affect Saturday and Sunday participation if the athlete has recovered sufficiently to play.

Attend and be on time for regularly scheduled practices.

Athletes are expected to be present and on time for all practices and games. Not attending practices affects the entire team and detracts from the sense of teamwork that the coaches are striving to achieve. "Excused" or "unexcused" absences should be defined. Expectations and procedures for notification in the event that the student is unable to attend practices/games should be clearly outlined. The consequences of missing practices and games or of excessive absences should also be clear to parents and student-athletes.

Display Respect for Teammates, Opponents, Coaches, & Officials

Student-athletes must be respectful at all times towards their teammates, opponents, coaches, and officials. All student-athletes must also respect the spectators and fans. Athletes are expected to show good sportsmanship, play by the rules, and gracefully handle winning and losing. Losing self-control, using inappropriate gestures, “trash talking,” verbalizing foul or abusive language, arguing a referee’s call or a coach’s decision, or displaying other signs of disrespect should be reasons for immediate disciplinary action. These expectations are also detailed in the Student-Athlete Code of Ethics below.

Adhere to a Student-Athlete Code of Ethics:

All student-athletes are expected to exhibit the following behaviors:

- Play the game for the game’s sake.
- Be generous in winning and graceful in losing.
- Display good sportsmanship and respect towards all opponents.
- Work for the good of the team
- Accept the decisions of the officials gracefully.
- Conduct yourself at all times with honor and dignity. This includes during and after school, games, practices, and trips to other schools and facilities.
- Recognize, applaud, and encourage the efforts of your teammates and opponents.
- Show respect for your coaches.
- Show respect towards fans and personnel from other schools.

PROBATION, SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION FROM THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

Consequences of disrespectful behavior can include a reduction in playing time or even suspension or expulsion from the team. School policy should govern all such incidents, and these consequences must be enforced by the administrations and the faculty.

Student-athletes may be suspended from practicing with the team and/or participating in interscholastic competition for the following behaviors:

- Inappropriate language, as deemed by the coach, officials, or school administration.
- Physical or emotional abuse of teammates, opposing players, coaches, spectators, or officials.
- Unsportsmanlike behavior before, during, or after a contest
- Destruction of school facilities and equipment
- Disrespect toward any coach or official in games or practices
- Lack of academic performance, effort, and/or positive behavior in the classroom
- Several “Code of Ethics” violations

School policies and athletic policies should define what constitutes PROBATION (active participation and reasonable improvement), SUSPENSION (no participation for a given amount of time) and the finality of TERMINATION. Athletes should be given written notification and the opportunity “to be heard” if there is the possibility of suspension from the program for an extended period of time or if the possibility of dismissal from the program exists. Athletic

Directors or Athletic Boards/Committees may establish a grievance committee to offer advice on discipline issues or other issues of a serious nature. The pastor, principal, a head coach, the athletic director, an athletic board/committee representative or a school board member may be considered for membership on this committee. Final decisions, however, rest with the pastor and/or principal.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

A student-athlete may participate in school related athletic programs if he/she:

- Is a fully enrolled student.
- Is exhibiting academic progress as determined by the classroom teacher(s)
- Is displaying positive social behavior as determined by the classroom teacher(s)
- Has a current athletic physical on file with the Director of Athletics (Athletic Physicals are valid for one year)
- Has a current Child/Minor Acknowledgement Form on file with the Director of Athletics
- Attends school the day of a game and/or practice

PERSONAL PROPERTY SEARCHES

An athlete may be asked to submit to a search of gym bag, uniform or other athletic gear when the athletic director, the coach, or another school official suspects that the student possesses drugs, weapons, or anything that might be detrimental to the health and safety of the student or of the team.

STUDENT ATHLETE CODE OF CONDUCT

The purpose of the following Student Athlete Code of Conduct is to help define appropriate actions and behaviors that support the mission of the athletic program. All participating student athletes should read, understand, and sign this form prior to participation.

School Name: _____

School Year: _____

Any student athlete who does not follow the guidelines below may be suspended or expelled from the athletic program.

As a student-athlete, I therefore agree to the following:

1. I will play the game for the game's sake.
2. I will be generous in winning and graceful in losing.
3. I will display good sportsmanship and respect towards all opponents.
4. I will work for the good of the team.
5. I will accept the decisions of the officials gracefully.
6. I will conduct myself with honor and dignity. This includes during and after school, games, practices, and trips to other schools and facilities.
7. I will recognize, applaud, and encourage the efforts of my teammates and opponents.
8. I will show respect for my coaches.
9. I will show respect towards fans and personnel from other schools.

