

# National Standards for Youth Sports

Compiled by the National Alliance for Youth Sports



**NAYS** | National  
Alliance for  
Youth Sports

2017 Edition  
[nays.org](http://nays.org)

## An Introduction to the Updated National Standards for Youth Sports



The National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) is pleased to release this revised edition of the National Standards for Youth Sports. The original version of the National Standards for Youth Sports were released in 1987 to

provide direction for parents to follow when developing and administering youth sports for children. Then in 2008 an updated edition was released after a dedicated group of professional youth sports administrators convened during the International Youth Sports Congress in Orlando, Florida to re-examine the Standards amid the evolving youth sports environment.



In late 2016, after a comprehensive review and analysis by members of the Certified Youth Sports Administrators (CYSA) Leadership Team, this new edition was presented at the NAYS Youth Sports Congress to provide the CYSAs with an opportunity to provide input and address a variety of topics that currently affect the delivery of youth sports programs. This new edition reflects the consensus of this group to restructure this document into four Core Areas that now have specific and implementable standards within each Core Area. The Standards within each Core Area provide a framework by which youth sports programs should be designed and executed.

The original edition was focused on parents and the role of parents within the youth sports landscape; while today the National Standards for Youth Sports serve as the blueprint for how recreational youth sports providers can meet the needs of all their participants. The National Standards for Youth Sports place in motion guidance for league and program administrators to implement to ensure the best possible youth sports experience for all.

In addition to the four Core Areas and the specific Standards within each, we have included three additional sections that provide information for professional youth sports administrators, volunteers and parents to explain what the National Standards for Youth Sports specifically mean to each group.

The National Standards for Youth Sports are designed as a resource for existing organized youth sports programs. While the Standards focus specifically on recreational youth sports programs, they are applicable in a variety of sports settings to ensure safe, positive and child-centered experiences.

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**For more information about the National Standards for Youth Sports contact:**

**800-688-KIDS**  
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## Core Area #1: Child Centered Policies and Philosophies

Historically, many organized youth sports programs have been modeled after adult-oriented programs using rules, skill expectations and competitive requirements replicated from high school, college and professional levels. Today, recreational and developmental programs must be designed and administered so that every child, regardless of their abilities, has an opportunity to have a positive youth sports experience from their participation. To ensure the positive benefits of participation, youth sports programs must embrace a common philosophy.



### Standards:

1. Programs should be guided by a written mission statement that provides a foundation for the program's purpose and goals.
2. Programs should be organized using the following guidelines, although modification can be made when total participation numbers are low:
  - a. **Developmental Programs for children 6 years old and under:**
    - **Focus:** Motor skill development, concentration on fundamentals with no offensive or defensive schematics and an introduction of team sports.
    - **Practice/Games:** Limited to a maximum of one hour per day, two times a week.
    - **Scores/Standings:** No scores or standings kept.
    - **Coaches:** Permitted on playing surface.
    - **Competitive/Tournament Play:** Not recommended.
  - b. **Instructional Programs for children 7 and 8 years old:**
    - **Focus:** Skill development, concentration on fundamentals, basic concepts of rules and basic offensive or defensive schematics.
    - **Practice/Games:** Limited to a maximum of one hour per day, three times a week.
    - **Scores/Standings:** Encouraged not to keep.
    - **Coaches:** Permitted on playing surface.
    - **Competitive/Tournament Play:** Not recommended.
  - c. **Organizational Programs for children 9 and 10 years old:**
    - **Focus:** Skill development, concentration on fundamentals, progressive introduction to simple offensive or defensive schematics and introduction of internal competition.
    - **Practice/Games:** Limited to a maximum of one hour per day, three times a week.
    - **Scores/Standings:** Kept but not emphasized.
    - **Coaches:** Not permitted on playing surface.
    - **Competitive/Tournament Play:** Permitted but not emphasized.
  - d. **Skill Enhancement Programs for children 11 years old and above:**
    - **Focus:** Continue skill development, concentration on fundamentals with progressive introduction of offensive or defensive schematics and an introduction of more competitive play.
    - **Practice/Games:** Limited to a maximum of 1.5 hours per day, three times a week.
    - **Scores/Standings:** Kept but encouraged not to emphasize.
    - **Coaches:** Not permitted on playing surface.
    - **Competitive/Tournament Play:** Permitted but not emphasized.

