

PLAYERS HEALTH ABUSE PREVENTION TRAINING

PARENT/GUARDIAN HANDBOOK



INTRODUCTION

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers,

At Players Health, our mission is to create the safest and most accessible environments possible for athletes to play the sports they love. As a key part of fulfilling this mission, we are dedicated to creating training and resources for parents, athletes, coaches, and sports organizations to eliminate abuse in sports.

You are most likely receiving this handbook because your athlete participates in a program that is committed to the safety of its participants and is utilizing services, training, and resources provided by Players Health to make your child's sports experience the best it can be.

This guidebook is derived from the content we created for the Players Health Abuse Prevention Training for Coaches online course. Parents are key partners with coaches and organization leaders in supporting a safe experience for all athletes. Training coaches is even more impactful when parents are also given the tools they need to identify signs of abuse and prevent incidents before they occur. We hope this guidebook serves that purpose.

At Players Health, we too are athletes, coaches, and parents, so we understand how deeply invested you are in making sure your child has a safe and meaningful sports experience. By providing you with this resource we hope to equip you with useful information and practical tools that can help prevent abuse before it happens.

Sincerely,

The Players Health Team

June 2022





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sexual Abuse-Grooming	4
Responding To Grooming	5
Setting Boundaries	6
Hazing	9
Cyberbullying	10
Creating A Positive Sport Experience For Your Athlete	11

SEXUAL ABUSE: GROOMING

WHAT IS GROOMING?

Grooming is when someone builds a trusting relationship and an emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate them, with the intention of sexual abuse.

90% of victims of child sexual abuse know their abuser personally.

Predators are subtle, and since they rely on manipulating their victims into maintaining confidentiality and silence, it is easy to overlook grooming behavior. Knowing the potential signs of grooming or “red flags” can keep these behaviors from being overlooked.

It is important to be cautious. Some of these examples by themselves may not always suggest grooming is occurring, but the more parents, guardians, and coaches are aware of what to look for, the easier it will be to spot abuse before it happens.

→ Red Flags to look for:

- An adult striking up a friendship with a minor athlete outside of team activities using individual phone calls, text messages, or seemingly accidental meetings.
- Making the athlete feel special by spending more time with them compared to others on the team or listening to personal stories or social gossip.
- Giving the athlete special attention. For example: small gifts or sending personal text messages singling out that athlete.
- Demeaning people the athlete may depend on for support including friends, significant others, or parents who “don’t understand them.”
- Stopping the athlete or discouraging them from accessing significant others for friendship or support.
- Gradually intruding into physical boundaries, often starting with small physical touch.
- Invoking guilt and cooperation and/or discrediting the athlete as a way to maintain secrecy. **For example: “I’ve given you more playing time, you owe me.” or “Nobody will believe you if you tell.”**

For a sexual offender to be successful in a youth-serving organization, that person is depending on us to believe myths around child abuse. The myth that victims tell, the myth that you can recognize a sexual predator by the way they look, the myth that you would never hire a sexual predator because you are friends with them and you know their history and they’ve worked in other organizations, the myth that a background check would stop a sexual predator.”

MICHELLE PETERSON

President of Michelle Peterson Consulting, former social worker investigating crimes against children

SEXUAL ABUSE: GROOMING

The grooming pattern of predators has emerged over years of collecting data on abuse incidences. **The pattern is as follows:**

- Target a potentially vulnerable athlete.
- Build trust and friendship with the athlete in a different way than with the rest of the athletes on the team.
- Establish isolation, loyalty, and control over the athlete.

RESPONDING TO GROOMING

Grooming is never the athlete's fault, or something an athlete should be ashamed about telling others.

If a child ever does tell you that they've been abused by someone, remain as calm as possible.

Showing a large reaction or intense emotion can scare the child back into silence or make them wish they hadn't disclosed the incident to you. Simply let them know that you hear them, and you believe them. Take the information and report it to the appropriate authorities according to your state and your organization's athlete safety policy.

Make sure your children know if something another adult does or says to them makes them feel uncomfortable, they should tell you. Be clear that you will never blame them or be upset with them for anything they disclose.