Athlete's Name

Athlete's Signature

Date

PARENTS/ GUARDIANS: EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Parental support is valued and encouraged. Parents/guardians and spectators must conduct themselves in an appropriate manner and act as positive role models for all participants. The essential elements of character building and ethics in sports are embodied in the concept of sportsmanship and six core principles: **trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and good citizenship.**

The highest potential of sports is achieved when parents reflect these core principles, therefore, it is critical for parents/guardians to display the following behaviors:

1. Trust in their child's ability to have fun as well as to perform and achieve excellence on their own.
2. Help their child to learn the right lessons from winning and losing and from individual accomplishments and mistakes.
3. Respect their child's coaches, teammates and fellow parents as well as the players, parents, and coaches from opposing teams.
4. Give only encouragement and applaud positive accomplishments, whether for their child, his/her teammates, their opponents or the officials.
5. Show respect towards all officials and their decisions.
6. Never coach their child or other players during games and practices, unless they are one of the official coaches of the team.

It is reasonable to expect parents/guardians to attend a mandatory pre-season orientation session as a means of fostering continuity and consistency between parents, administrators, coaches, and student-athletes. Play Like a Champion Today offers a quality pre-season parent orientation program called Parent Like a Champion. More information can be found at playlikeachampion.org/parents.

The mission/philosophy statements of the athletic program should be communicated to the parents as well as all expectations of their child's participation in the program.

Below is a detailed list of major responsibilities and behaviors that all parents/guardians are expected adhere to:

Commit to the Demands of the Sport

It is important for parents/guardians to understand that participation in an interscholastic athletic program is a significant commitment. This commitment includes adhering to all school and league policies, attending every game at all locations at which their team is scheduled to play, driving student athletes to "away games" or tournaments that are a good distance from the school, and participating in tournaments during the holidays. If parents/ guardians cannot make such a commitment, they should be encouraged to not enroll their child in the sports program.

Act in Accordance with Catholic Values

Parents/guardians are expected to support and encourage their child's efforts. All comments from the stands should be supportive of the team's efforts. No negative comments and criticisms

should ever be directed towards student-athletes. Public criticisms directed towards the coaches, the athletic director, and the school administration are unacceptable. In addition, it is expected that parents/guardians act as role models for their children by putting wins and losses in their proper perspective.

Let the Coaches Coach and the Referees Ref

Parents/guardians should make no attempt to instruct players or the team from the stands. In addition, questioning, criticizing, or berating the coach and/or the referees does not set a good example for the young athletes involved in the contest. It is up to the Athletic Director and/or the School Administration to help parents/guardians realize that they will be asked to leave a game if they are not able to maintain a standard of acceptable behavior.

Volunteer

Parents/guardians may be expected to contribute their time and service in support of the team and the interscholastic athletic program. A viable volunteer program is dependent upon everyone's willingness to maintain a high level of quality and success. Parents/guardians may be asked to assist as scorekeepers, timekeepers, ticket or money takers, refreshment sellers, crowd control monitors, or to help with set-up or clean-up. When appropriate, parents/guardians may be asked to serve as team liaisons and assist with phone calls or provide a schedule to see that all tasks are filled and rotated in an equitable manner. In addition, parents/guardians may also be asked to help with and support fundraising. Any expectation that is mandatory must be clearly stated before the season begins.

Provide Transportation to and from Games

In most cases, parents/guardians are expected to provide transportation for their children to and from games and practices. Coaches are not covered with liability insurance for chauffeur service. Therefore, they are not allowed to transport athletes at any time.

Engage in Respectful Communication

Parents/guardians should communicate directly with the coach, athletic director, and/or the athletic board/committee on matters of concern. They must do so respectfully, at appropriate times, and not immediately before, during, or after a game. While it is a given that parents/guardians act as advocates for their own child, it is important for parents/guardians to understand that coaches, athletic directors, and school administrators make decisions that benefit the group, not the individual. Under no circumstances should parents/guardians be verbally abusive towards coaches, athletic directors, and school administrators.

Support the Program

Under no circumstances may parents of student-athletes publicly criticize school coaches, the athletic director and/or the athletic board. All matters of concern regarding any aspect of the athletic program must be expressed directly to the coach and/or athletic director/athletic committee.

Pay all Necessary Fees and be in Good Financial Standing with the School

Parents/guardians may be asked to make the school fees and tuition account current as a condition of student participation in the athletic program.