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## Core Area #1: Child Centered Policies and Philosophies (continued from page 3)

3. Programs must establish and abide by written policies and procedures to ensure consistency. These written policies should:
  - a. Be made available to everyone in a variety of formats and languages.
  - b. Be reviewed, evaluated and, if necessary, updated annually.
  - c. Include a non-discrimination and reasonable accommodation policy that ensures participation for all children.
  - d. Encourage inclusive programming and make reasonable accommodations to attract children with disabilities to participate.
  - e. Include sportsmanship policies that clearly state zero tolerance policies for bullying, child abuse, inappropriate behaviors and/or violence of participants, coaches, officials, volunteers, parents or other spectators. An enforcement plan and disciplinary procedures should also be addressed.
  - f. Implement a code of conduct that includes positive expectations and describes unacceptable behaviors for everyone involved in youth sports, including administrators, coaches, parents and participants.
  - g. Maximize playing time for all by establishing a minimum play rule/policy.
  - h. Adapt appropriate roster sizes, rules, equipment and fields based on the age of the participants.
  - i. Encourage and instruct coaches to allow participants to experience a variety of positions and situational play.
  - j. Establish methods to ensure balanced teams, including no cut policies so all children can participate in recreational programs.



4. Programs, parents and coaches should encourage participation in a variety of youth activities in addition to sports, paying careful attention not to specialize or participate year-round in only one activity or sport.
5. Programs should communicate to all administrators, officials, coaches, parents, players and spectators that they are responsible for providing a positive environment. This should include:
  - a. Promotion of fair play, respect for the game and graciousness in losing and winning.
  - b. Before and/or after each game, participants should be required to participate in the “hand-shake” ritual that is monitored by coaches and officials.



## Core Area #2: Volunteers

Volunteers are crucial to the delivery of youth sports programs. Youth sports providers must be selective when choosing volunteers since parents are entrusting their children to the adults running the youth sports league. Consistent and comprehensive screening strengthens the organization’s protective shield. To ensure that everyone involved strives to make the youth sports program safe, positive and fun for all children, all administrators, coaches and parents must receive information about the program’s philosophy, policies and procedures, as well as specific knowledge required for each position. By holding everyone accountable for their behaviors, high quality programming can be ensured.



### Standards:

1. Parents, coaches and volunteers should be provided written information that outlines the program’s purpose, as well as all policies relating to volunteers including:
  - a. A positive recruitment policy that encourages the recruitment and selection of qualified women and men, regardless of race, color, national or ethnic origin, age, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and expression, veteran status, and any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law.
  - b. A written screening policy should be included in policies and procedures.
  - c. A written job description outlining duties and responsibilities should be available for every position. Job descriptions should be read, signed, dated and kept on file to ensure an understanding of the position and the league’s expectations.
2. Volunteers should be required to complete and sign an application form.
3. Volunteer positions should be filled after interviews are conducted, references checked and criminal histories are checked.
4. Programs should develop procedures and identify disqualifiers to determine what makes a volunteer ineligible.
5. Coaches must complete concussion prevention training.
6. Coaches and staff should be trained in the following areas: a general introduction to coaching youth sports; sport-specific coaching information; the emotional needs of children; safety; injury prevention and first aid; conditioning; hydration and nutrition; teaching proper sports techniques; including all children; child abuse prevention; bullying prevention; and drug, alcohol and tobacco prevention.
7. Volunteers should be provided the zero tolerance policies for bullying, child abuse and violence. Coaches should mandate positive sportsmanship among players, coaches, parents and spectators.
8. Coaches should continually gain general and sports specific coaching skills.
9. Programs should be encouraged to provide additional educational resources for coaches and parents to assist them in providing the best possible youth sports experience for each child.
10. All volunteers should be required to annually sign a code of conduct pledging their commitment to provide enjoyable, healthy youth sports experiences.
11. Programs should establish an accountability procedure and a disciplinary process to remove anyone who does not abide by its policies.

