



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY & PROCEDURES

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Child Protection Policy & Procedures

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OVERVIEW

At Sports Quest, we are committed to the holistic safety and well-being of every child and youth entrusted to our programs. This policy incorporates biblical principles of care and stewardship while adhering to state and national child protection laws, such as those established by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and federal guidelines like the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).

We are radically focused on Jesus Christ, which compels us to honor Him in every aspect of our mission. Jesus places children in a special position of honor, celebrating their simple and authentic faith. As recorded in Matthew's gospel, Jesus calls us to embrace a childlike faith and underscores the sacredness of protecting children:

“He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’”
(Matthew 18:2-5)

To welcome children is to welcome Jesus Himself. Jesus also warns of the grave consequences of failing to protect these vulnerable young souls:

“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”
(Matthew 18:6)

Unfortunately, children in our society are not always protected. Statistics reveal that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused before the age of eighteen, and 67% of all sexual abuse reported to law enforcement in the United States involves children. These realities compel us to ensure that every program and interaction at Sports Quest creates a safe environment for children and youth, prioritizing their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

This Child Protection Policy reflects our deep desire to carry out the directive of Jesus to both welcome and safeguard children in His name. We consider all minors under the age of 18 to be vulnerable to abuse. Therefore, our policies apply universally, with adjustments as needed to address specific program contexts and age groups.

We also recognize that safeguarding children is not the sole responsibility of a few but a shared commitment among all staff, volunteers, parents, and participants. To this end, we are dedicated to educating everyone involved with Sports Quest about child safety, equipping them to identify potential risks, prevent abuse, and take immediate and appropriate action when concerns arise.

DEFINITIONS

Shared Understanding of Abuse

At Sports Quest, it is essential that we have a shared understanding of what constitutes abuse. Studies show that many children who experience abuse are subjected to multiple forms of maltreatment. Clearly defining abuse helps us identify warning signs in one area, which can often indicate a need for protection in other areas as well.

The following definitions are informed by the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS):

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves the exploitation of a child by an older person through acts such as rape, incest, fondling, exhibitionism, or the creation and distribution of pornography. These acts may be perpetrated for sexual gratification, to exert power, or for economic gain (e.g., prostitution).

According to DFPS, sexual abuse includes:

- Sexual indecency, sexual assault, or aggravated sexual assault.
- Failing to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual misconduct involving a child.
- Exploiting a child for the production of obscene or pornographic material.

Sexual abuse encompasses both **contact behaviors** and **non-contact behaviors**, which may include:

- Exposure to pornography, voyeurism, or exhibitionism.
- Sexual communication by an adult to a minor intended to abuse, degrade, arouse, or gratify sexual desires.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse refers to non-accidental injuries inflicted on a child, which may involve:

- Beatings, violent shaking, human bites, strangulation, suffocation, poisoning, or burns.

These actions can result in:

- Bruises, welts, broken bones, permanent disfigurement, psychological trauma, internal injuries, brain damage, or death.

As defined by DFPS, physical abuse includes deliberate actions causing injury, threats of harm, or unexplained or suspicious injuries.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that harms a child's emotional development or self-worth. This may include:

- Persistent criticism, belittling, insulting, or manipulation.

Such behavior undermines a child's confidence and sense of safety, often causing long-term harm.

Physical and Emotional Neglect

Neglect occurs when a caregiver fails to meet a child's basic needs, such as food, clothing, education, shelter, medical care, and adequate supervision.

DFPS defines specific forms of neglect as:

- **Neglectful Supervision:** Improper supervision of a child that could lead to significant harm.

- **Medical Neglect:** Failing to seek or provide necessary medical treatment, potentially causing harm.
- **Physical Neglect:** Failing to provide essential food, clothing, and shelter needed for a healthy life.
- **Abandonment and Parental Responsibility Refusal:** Leaving a child in a harmful situation or refusing to allow a child to return home without planning for their care.

Our Approach

Sports Quest takes all indicators and suspicions of child maltreatment seriously. We recognize that children who experience one form of abuse are at heightened risk of being maltreated in other ways.

When abuse is suspected or reported, we will:

1. Take immediate steps to ensure the safety and protection of the child.
2. Address known risks proactively while offering additional attention and support to the child.

Our commitment to safeguarding children reflects our dedication to their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, ensuring that every child in our programs is respected, protected, and given the opportunity to thrive.

LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Sports Quest is committed to following all applicable child protection laws and mandates, including:

1. **Mandatory Reporting:** All staff and volunteers are legally required to report suspected abuse or neglect immediately to DFPS at **1-800-252-5400** or via the **Texas Abuse Hotline** (txabusehotline.org).
2. **Background Checks:** All personnel working with minors undergo a criminal background check in compliance with Texas law.
3. **Confidentiality:** Reports and investigations are handled with strict confidentiality, ensuring the privacy and dignity of all involved parties.