It is important for parents/guardians to realize the amount of time and effort it takes to run effective and efficient interscholastic athletic programs. The level of commitment that coaches, athletic directors, and school administrators put forth demands the respect of all parents involved.

Parents/guardians who cannot adhere to a reasonable level of respectful behavior and expectations should have their privileges of attending games revoked. In addition, under no circumstance should parents/ guardians sit in and around the bench area or speak with their child during games unless they are asked to serve as an official volunteer coach.

It is recommended that coaches have parents sign a code of conduct at their orientation meeting or before the first game to ensure parents understand expectations and for their behavior. Some example parent materials are below.

10 COMMANDMENTS FOR SPORT PARENTS

(Source: Parent Like a Champion)

On the way to the event...

- 1. Ask your child to set goals for the game: a physical goal, a mental goal and a sportsmanship goal.*
- 2. Remind your child (and yourself) to have fun.*
- 3. Say a prayer with your child thanking God for the opportunity to play.*

At the event...

- 4. Be positive with all players, opponents, fans, coaches and officials.*
- 5. Remain calm and in control of your words and actions.*
- 6. Take a deep breath and/or remove yourself from the environment if you grow angry.*
- 7. Applaud good play from both teams.*

On the way home...

- 8. Ask your child, "How do you think the game went?"*
- 9. Point out signs of sportsmanship shown in the game.*
- 10. Express your love for your child regardless of the outcome of the game.*

PARENT/GUARDIAN CODE OF CONDUCT (Source: *Play Like a Champion Today!*)

As sport seasons kick off at the beginning of the school year, it is important for parents to remember a holistic approach to helping their children develop into Champions both on and off the field. Today, we present a Sport Parent Code of Conduct that can serve as a guide for parents. Read through this Code carefully and embrace it personally. Then, work as a member of your school community to help coaches and other parents to abide by it.

- I will be positive and support my child in his/her individual sport journey.
- I will not force my child to play sports.
- I will remember that sports are games meant to be played by and for the kids.
- I will accept that my child plays sports for his/her enjoyment, not for mine.
- I will be realistic in my expectations for my child in sports.
- I will encourage my child in the GROW model of developing as an athlete
- I will help him/her to set goals.
- I will help him/her foster positive relationships on her team.
- I will ensure that he/she has an opportunity to make his/her own decisions in athletics.
- I will guide him/her in winning and losing gracefully.
- I will help my child grow with the cardinal virtues through sports (Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance).
- I will live by the cardinal virtues in my own behavior/attitude at sporting events.
- I will help my child feel like a Champion by offering fair praise and constructive feedback.
- I will support a nurturing sideline environment.
- I will applaud good play, by both my child's team and opponents.
- I will respect the game officials and their decisions, understanding their task is challenging.
- I will respect and show courtesy to my child's coaches at all times.
- I will commit to ensuring my child's coach follows the standards of Christian coaching and acts as a youth minister for my child in his/her sporting experience.

Committing to becoming a Champion is not just for our kids – Parents too can be Champions in their approach to youth sport.

Play and Parent Like A Champion Today!

Athlete's Name

Parent Name (Print)

Parent's Signature

Date

TRAINING RESOURCES FOR COACHES

The training resources referenced throughout this handbook have been curated here for ease of sharing with school staff and volunteers.

Play Like a Champion Today

<https://www.playlikeachampion.org/>

Archdiocese of Chicago Safe Environment Training

<https://protect.archchicago.org/compliance-resources/safe-environment-office>

American Red Cross (CPR & First Aid)

<https://www.redcross.org/>

ASEP

American Sports Education Program

www.asep.com

Center for Disease Control

HEADS UP – Concussion Protocol Training

<https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/youthsports/training/index.html>

NAYS

National Alliance for Youth Sports

<https://www.nays.org/>

NAYSI

North American Youth Sports Institute

www.naysi.com

SHAPE America

Society of Health and Physical Educators

<https://www.shapeamerica.org/>

VIRTUE = STRENGTH SPORTS LEADER

<https://virtuestrength.org/>

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Heads Up | HEADS UP | CDC Injury Center. (2023). www.cdc.gov/headsup/index.html

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APPENDIX

TACKLE FOOTBALL GUIDELINES

According to the National Youth Safety Foundation, collision sports like ice hockey and tackle football are not recommended until age ten. But even then, the different levels of performance within a given age group result more from differences in physical maturity rather than differences in pure skill. With that being said, classification solely based on chronological age is not always the safest way to differentiate levels of competition when building a youth football program. Rather than grouping student athletes by age, in many cases it may be best to use physical maturity assessments as a basis for matching athletes for football. Youth who are not sufficiently mature should be advised to go into one of the many sports in which there is less risk for injury.