## Core Area #3: Parents

Parents are one of the key components to their child's youth sports experiences. Parents/guardians must take an active and positive role in their child's youth sports experiences. Programs should encourage parents to be caring and active in their child's youth sports experiences by providing positive support as a spectator, coach and league administrator.



### Standards:

1. Parents should be required to attend a league orientation meeting at a minimum of once a year. The orientation should cover the following areas: youth sports philosophy; program goals; expected behaviors and responsibilities; and sport specific information.
2. Teams should have a minimum of one team/parents' meeting at the beginning of each sports season.
3. Parents should demonstrate their commitment to their child's sports experience by annually signing a parental code of conduct that includes disciplinary action for failing to abide by the code of conduct.
4. A child should not be able to attend practices and games if their parent/guardian refuses to sign the parental code of conduct.
5. All parents and spectators should provide a positive environment for players, coaches and other spectators. Failure to provide a positive environment will result in disciplinary action as written in the policies.
6. Parents should familiarize themselves with the sports specific information, including the rules of the game.
7. Programs should maintain open communication channels with parents through newsletters, league meetings, website and email.
8. Programs should promote parental involvement in such roles as coach; team manager; fund-raiser; league administrator/manager; assistant and/or fan.
9. Parents, volunteers and participants should be provided opportunities to evaluate their experiences.
10. Parents should be provided opportunities to evaluate their child's experiences, including coaching and administration.

## Core Area #4: Safe Playing Environment

Youth sports programs must provide safe playing facilities and equipment, healthful playing situations and be ready for emergencies, should the need arise. Children participating in youth sports are exposed to a variety of risks that are simply a part of the game. It is important for programs to take every precaution to protect participants from dangerous situations and in the event of an accident or emergency, everyone must be prepared to respond appropriately.



### Standards:

1. Programs should implement procedures for inspecting playing facilities for safety hazards before every sports activity.
2. Programs should implement procedures for continual safety inspections of all playing equipment.
3. Programs should develop policies and procedures to not allow participation during unsafe conditions, such as lightning storms, darkness, playing sites in disrepair, etc.
4. Programs should implement written emergency action plans in the event of medical, weather or other types of emergency situations. These should be communicated to everyone involved at the beginning of every season or program.
5. All teams should establish procedures and have an emergency plan if a medical situation occurs or in the event dangerous weather conditions and hazards pose injury risks.
6. Programs should require basic medical and injury treatment forms to be properly completed and signed by parents/guardians prior to their child's participation.
7. Programs should inform coaches and staff of each player's emergency contact and health information/conditions prior to any practices and games.
8. At least one adult trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), automated external defibrillator (AED) and basic first aid should always be on site at any practice or game.
9. An automated external defibrillator (AED) should be located in proximity to all playing areas.
10. Programs should have a written reporting policy for injured players and disciplinary action should be taken when injuries are not reported.
11. Programs should enforce a policy that requires written permission from a doctor prior to allowing a child to participate following an injury where the child sought medical treatment.
12. Programs should provide information to everyone regarding proper hydration techniques.
13. Children below the age of 11 should participate in activities that limit collision potential and feature modified rules that will significantly reduce the chances of injury.
14. Programs should mandate that at least two adults are always present during practices, games and any other related activities.
15. Programs should adopt policies for banning rapid weight loss/gain procedures used solely for participation in youth sports.
16. Protective equipment designed to reduce potential injuries to participants should be used.
17. Programs should adopt rules to prohibit the use of performance enhancing drugs, alcohol, illegal substances and/or tobacco at all youth sports events.
18. Programs should establish written policies and procedures for immediately dealing with substance abuse by coaches, players and spectators; and communicate this information to coaches, players and parents.
19. Leagues should communicate to all administrators, officials, coaches, parents, players and spectators the zero tolerance policies for bullying, child abuse and violence, including clearly stated disciplinary actions for violations.