As parents, guardians, and coaches, it is our job to keep kids safe by setting boundaries that are appropriate for their age and the activities they participate in. There is more on boundaries later in this guide.



SETTING BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are the guardrails that prevent predators from being able to operate in an abusive way.

For parents and guardians, knowledge is power.

Knowing what boundaries should be in place based on best practices in abuse prevention and equipping your athlete to know what those boundaries are through open, honest discussions is the best way to ensure there is no room for abuse in your child's sport experience.

You should also ask your program for a copy of their athlete safety policy which outlines what prohibited conduct is in your organization so you can be a part of holding everyone accountable for appropriate behavior.

BOUNDARIES: COMMUNICATIONS

A child should never receive any electronic message individually from someone who isn't their guardian. This includes coaches. All texts, calls, emails, and messages on any platform should be sent to the entire team.

If a coach needs to reach an athlete individually, you should be copied on the message.

Because social media platforms have direct messaging features that athletes and coaches should not be communicating on, it is recommended to not allow your child to have any social media connections with their coaches.

Make sure your child knows that if they do receive a message individually from a coach, they should not respond and they should notify you immediately.

If this does happen, reach out directly to the coach and let them know you need to be copied on all electronic communication with your child.



SETTING BOUNDARIES

BOUNDARIES: PRACTICES AND TRAINING SESSIONS

A phrase all parents should keep in mind when thinking about one-on-one interactions between an adult and minor athlete is that it should always be observable and interruptible.

This means that there is at least another adult who can easily observe the interaction and is within a distance where they could interrupt the interaction. You should let your athlete know that this should always be the case.

Any individual training or coaching session between an athlete and a coach should be open door and have either a parent/guardian or another coach present.

BOUNDARIES: LOCKER ROOMS

Ideally, athletes arrive at their activities properly dressed, but sometimes needing to change is unavoidable. Teach your athlete to always look for appropriate changing places. No matter what age your child is, you should always have them change in a private area.

If changing areas are available and not being monitored, you should walk with your child to any locker room or bathroom to ensure they can privately and safely change.

Make sure your athlete knows they should always change in the locker rooms or designated private areas before and/or after the training session if changing is necessary.

If your athlete is involved in a sport where team locker rooms are used, there should be policies banning the use of phones in order to prevent pictures from being taken and anything else that could contribute to bullying or hazing.

BOUNDARIES: MEDICAL OR ATHLETIC TRAINING SERVICES

It is your right as a parent or guardian to observe any medical or athletic treatment your child may need.

In many organizations, the coach may also serve as an athletic trainer for their team. Coaches should make you aware of what treatments your athlete is receiving.

Coaches are to ensure athletes are being treated by athletic trainers with two adults present and in an open location. If the coach or a second adult cannot be present, it is best if the coach finds you as the athlete's parent/guardian and asks you to be present for the treatment. In addition to being supervised, your child should always remain as fully clothed as possible.

It is completely OK to respectfully ask questions while the treatment is underway to ensure you know what is being done to address an injury or return to play.

Your child should never be left alone in these situations. Part of the organization's pre-season paperwork should include obtaining parent/guardian permission for athletes to be treated by athletic trainers where applicable.

SETTING BOUNDARIES

BOUNDARIES: TRAVEL

When possible, you should transport your own children to any sporting event. In the event you cannot, it should fall to another adult you know well and trust, and at least one other athlete or adult should accompany the child on that trip.

Note: *Your program should have a policy that requires written consent from you for your child to ride in a vehicle with someone other than yourself. This applies to travel and rides to games and practices.*

Athletes should never stay in a hotel room with another adult that is not their parent or guardian.

No meetings should occur in any hotel room. If your child's coach schedules a meeting in his or her room, let them know that all meetings should be in open locations like a hotel lobby, on the field, at a restaurant, etc.

Parents and guardians should always receive a detailed itinerary of where their children will be the entire time they are traveling with their team, regardless of if they are present or not.

Parents should check in with their children regularly if they are not able to be there.

If parents or guardians can be at the event, they should stay in the team-designated hotel.

BOUNDARIES SUMMARY

One-on-one interactions between adults and minors should be observable and interruptible.

