Appendix G: Guidelines for Parents/ Guardians

FIRST® is committed to providing every youth participant with a safe, respectful, and positive experience. Parents and guardians play an important role in supporting youth safety and well-being. This appendix provides practical guidance to help families understand expectations and support safe participation.

This appendix supplements, but does not replace, the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program requirements outlined in the core guide.

Get Involved

Parents and guardians are encouraged to stay engaged in their child's team experience. Involvement may include:

- Getting to know the Lead coach, mentors, and other adults working with the team.
- Becoming familiar with where and how the team meets.
- Attending meetings or events when possible.
- Communicating with other parents/guardians.

Your presence and awareness can help reinforce a safe and respectful team environment.

Understand Youth Safety in *FIRST*®

FIRST Youth Protection includes measures such as adult screening and training, clear behavioral expectations, supervision standards, and reporting processes designed to promote youth safety.

Parents and guardians do not need to determine whether a situation is a violation — concerns should be reported.

Recognizing Signs of Concern

Parents and guardians are often the first to notice changes in a child's behavior. While these signs may have many causes, they can sometimes indicate that a youth participant is experiencing stress, harm, or inappropriate interactions.

Potential signs may include:

- Sudden changes in mood, behavior, or engagement.
- Withdrawal from activities or peers.
- Reluctance to attend team activities or interact with certain individuals.
- Unexplained injuries or complaints.
- Increased secrecy or changes in communication patterns.
- Age-inappropriate language or behavior.

DIGITAL AWARENESS

Parents and guardians should remain aware of their child's online interactions related to team activities.

Encourage your child to:

- Keep personal information private.
- Avoid communicating with unknown individuals.
- Tell a trusted adult if they receive messages that feel inappropriate or unrelated to team activities.

These signs are not definitive proof of abuse; however, concerning patterns should be taken seriously and may warrant further attention or reporting.

Adults working with teams should not engage in private or non-transparent communication with youth outside appropriate contexts. Parents may request to be included in communications where appropriate.

See Appendix F: Best Practices for Online Communication Platforms and Digital Interaction for additional guidance.



HELPING YOUR CHILD BUILD SAFE BOUNDARIES

Parents and guardians can help youth participants recognize and respond to unsafe situations by reinforcing the following:

- Encourage your child to tell you (or another trusted adult) if something does not feel right.
- Remind your child that no one should ask them to keep secrets about interactions or behavior.
- Encourage your child to trust their instincts and remove themselves from uncomfortable situations.
- Reinforce that their privacy should be respected at all times.
- Make clear that unwanted physical contact is not acceptable.
- Identify trusted adults your child can go to for help.

Discuss with your child that even individuals they know, trust, or admire may sometimes behave inappropriately.

Open communication helps children feel comfortable reporting concerns and reduces confusion in difficult situations.

Responding to Disclosures and Other Signs of Abuse

The strongest indication that a child has been abused is the child's own statement that it occurred, but children who have been abused often do not report it, so parents or guardians should be alert for other signs, such as refusing to participate in an activity they once enjoyed, emotional withdrawal, unexplained cuts or bruises, acting out adult sexual behavior, or using language a child that age is unlikely to know. For more specific signs, consult www.childwelfare.gov.

If your child tells you they have experienced or observed what may be abusive behavior, your first reaction can be especially important in helping the child through the ordeal. The following guidelines may help you:

- ✔ **DO** assume that your child is telling you the truth, respect your child's privacy, and take them to a place where the two of you can talk without interruptions or distractions.
- ✔ **DO** reassure your child that they are not to blame for what happened, and that you appreciate being told about the incident and will help to make sure that it will not happen again.
- ✔ **DO** consult your family doctor or other child abuse authority about the need for medical care or counseling.
- ✔ **DO** tell a child protection agency or the police what happened and follow their direction regarding confidentiality and notification of the school or organization hosting your child's team and *FIRST* Youth Protection.
- ✖ **DON'T** panic or overreact to your child's disclosure or show alarm or anger.
- ✖ **DON'T** criticize your child or tell your child they misunderstood what happened.
- ✖ **DON'T** express remorse that the child was not more careful, put themselves at risk, or is in any way at fault.
- ✖ **DON'T** attempt to investigate or confront the suspected offender, even if you know the person well.
- ✖ **DON'T** promise confidentiality; explain that you may need to share the information to help keep them safe.

FIRST Youth Protection is available to any individual with concerns about the safety of *FIRST* team members and can be contacted directly if additional information or guidance is needed. *FIRST* Youth Protection will become involved, if necessary, to ensure youth protection concerns are promptly and effectively resolved. With your help, we can provide your child with a safe, enjoyable, and inspiring experience.

If you have concerns about the safety or well-being of a youth participant:

- Report concerns to the Lead coach, hosting organization, and submit a report to the *FIRST* Youth Protection Reporting Portal.
- Contact local child protection authorities or law enforcement when appropriate.
- Do not attempt to investigate independently.

You do not need proof to report a concern.

FIRST Youth Protection is available to provide guidance and support regarding safety concerns. *FIRST* may take action to address risks and ensure a safe environment for participants.