Mandatory pre-participation physical exams are one of the most critical aspects of injury prevention in youth sports programs, especially contact sports such as football. The purpose of the exam is to:

1. detect conditions which could make football playing (or any other sport for that matter) life threatening or disabling and
2. detect medical or musculoskeletal conditions that could result in injury or illness during practice or competition.

It is recommended that the performance of this pre-participation physical exam take place six weeks prior to preseason practice, allowing adequate time for the correction of identifiable problems such as use of specific strengthening or flexibility exercises which are highly critical for contact sports such as football.

The use of proper equipment is of utmost importance. Helmets must be fitted by a knowledgeable person experienced in this process. All equipment—helmets, shoulder pads in particular—should be constantly inspected for cracks, frayed strings or straps, loose rivets, and other possible failures.

The coach has the ultimate responsibility for the safety of the athletes. It is the coach's responsibility to teach safety principles to the athletes; to see that athletes are properly conditioned; to require a proper warm-up; to teach appropriate techniques; to avoid unsafe environmental situations such as practicing on dangerous field conditions or during inclement weather; and to prevent players from competing beyond their fatigue level, especially in hot conditions.

It is recommended that coaches teach athletes information on safety by giving the players checklists, lectures, and showing training films. Communication on safety should be documented, reminding coaches, administrators, and officials that safety instruction is a priority. These same safety principles should also be presented to parents so they can reinforce the message.

Practice:

Pre-season practices are the most injury prone times. Controlled activities should be emphasized at this time, and coaches should be particularly vigilant about technique. Because a significant percent of injuries occur during contact practice drills, the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation recommends that a reduction in the amount of contact practices should be considered. Such a reduction is certainly feasible as the season progresses, after athletes are beginning to grasp appropriate technique for blocking and tackling.

In addition, the National Athletic Trainers Association recommends a minimum of fifteen minutes of warm-up before any game or practice and a cool down period afterward. Athletes should also warm up at least five minutes during any prolonged breaks in activity (half time, etc.).

Youth football organizations with younger participants should develop a preseason acclimatization plan that has a greater emphasis on allowing athletes to safely learn the game and adjust to the demands of the sport. **YOUTH LEAGUE PLAYERS SHOULD NOT PRACTICE MORE THAN FOUR CONSECUTIVE DAYS.**

- A suggestive model for youth league players is outlined by the following program parameters for preseason practice:
- 8-10 acclimatization episodes with 30-45 minutes of conditioning, at a rate of one per day or one every other day
- No one practice session should last more than two hours (including warm-up, conditioning, instruction, breaks, and cool-down)
- Practices are limited to one session per day and 8 hours total in a week.
- First Week (up to 8 hours total): Shorts, shirts, and helmet only, with an emphasis on heat acclimatization and basic skills
- Second Week (up to 8 hours total): First 5 hours in helmet and shoulder pads, and the remaining 3 hours in full pads, without live contact, limited contact with blocking dummies and sleds permitted after total of 12 hours of practice – weeks one and two combined)
- Third Week (up to 8 hours total): Full pads with live contact permitted.
- Regular Season Practices: Up to 6 hours per week, with no practice session lasting longer than 2 hours (including warm-up, conditioning, instruction, breaks, and cool-down)

Training Safety in the Heat

Youth football coaches should adopt strategies to acclimatize players to perform in the heat, along with a fluid replacement in anticipation of young players who begin practice already dehydrated. Practices should be modified to reduce intensity, duration, and equipment depending on the environmental heat stress. The team support staff must closely monitor **ALL PLAYERS**, instead of only focusing on those with an excessive body mass index, for signs and symptoms of developing heat related injury during football practices and games.

Measures to help players safely acclimatize during pre-season and reduce the risk for heat injury during all practices include:

Handbook for Athletic Directors in Catholic Elementary Schools

- Allow easy access to fluids. Players must have unlimited privileges to adequate drinking water and/or other beverages that are chilled, flavored and contain sodium that help promote fluid intake during and after training.
- Regular breaks should be scheduled to limit excessive physical activity and allow fluid replacement.
- Utilize the shade whenever possible during rest breaks.
- Schedule a pre-season for at least two weeks, with gradual and increasing exposure to intensity, duration, and protective equipment.
- Use the “Buddy System” to monitor players (two players assigned to keep an eye on each other)

Games:

Maximum of one game per week with a minimum of nine games plus playoffs

CHEERLEADING GUIDELINES

As with any sport, safety should be of utmost concern for all participants. As with most sports, cheerleading inherently carries some unavoidable risks. Proper information and knowledge can possibly reduce the severity and frequency of the injuries.