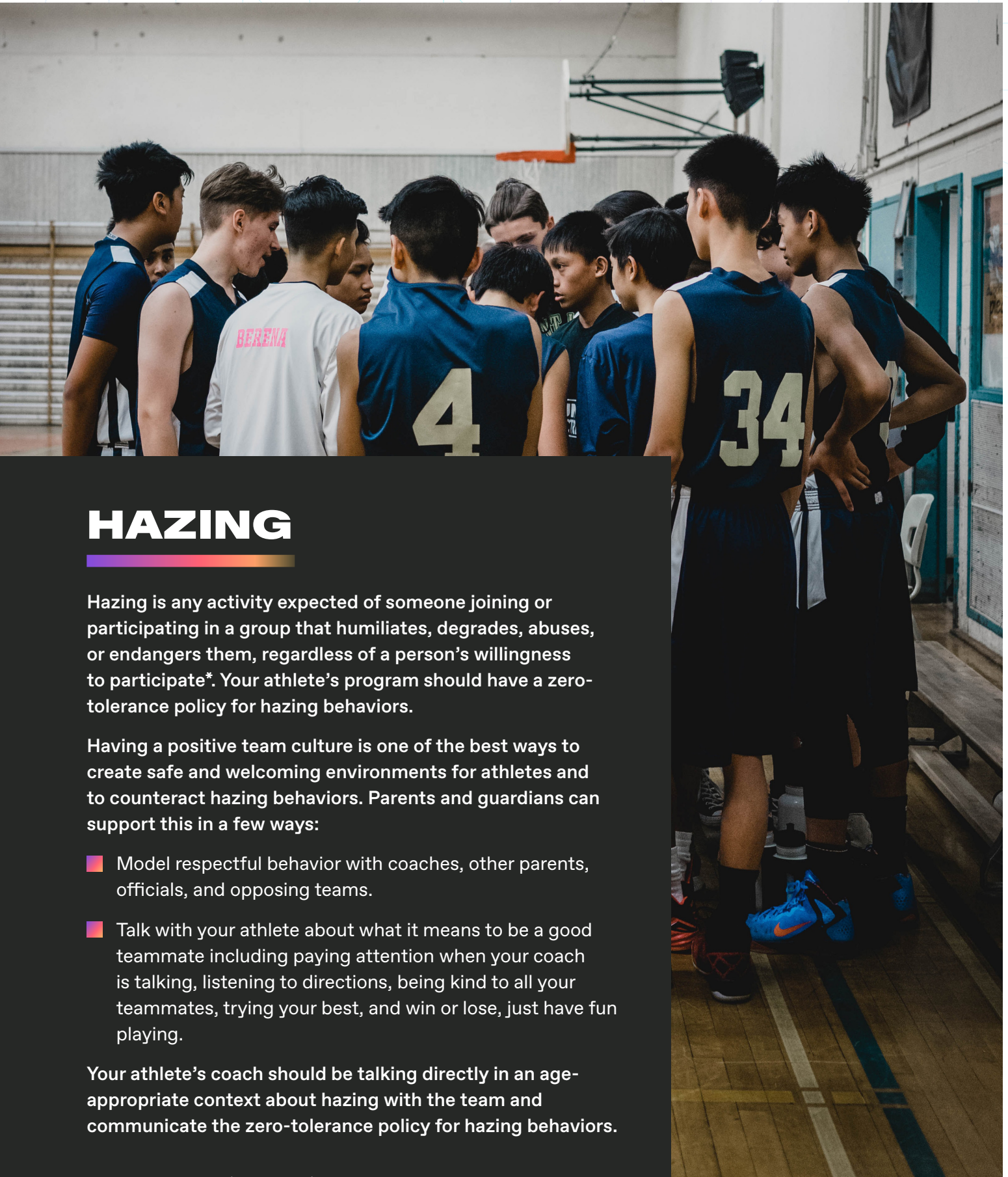
All team communication should include the entire team, coaches should never be electronically communicating privately with an athlete.

Any individual training or coaching session between an athlete and a coach should be open-door and have either a parent/guardian or another coach present.

Athletes should always change in locker rooms or private spaces and should not be using their phones or electronic devices.

Parents and guardians should always travel with their child, or at the very least, make sure their child is not traveling alone with one other adult.





HAZING

Hazing is any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers them, regardless of a person's willingness to participate*. Your athlete's program should have a zero-tolerance policy for hazing behaviors.

Having a positive team culture is one of the best ways to create safe and welcoming environments for athletes and to counteract hazing behaviors. Parents and guardians can support this in a few ways:

- Model respectful behavior with coaches, other parents, officials, and opposing teams.
- Talk with your athlete about what it means to be a good teammate including paying attention when your coach is talking, listening to directions, being kind to all your teammates, trying your best, and win or lose, just have fun playing.

Your athlete's coach should be talking directly in an age-appropriate context about hazing with the team and communicate the zero-tolerance policy for hazing behaviors.

*1 StopHazing Research Lab. (2020, December). Hazing: The Issue, StopHazing Consulting. <https://www.stophazing.org/issue>

CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through SMS, text messages, and various apps online, such as social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else.*

Social media and the internet can be a great way for athletes to connect with their friends and family, share photos and videos of themselves and teammates, and learn about their sport by reading and watching videos.

However, social media can also create a toxic environment for young people to communicate with others and unfortunately there has been an increase in bullying online in the last few years.

→ What parents can do to prevent cyberbullying:

- Be clear with young athletes that just because it might feel easy to say mean or hurtful things online to another person, that is not appropriate behavior, and it can severely affect the other people involved.
- Set the expectation that your child should only comment or post with positive thoughts and ideas.
- Where appropriate, parents and guardians might want to monitor their child's activity and behavior online. Sometimes, it can be easier for parents to understand how to speak with their children about social media usage after they have witnessed an example of inappropriate or unwanted behavior.
- Every family has their own social media and internet usage guidelines for their children. Consider what kind of behavior you want your children to exhibit in all aspects of social interaction, whether it be face-to-face or online, and discuss this as part of the guidelines you set for your children as it relates to social media.



* <https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it>

CREATING A

POSITIVE SPORT EXPERIENCE

FOR YOUR ATHLETE

This guide has focused on many of the negative things that can happen in sports. We also know that sport participation has significant positive effects on participants physically, socially, emotionally, and mentally.

Here are a few suggestions for positive conversations parents can have to make sure their athletes are getting the most out of their sport experience and having fun doing it:

→ The Car Ride Home

After games, especially on the car ride home, it is easy to focus on what your athlete could improve upon next time. Oftentimes, it is enough to just say, “I love to watch you play.”

→ Positive Feedback

Providing meaningful positive feedback supports your athlete’s performance and confidence. When providing positive feedback, make it specific and meaningful. Instead of saying, “great job today,” try, “I really liked the hustle you showed in the second half when you had to recover back on defense.”

→ Effort vs. Outcomes

Focus on effort and improvement versus outcomes. Instead of talking about the team’s record or stats, ask your player where he or she has improved, or how the team is working to improve. Ask how you can help.

→ Improvement

If you and your athlete are discussing areas of improvement, make sure the athlete knows it is OK to make mistakes. Instead of telling them what you observed, consider asking them what they might want to do differently. Children are surprisingly self-aware and the more you ask questions versus providing your own solutions, the more empowered they will feel.

→ Controllables

Focus on things the athlete can control such as being in the right position or adjusting and being coachable. Avoid framing feedback around things he or she may not have been able to control such as getting beaten by an athlete who was taller, faster, or more skilled, missing a fly ball that was in the sun, or letting in a goal on a great shot by the other team.

→ Team Dynamics

Finally, be an observer of the team dynamics when you do stay and watch practice or attend games. Look for how athletes interact, if there appear to be any cliques, and observe if there are athletes who may not seem to be included. Talk to your child about how he or she feels about their role on the team and ways to be a positive influence on other players.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FOR PARENTS

Bullying Resources

STOPBULLYING.GOV

National Sexual Abuse Hotline

RAINN.ORG

US Center for Safe Sport

USCENTERFORSAFESPORT.ORG

Child Welfare Information Gateway

WWW.CHILDWELFARE.GOV



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HOW DID WE DO?



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<https://forms.office.com/r/hvCen1T9n4>

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