# Professional Youth Sports Administrators

## What the National Standards for Youth Sports Mean to YOU

Overseeing recreational youth sports programs at the local level can be complicated when there are multiple organizations offering a variety of sports, varying levels of leadership and differing views on what youth sports is all about. The National Standards for Youth Sports are a great resource to help you offer safe and positive youth sports experiences. They represent what respected professionals around the country believe is the best way to provide top-quality sports programs for children.

You should actively share these Standards with everyone in your organization as well as all local recreational youth sports organizations that you encounter since these were created with children's best interests in mind. These Standards provide guidance, specific policies and support for numerous topics that must be addressed by all recreational youth sports offerings.

Our professional duty is to adhere to the National Standards for Youth Sports and to encourage everyone (other professionals, volunteers and parents) to do their best to follow the Standards – as a way to ensure that all children enjoy participating in a positive environment where they will learn new skills, and have a safe and fun-filled experience.





# Volunteers

## What the National Standards for Youth Sports Mean to YOU



As a volunteer in youth sports, you are commended for stepping forward to work with a group of children because there are few endeavors in life more worthwhile. Whether you are a coach, a board member, a team parent or a volunteer in any other capacity, you are in a special position to impact the lives of children in so many areas. Your influence extends far beyond simply helping them learn and progress in their respective sport, so it's of paramount importance that you take great care to approach your role with diligence.

One of the best ways you can prepare yourself is to review the National Standards for Youth Sports. The Standards place in motion a national policy for children's sports. They serve as a blueprint for all youth sports programs and must be incorporated into the delivery of every youth sports experience to best ensure that the needs of every child are met.

Regardless of your role as a volunteer, your organization has the responsibility to meet the needs of every child who participates. As you review the Standards – keep in mind that these represent what being involved in youth sports is all about. By making a commitment to implement these Standards, you'll greatly increase the likelihood that the youth sports environment provides a positive and rewarding experience for the participants.



## Parents

### What the National Standards for Youth Sports Mean to YOU

Participation in youth sports provides children with an opportunity to gain many valuable life skills and develop an appreciation for physical fitness, all of which can lead to a lifetime of healthy activity. This can only occur, though, when organized sports programs are designed and administered to ensure a safe, positive and fun environment for everyone.

The National Standards for Youth Sports place in motion a national policy for children's sports. These Standards serve as a blueprint for all youth sports programs and must be incorporated into the delivery of every youth sports experience to best ensure that the needs of every child are met.

As a parent of a youngster involved in youth sports, you have a responsibility to make sure that your child is enrolled in a program that adheres to the Standards. Prior to signing your child up for a sport it's important that you review the Standards so when you're taking a look at how the program operates you can be sure that it is a good fit for your child.

Remember, you have the right to expect and demand that the recreation agency and/or youth sports program understands the Standards. You also have the right to ask that these Standards are incorporated into their programs so that all children are given the best opportunity for a memorable season that they'll look back on for years to come for all the right reasons.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These National Standards for Youth Sports are intended to be used by every recreational youth sports program in the nation! The National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS), America's leading advocate for safe, positive and fun youth sports experiences, has continually taken a leadership role to assimilate and share best practices.

Special appreciation is extended to Rance Gaede (City of Tamarac, Florida) and Tory Miller (City of Raleigh, North Carolina) who are both members of the CYSA Leadership Team and took a lead on facilitating the re-examination of the National Standards for Youth Sports. Also, a special thank you to the entire CYSA Leadership Team for their contributions to this important update.

NAYS also wishes to pay tribute to the countless number of Certified Youth Sports Administrators (CYSA) whose professional input helped to ensure that these reflect the current recreational youth sports landscape. We thank every youth sports professional who lent their time and provided input for these Standards.

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