Current research has indicated the following causes for sport related injuries:

- » Lack of proper conditioning; not being physically prepared
- » Lack of training for coaches, instructors, and/or advisors in the rules and procedures for the sport
- » Poor decision making by coaches, instructors, advisors, and participants.
- » Inadequate supervision
- » Inadequate equipment and facilities (lack of mats, practice area free of obstructions, etc.)
- » Poor nutrition and lack of hydration
- » Improper application of the rules of progression

As with all sports, cheerleading coaches must place a premium on conditioning and physical preparation. A significant portion of practice times should be dedicated towards exercises that increase flexibility and strengthen the abdomen, lower back, quadriceps, and upper body (arms and shoulders). The intensity of practices should increase gradually, as should the difficulty of stunts, tumbling and other sport specific skills.

It is recommended that all cheerleading coaches obtain proper training and education in the rules and techniques of the sport. It is also recommended that coaches become certified in first aid and CPR. All

coaches should ensure that proper safety measures are implemented at all times, to decrease the probability of injuries to the athletes. No other single factor affects a program more than the knowledge of coaches.

It is recommended that all cheerleading coaches obtain proper training and education in the rules and techniques of the sport. It is also recommended that coaches become certified in first aid and CPR. All coaches should ensure that proper safety measures are implemented at all times, to decrease the probability of injuries to the athletes. No other single factor affects a program more than the knowledge of coaches.

In order to help prevent injuries to cheerleaders, it is highly encouraged that school administrators and athletic directors implement the following safety guidelines for all coaches and student-athletes as outlined in the NFHS Spirit Rule Book. These rules will help to minimize risk for the participants. This rule book is published, reviewed and revised annually by the National Federation for High School Associations (NFHS), and it serves as the main source for determining what's legal and/or illegal in the sport of cheerleading. The Spirit Rules book is available for purchase at www.nfhs.org.

Since there have been no rules other than those written specifically for high school teams, many elementary, middle, and junior high schools and state associations have directed their cheerleading teams to follow high school rules. As a result, many in the cheer industry recently noticed that more teams at the elementary and middle school level were performing advanced skills for which they were not prepared. However, beginning in 2010, the American Association

of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA) introduced the first set of cheerleading rules developed specifically for elementary, middle, and junior high school squads with the goal in mind of minimizing the risk of cheerleading related injuries.

While it is expected that schools follow the rules as outlined by the [NFHS](#) and [USA Cheer](#), it is also expected that schools follow the limitations outlined by the [Illinois Elementary School Association](#).

A copy of the USA Cheer Cheerleading Safety Manual can be ordered at <https://usacheer.org/safety/usa-cheer-cheerleading-safety-manual>.

According to the IESA, **basket tosses, elevator tosses, and similar multi-based tosses are prohibited**. While there are certainly teams at this age level that can safely perform these skills, the rules are not written for the elite athletes, just as they are not written for the beginning athletes. These revised rules for elementary, middle school, and junior high teams are written for school teams, not all star or youth recreational programs. There must be a difference in focus of school cheerleading, which results from a limit on talent pool from which teams are selected, and a certain level of risk acceptance on the part of school administrators.

In order to prevent cheerleading injuries, it is highly encouraged that school administrators and athletic directors implement the following safety guidelines for their coaches and student-athletes:

- Coaches must maintain a current certification in cheerleading safety and stay updated on the latest safety guidelines and techniques.
- Coaches should design practice plans that include proper warm-up, conditioning exercises, skill progressions, and cool-down routines.
- Coaches must emphasize proper technique and ensure athletes have mastered fundamental skills before advancing to more complex maneuvers.
- Coaches should enforce rules and guidelines regarding safety, including proper attire, spotting techniques, and appropriate equipment usage.
- Coaches must have a well-prepared emergency action plan and be trained in first aid, CPR, and concussion protocols.
- Coaches should ensure that practice and performance areas are free from hazards, with appropriate mats and padding in place.
- Coaches should participate in ongoing professional development opportunities related to cheerleading safety to stay up to date with the latest trends and recommendations.
- Coaches should have a response plan in place in case of injury or emergencies.