RECOGNIZING INDICATORS AND IMPACTS OF ABUSE

The majority of children who experience abuse will exhibit symptoms or behavioral changes at some point. At Sports Quest, we are committed to being attentive to the indicators of child abuse, including physical, emotional, and behavioral signs.

Physical Indicators of Abuse

Physical signs that may indicate abuse include:

- Injuries to genital areas.
- Pain, itching, or swelling in sensitive areas.
- Stained underclothing or other signs of physical trauma.
- Unexplained bruises, burns, or welts.

Behavioral and Emotional Indicators

Children who have been abused may display emotional or behavioral changes that are atypical for their age or circumstances. These can include:

- Withdrawal or isolation.
- Aggression or sudden outbursts.
- Fearfulness around certain individuals or settings.

Coaches, staff, and volunteers at Sports Quest are uniquely positioned to observe behaviors during practices, games, and other activities. Through consistent interaction, our team has opportunities to detect signs of abuse or maltreatment and intervene appropriately.

Long-Term Impacts of Abuse

The effects of child abuse often extend far beyond the immediate harm. Abuse, especially sexual abuse, can have lasting impacts on a child's emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Survivors may face challenges in adulthood, including difficulties in forming relationships, mental health struggles, or physical health issues.

Understanding these impacts is critical to preventing abuse and providing compassionate support. While not every child will outwardly show the effects of maltreatment, all survivors are at increased risk of experiencing long-term consequences.

At Sports Quest, we strive to create an environment where potential signs of abuse are identified early, and all children feel safe, valued, and supported. Through vigilance and care, we seek to safeguard their well-being and respond with empathy to those who may have experienced harm.

IDENTIFYING OFFENDERS: GROOMING AND ABUSE TACTICS

At Sports Quest, we understand that individuals who sexually abuse children often exploit authority, trust, or threats to gain access and control over their victims. These individuals can include strangers, acquaintances, or even family members. Research shows that children are three times more likely to be abused by someone they know and trust than by a stranger.

Perpetrators commonly use a process known as **grooming** to manipulate both the child and their caregivers. Grooming often involves:

- Building trust through gifts, special attention, privileges, or excessive affection.
- Creating a sense of dependence or obligation in the child.

Once trust is established, perpetrators seek to isolate the child, using their authority, physical force, or threats to maintain control and perpetrate the abuse.

At Sports Quest, we are committed to recognizing these tactics and protecting children from individuals who might seek to harm them. Our policies and training ensure that all staff and volunteers are vigilant in identifying behaviors that could indicate grooming or abuse, creating a safe and supportive environment for every participant.

SCREENING & TRAINING

Screening Process

All staff and volunteers undergo:

1. A detailed application process, including references.
2. A criminal background check that includes searches of:

- Sex Offender Registry
 - State and Federal Criminal Records
3. Completion of **Ministry Safe training**, focusing on abuse prevention and detection.
 4. Social Media Screening
 5. An in-person interview with Sports Quest staff.

If this screening process reveals that an individual has abused a child or been convicted of a violent and/or sexual crime, they will not be allowed to work with children in any capacity.

If the screening process provides information that an individual has been accused of, convicted of, or involved in a sexual, violent, or other concerning crime, Sports Quest will review the situation in consultation with external child safety experts or certification organizations to determine the appropriate course of action.

Our commitment is to ensure that every staff member and volunteer upholds the highest standards of integrity and trust, providing a secure environment for all participants.

Training Requirements

- **Initial Training:** All personnel must complete training before interacting with children.
- **Ongoing Training:** Mandatory biannual sessions covering child protection policies, scenario-based learning, and updates to laws or best practices.
- **Specialized Training:** Programs like special needs soccer require additional instruction tailored to participant vulnerabilities.

SAFEGUARDS

Safe Behaviors and Boundaries

At Sports Quest, creating an environment that promotes safe behaviors is paramount. Recognizing that most child abuse occurs in isolated situations, we have implemented the following practices to minimize risks and ensure the safety of every participant:

Safe Behaviors

1. **Two-Adult Rule:** At least two unrelated adults must be present in environments where minors are involved.
2. **Observable Interactions:** All interactions should be observable with clear line-of-sight visibility through windows, open doors, or public meeting spaces.
3. **Restroom Breaks:** Two adults must supervise restroom breaks, and restroom doors should remain open during supervision. Adults needing to use the restroom must wait until the room is empty before entering.
4. **Changing Clothing:** Only paid staff or childcare workers may assist children with clothing changes. Volunteers are not permitted to change diapers or clothes.
5. **Super Vision Ratios:** Maintain an adult-to-child ratio that ensures adequate supervision and minimizes risks of peer-on-peer maltreatment.
6. **Interruptible Settings:** All interactions with children should remain interruptible. Caregivers are encouraged to visit programs unannounced to ensure transparency.

Safe Touch

Respect, safety, and clear boundaries are the foundation of physical contact at Sports Quest. Positive, age-appropriate physical interactions are encouraged to foster a supportive environment while maintaining boundaries that protect all participants.

Examples of **positive and appropriate forms of affection**:

- Brief hugs or side hugs.
- Pats on the shoulder, back, or head.
- Handshakes, high-fives, fist bumps, and verbal praise.
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders, or arms in an appropriate manner.
- Holding hands with small children in group settings.
- Sitting or kneeling beside small children for support.
- Holding hands during group prayer.

Examples of **negative and inappropriate forms of affection**:

- Inappropriate or prolonged embraces.
- Kisses or unwanted physical affection.
- Holding children over four years old on the lap.
- Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas except for necessary diapering or toileting.
- Wrestling, tickling, or giving piggyback rides.
- Any type of massage.

Sexual Language

Sports Quest prohibits any form of sexually suggestive language or behavior. This includes racy jokes, sexual innuendos, or discussions of sexual experiences. Inappropriate music, media, or conversations are strictly forbidden in all program settings.

Extra Attention

Staff and volunteers must avoid favoritism or singling out children for special gifts, favors, or acts of service that are not provided to others. This ensures equal treatment and prevents the appearance of inappropriate relationships.

Electronic Communications & Social Media

Digital interactions are subject to the same standards as in-person interactions:

1. **No Private Messaging:** All communication with minors must include parents/guardians or occur in a group setting.
2. **Transparency:** Online interactions, such as group messages or emails, should remain observable and interruptible.
3. **Logistical Focus:** One-on-one communication with minors should be minimized and used only for necessary logistical purposes.

Transportation

1. **No Solo Transportation:** Adults are not permitted to transport minors alone. When transportation is required, two adults should accompany the minor.
2. **Parental Approval:** All transportation arrangements must be pre-approved by the child's parent or guardian.

TAILORED PROGRAM POLICIES

1. **HCYA Homeschool Cyclones:**
 - Enforce team-specific guidelines.

2. **Special Needs Soccer:**
 - Use individualized care plans and assign staff trained in addressing disabilities.
3. **Summer Camps:**
 - Implement daily attendance checks, ID badges, and strict drop-off/pick-up protocols.
4. **Personal Training:**
 - Sessions must occur in open, public spaces with no secluded areas allowed.

REPORTING & RESPONSE

Reporting Responsibilities

1. **Mandatory Reporting:** Any suspicion of abuse must be reported immediately to DFPS and the Child Protection Committee.
2. **Internal Documentation:** Staff must complete an Incident Report Form to document concerns.

Response to Allegations

1. **Immediate Action:** Accused individuals are suspended pending investigation.
2. **Care Committee:** Support for victims and families includes counseling referrals and spiritual care.

Escalation Process

1. Reports must be filed with DFPS within 24 hours of suspicion.
2. Cases involving imminent danger are escalated to law enforcement immediately.

At Sports Quest, it is the responsibility of every staff member, volunteer, and participant to remain vigilant and report any suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Texas law mandates that anyone who suspects a child is being harmed must report it to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

Individuals who report suspected abuse in good faith are protected from civil or criminal liability. However, failure to report suspected abuse can result in serious legal consequences, including criminal charges such as misdemeanors or felonies.

If you suspect a child has been abused, you **must immediately report** the concern to DFPS by calling 1-800-252-5400 or using the Texas Abuse Hotline at txabusehotline.org. If assistance is needed to complete the report, notify a member of the Sports Quest leadership team, who will provide guidance to ensure the report is submitted promptly and accurately.

It is important to avoid interviewing the child about the suspected abuse, as this could unintentionally lead the child and interfere with an official investigation. Additionally, discussions about the suspected abuse should not take place with others to maintain confidentiality and protect the child's privacy. All information related to the report must be shared only with DFPS authorities and designated Sports Quest staff involved in assisting with the process.

SPECIALIZED CONSIDERATIONS

Special Needs: Policies are designed to prioritize the dignity and safety of participants with disabilities.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- Parents are encouraged to attend informational sessions on child protection.
- Policies and procedures are made available to parents online and in print.
- Feedback forums are hosted quarterly to address parent concerns and improve practices.

ACCOUNTABILITY & OVERSIGHT

1. **Child Protection Committee:** Oversees implementation, conducts quarterly audits, and reviews policy effectiveness.
2. **Board of Directors:** Receives annual reports on compliance and safety performance.

POLICY REVIEW & UPDATES

- Policies are reviewed semi-annually to incorporate updates to state and federal guidelines.
- Emergency revisions may be implemented at the discretion of the Child Protection Committee.

RECEIPT & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This Child Protection Policy and Procedure is a vital document designed to ensure the safety and protection of all children involved in Sports Quest programs. The contents of this policy may be amended at any time at the discretion of Sports Quest leadership.

By signing below, I acknowledge the following:

- I have read, understood, and received a copy of the Sports Quest Child Protection Policy and Procedures.
- I understand that I am required to comply with the policies outlined in the Sports Quest Child Protection Policy and Procedures.
- I acknowledge that all adults share the responsibility of protecting children and that it is my duty to report any violations of this policy to a Sports Quest staff member and to report suspected abuse to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

Signature:

Printed Name:

Date:
