

SSA SAFE SOCCER PROGRAM

SSA's 'Safe Soccer' Program is a program derived from US Soccer's Safe Soccer Program that is designed to help foster a safe environment for every child who participates in any SSA-sponsored activity. It is a program designed to inform all volunteers, parents, coaches, referees and staff/employees about the risks associated with youth soccer programs, as well as define prohibited conduct, outline background screening policies, provide education and training, offer reporting procedures, define limits on one-on-one interactions, and detail enforcement and the associated review/grievance process.

Contents

Introduction	1
General Policies	1
Code of Conduct	1
Goal, Player, and Field Safety	2
First Aid	2
Emergency Action Plan (Calling 9-1-1)	3
Concussion Issues	4
Sudden Cardiac Arrest Issues	5
Preventing Bullying	7
Inclement Weather	8
Prohibited Conduct Policy	9
Inappropriate Conduct: Protect the Child and Others	10
Definitions of Abuse	10
Education and Training	11
Online Training for Coaches and Team Managers	11
Online Training for Parents	11
Online Training for Players	11
Red Flags for Grooming Behavior in Sexual Abuse	12
Limits to Physical Contact/One-on-One Interactions	13
Reporting of Abuse	14
Mandatory Reporting Obligations	14
Reporting Procedures	14
Enforcement	15

Introduction

To begin with, we want to thank those of you who work with our children in a coaching or administrative capacity! It is only through the hard work and dedication of people like you that we are able to provide a fun-filled, instructional, and developmental soccer program for the children of our community. And to parents reading this material, we thank you for entrusting SSA with your children.

One of our greatest concerns and highest priorities is that we provide a safe environment for all our members, and especially for the children who participate in our club. The following information highlights our club's policies as a means for making the soccer experience more "risk-free" for all our participants.

SSA General Policies

- SSA endorses and abides by the US Soccer 'Safe Soccer' Program.
- It is the intent of SSA to exclude from participation in our activities, all persons who have been convicted of crimes of violence or crimes against persons.
- Volunteers, coaches, and administrators are required to complete a national governing body background check.
- Disclosures will be renewable every two years and kept completely confidential.
- Youth ages 16 to 17 may be Assistant Coaches, but must have an adult (18 years or older) Head Coach at all activities protecting players.
- Adult supervision is required at all activities. A club-recognized coach or assistant coach should be in attendance at all times. If neither is attending then the coach must "deputize" another adult as needed to act as coach.
- All players and coaches must be properly registered with the club in order to participate in practices and/or games. A coach must not allow a player to participate in any club-sponsored activity unless the player appears on the team's official roster.

SSA Code of Conduct

SSA has a Code of Conduct that governs the behaviors of players, coaches, volunteer staff, and spectators before, during, and after SSA-sponsored soccer activities. To view details, please click [HERE](#).

For a list of sanctions regarding behavior at In-House Recreational games, please click [HERE](#).

Player, Goal, and Field Safety

- Practice is permitted only on authorized grass and/or turf fields and at club-approved venues during the regular season (dates for the beginning and end of a season are posted on the website.) **Parking lots or other hard-surface areas outside of the fields are not approved for practice activities and coaches do not have club approval to conduct team practices outside of published start and finish dates for the Fall and Spring seasons.**
- Goals must be anchored securely at all times during play. This includes games and practices - Never allow the players to climb on, or hang from, goals
- When moving goals, great care should be used, and there must always be adult supervision and/or assistance
- Do not use a goal that is damaged, weakened, or otherwise in disrepair - report it to your program director.
- Check the goals and field before each activity for hazards, holes, sharp objects, etc. This includes the perimeter immediately outside the game or practice field. Do not conduct an activity if there are obvious safety issues with the field, such as deep holes or other unsafe conditions - report it to your program director.

The first line of defense in the treatment of athletic injuries is to prevent them:

1. Proper equipment (shin guards worn at all times, no jewelry, no jeans or cut-offs, or clothing with studs or buttons that may cause injury in the event of a collision). Please note that this restriction on jewelry includes earrings even if the earrings are covered with tape or a similar material.
2. Proper fitting shoes, proper type of shoe for surface.
3. Ample water supply and sufficient number of rest breaks and length of rest breaks.
4. Be mindful of any inherent risks in conducting activities where there is a significant mismatch between participants in terms of age or size. Under no circumstances should a parent act as a participant in any scrimmage or practice activities, and any involvement by the assigned coach should be limited to serving an instructional purpose such as modeling good soccer technique.
5. Adherence to SSA Weather Policy guidelines and recommendations found [HERE](#).

First Aid

- Each team will have a signed medical release found [HERE](#) for each player available at all times. This document serves to protect coaches and team managers from any financial obligation related to the provision of medical care to a player in their care
- Always have a phone ready for emergency calls
- Be aware of any special medical needs, allergies, asthmatic conditions, etc. of your players as listed on the club Medical Release Form
- Provide ample water breaks, especially during the hotter months and follow the guidelines in the club's Weather Policy information found [HERE](#).
- Have a well-stocked first aid kit handy at all times
- Always err on the side of caution
- Inform parents, should they not be in attendance, of player injury incurred during practice or games
- Ask for a Doctor's letter approving a child's resumption of soccer activity after any absence due to significant injury that required a Doctor's care
- Any player that is bleeding should be removed from play until bleeding has stopped and the wound covered

Emergency Action Plan

In the event that an individual connected to an SSA team participating in a scheduled activity requires emergency medical treatment, the following steps should be followed:

- The coach should call 911 immediately and stay with the individual through the emergency.
- Information to be provided over the phone in case of emergency: 1. Name and phone number you are calling from 2. Exact location of emergency and directions (street names, buildings, landmarks, entry into building, specific areas, etc.) 3. Type of injury or illness 4. Condition of patient(s) and type of aid being provided 5. Number of people injured 6. Other information as requested and be the last one to hang up
- Once the call has been completed, the coach should nominate an individual to wait at the entrance to the facility to assist medical personnel with directions to the location of the medical emergency.
- Following the incident, a short summary of the incident should be communicated to the Operations Manager, Sean Chamberlain, as soon as possible, either by email (schamberlain@ssaelite.com) or by phone (404-395-9703), with a more-detailed Incident Report (found [HERE](#)) shared within 72 hours of the incident.

Concussion Issues

Concussions in sports are a serious issue with long term risks and complications if not treated properly. Always remember “When in doubt, sit them out!” Recognizing the signs and symptoms of a concussion is the key factor as to whether a child should return to play and the training program provides valuable information to assure the athlete is ready to get back into the game safely. US Soccer has implemented the 'Recognize to Recover' program:

<http://www.recognizetorecover.org/head-and-brain/#concussions>

In addition, US Soccer is placing the following limitations on heading:

1. No player in a U11 and Under program may head the ball, either in practice or games.
2. No 10-year-old playing in a U12 and Under program may head the ball, either in practice or games.
3. Players in the U12 and U13 and Under programs are allowed to head the ball in games, but are limited to 30 minutes of practice per week, with no more than 20 headers per week in total.
4. An 11 or 12-year-old player playing in a U14 and Under program should abide by these restrictions.

CDC's Heads Up Concussions In Youth Sports

- A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works.
- A concussion is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body.
- A concussion can happen even if you haven't been knocked out.
- If you think you have a concussion, you should not return to play on the day of the injury and not until a health care professional says you are OK to return.

Coaches: To access the short CDC online training course for concussion, please click [HERE](#), then click on 'Launch the Course' on the right side of the screen. When you have completed the course, please click [HERE](#) and complete the Form.

Concussion Notification and Return to Play Form

Click [HERE](#) to download.

In the event that a participant in an SSA-sponsored activity displays any symptoms of concussion, the first page of the above form must be completed and given to the participant's parent/guardian. Once the participant has been assessed by qualified medical personnel, the second and third pages must be completed and returned to SSA (by

emailing to the Operations Manager as listed on the Contacts page on the club website, or by mailing to the office address listed on the same page.)

Sudden Cardiac Arrest Issues

Sudden Cardiac Arrest Facts

1. Sudden Cardiac Arrest is the leading cause of death in student athletes 19 years of age or younger. SCA occurs when the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops beating. This cuts off blood flow to the brain and other vital organs. SCA is fatal if not treated immediately.
2. "Youth" covered are all athletes 17 years of age or younger that wish to practice for or compete in soccer activities organized by Georgia Soccer and its Affiliates.
3. Any of the following may cause SCA: a) Structural heart disease. This may or may not be present from birth b) Electrical heart disease. This is a problem with the heart's electrical system that controls the heartbeat c) Situational causes. These may be people with completely normal hearts who are either are hit in the chest or develop a heart infection
4. Warning signs in your family that you or your youth athlete may be at high risk of SCA: a) A blood relative who suddenly and unexpectedly dies before age 50 b) Any of the following conditions: cardiomyopathy, long QT syndrome, Marfan syndrome, or other rhythm problems of the heart
5. Warning signs of SCA. If any of these things happen with exercise, see your health care professional: a) Chest pain/discomfort b) Unexplained fainting/near fainting or dizziness c) Unexplained tiredness, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing d) Unusually fast or racing heart beats
6. The youth athlete who faints or passes out before, during, or after an athletic activity MUST be removed from the activity. Before returning to the activity, the youth athlete must be seen by a Ga. Licensed Physician or Cardiologist and cleared in writing.
7. If the youth athlete's biological parent, sibling or child has had a SCA, then the youth athlete must be removed from activity. Before returning to the activity, the youth athlete must be seen by a Ga. Licensed Physician or Cardiologist and cleared in writing.
8. Any young athlete with any of these warning signs CANNOT participate in practices, scrimmages or competition until cleared by a Ga. Licensed Physician or Cardiologist.

9. Other reasons to be seen by a Ga. Licensed Physician or Cardiologist would be a heart murmur, high blood pressure, or prior heart evaluation by a physician.

10. Health Care Professionals (HCP) who may evaluate and clear youth athletes. They are a Georgia licensed physician (MD) or Cardiologist. Clearance must be provided in writing to the Team official before the athlete can return to the activity.

11. Despite everyone's best efforts, sometimes a young athlete will experience SCA. If you have had CPR training, you may know the term "Chain of Survival." The Chain of Survival helps anyone survive SCA.

12. Using an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) can save the life of a child with SCA. Depending on where a young athlete is during an activity, there may or may not be an AED close by. Many, but not all, facilities have AEDs. The AEDs may be near the office. Look around at a sporting event to see if you see one. If you are involved in community sports, look around to see if there is an AED nearby.

Dealing with a suspected SCA

To view a short US Soccer presentation on how to deal with a suspected SCA in a participant, please click [HERE](#).

If you witness a person experiencing a SCA: First, remain calm. Follow the links in the Chain of Survival:

a) Early recognition - Assess child for responsiveness. Does the child answer if you call his/her name? If no, then attempt to assess pulse. If no pulse is felt or if you are unsure, call for help "someone dial 911".

b) Early CPR - Begin CPR immediately or early defibrillation (which is the use of an AED). If an AED is available, send someone to get it immediately. Turn it on, attach it to the child and follow the instructions. If an AED is not available, continue CPR until EMS arrives

Sudden Cardiac Arrest Notification and Return to Play Form

Click [HERE](#) to download.

In the event that a participant in an SSA-sponsored activity displays symptoms of SCA, the first page of the above form must be completed and given to the participant's parent/guardian. Once the participant has been assessed by qualified medical personnel, the second and third pages must be completed and returned to SSA (by emailing to the Operations Manager as listed on the Contacts page on the club website, or by mailing to the office address listed on the same page.)

Preventing Bullying

Approximately 45 million children and youth participate in sports in the U.S every year. Most young children cite “having fun” as their main reason for participating in sports. In addition to having fun and being with friends, other motivations include: improving skills, acquiring fitness, and experiencing the excitement of game play.

Participation in sports has many physical, mental and emotional benefits. In addition, playing sports positively affects personal development in areas such as self-esteem and leadership. Participation also builds character by teaching sportsmanship and discipline. Athletes who participate in sports develop a sense of belonging outside of the family and school community. Evidence shows that the quality of the coach is a large determining factor for the magnitude of these gains.

To view the US Center for Safesport handbook on how to prevent bullying, please click [HERE](#).

This handbook is designed to educate coaches on the nature of bullying and its impact on children and youth, as well as the coaches’ role in preventing its occurrence on their teams. Prepared by Prevent Child Abuse America and the United States Center for Safe Sport, this handbook is intended for coaches working with athletes between the ages of 6-18.

The handbook is divided into four sections:

- 1) Understanding bullying behavior, with particular focus on vulnerable populations
- 2) Strategies to prevent bullying behavior
- 3) Strategies for responding to bullying behavior
- 4) Potential bullying scenarios to use in team discussions

A child’s first “team” is their family, but throughout life they will belong to many teams, such as study groups, clubs, and work teams. As age and athletic ability increase, so does youth involvement in organized sport. To that end, highly competitive athletes are often spending more hours a week interacting with their coaches and teammates than they are with their families.

A coach’s influence cannot be overemphasized. Coaches build the skills that athletes need on and off the field. Coaching offers a unique opportunity to help athletes succeed in sports while simultaneously teaching valuable life lessons.

Inclement Weather

- Make use of the club's Weather Policy as it relates to hot weather, cold weather, air quality issues, and lightning.
- Just because the fields may not be closed does not imply that they are safe to play or practice on. Use good judgment and always make use of club resources such as field status updates, and website pages.

In conclusion, coaches and other club personnel should always keep the following things in mind:

- Ensure that you are familiar with all club policies and procedures, including our Weather Policy found [HERE](#).
- Provide adequate supervision
- Use sound planning of practices and skill progression
- Minimize inherent risks by warning players of dangerous techniques
- Provide a safe playing environment
- Evaluate players' injuries and physical abilities to determine limits of participation
- Be prepared to provide emergency first aid
- Enroll in GYSA coaching courses and continue your training and education
- Familiarize yourself with SSA, US Club Soccer, US Soccer, and FIFA rules and regulations
- The risks of the game are tolerable as long as coaches, volunteers or administrators act sensibly and these risks are recognized, appreciated, understood and willfully accepted by the participants.

Prohibited Conduct Policy

It shall be the policy of SSA, in accordance with US Soccer 'Safe Soccer' Policies, that no participant or non-participant in any SSA event or activity shall harass, abuse or molest any other participant or non-participant in any SSA event or activity. This policy prohibits not only actions that are severe enough to be potentially unlawful but also conduct and comments that are not severe enough to violate state or federal law but that are still inappropriate conduct by participants or non-participants in any SSA event or activity. Additionally, no participant shall, in any SSA event or activity, harass, discriminate, or otherwise abuse, any other participant or non-participant based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age or disability.

Furthermore, no participant should imply or threaten that advances or request for sexual favors (or refusal thereof) will have any effect on an individual's selection, advancement, or any other condition of participation in any SSA program. All such conduct is strictly prohibited and will bring prompt and certain disciplinary action. No one has the authority to engage in this kind of unacceptable behavior, and SSA will not tolerate it.

If a participant believes that he or she has been subjected to harassment or intimidation in violation of this policy, or a participant knows about it happening to others, the participant should, without fear of reprisal or retaliation, promptly report the incident following the reporting procedures described below. Any form of child abuse, as defined by Georgia State law, including, but not limited to, child molestation, is prohibited by this policy. Reporting of child abuse and molestation is required by Georgia Law. Any instance must be reported as soon as practicable to law enforcement. Retaliation or reprisal is expressly prohibited in any form against anyone for filing a complaint in good faith under this policy or for assisting in the inquiry into a complaint.

Inappropriate Conduct: Protect the Child and Others

- Two adults should be present during all scheduled activities
- Coaches should take care to never be alone with one player (who is not a family member) in any setting, including a car. If two adults cannot be present, then ensure that there are at least three people (including yourself) present
- The use of profane, offensive, insulting, and/or abusive language or gesture on the field of play or in the field's general area is prohibited and will result in disciplinary actions against violators
- Club personnel shall never verbally demean, negatively label, or ridicule a child based on weight, gender, race, sexual orientation, or any other identifying characteristic (including a lack of soccer skill)
- Coaches shall not buy gifts or give money to players
- Coaches should avoid "over-socializing" with players outside of practice or in other "team building" settings
- All suspected abuse and/or inappropriate conduct observations shall be reported to the appropriate authorities as mandated under Georgia law and to the Executive Director and Operations Manager for the club (as found under 'Contacts' on the www.ssaswarm.com website)

Definitions of Abuse

Physical Abuse - The non-accidental physical injury of a child

Neglect - The failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs.

Sexual Abuse - The exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of an adult or older child. Sexual abuse is most commonly perpetrated by an individual known to the victim, rarely is the offender a stranger. One-third of all sexual abuse is perpetrated by another child. Sexual abuse includes touching offenses: fondling, sodomy, rape; and non-touching offenses: child prostitution, indecent exposure and exhibitionism, utilizing the internet as a vehicle for exploitation.

Emotional Abuse - A pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. It frequently occurs as verbal abuse, but can also include the following: rejection, terrorizing, shameful forms of punishment, withholding physical and emotional contact; developmentally inappropriate expectations.

Education and Training

Online Training for Coaches and Team Managers

The US Center for Safesport offers free online training for US Soccer-affiliated youth organizations in three areas:

1. Sexual Misconduct Awareness
2. Mandatory Reporting Awareness
3. Emotional and Physical Misconduct Awareness

Information on how to access this course through the Got Sport National Registration Platform will be shared with coaches at the start of each season.

Courses for Parents

<https://athletesafety.org/training/index>

Designed for the parents of athletes of all ages, this free course from the US Center for SafeSport explains the issues of misconduct in sport and helps parents ensure their children have a positive and safe sport experience.

Courses for Players

The modules are age-based: Preschool, Grades K-2, Grades 3-5, Middle School and High School, and are anywhere from 10-20 minutes in length. These modules can be found at athletesafety.org.

A parent/guardian must first create an account in order to give consent for their child to access the training, and then select the appropriate module for their child's age.

<https://athletesafety.org/training/index>

Red Flags for Grooming Behavior in Sexual Abuse Instances

(from www.d2l.org)

Grooming is a process by which offenders gradually draw victims into a sexual relationship and maintain that relationship in secrecy. At the same time, offenders may also fill roles within the victims' families that make them trusted and valued family friends.

One of the scariest things about grooming is that it is highly successful, allowing offenders to slowly overcome natural boundaries long before actual sexual abuse occurs. The key is to recognize red flag behaviors and to minimize opportunity for abuse.

Here are some red flag behaviors to watch for:

1. Targeting specific kids for special attention, activities, or gifts. Some offenders show preference for a particular gender, age, or "type."
2. Slowly isolating a kid from family members and friends: physically and emotionally. This could include finding reasons for isolated, one-on-one interactions (sleepovers, camping trips, day activities, etc.), or undermining relationships with parents and friends to show that "no one understands you like I do."
3. Gradually crossing physical boundaries. Full frontal hugs that last too long, making kids sit in their laps, "accidental" touches of private areas – all of these are causes for concern. In some cases, offenders have engaged in partially clothed tickle sessions, showered with kids, or slept in the same bed with them.
4. Encouraging a kid to keep secrets from family members. The shame and fear associated with child sexual abuse make it easy for offenders to enforce secrecy in this area as well, keeping abuse "just between us."

We once heard a great analogy concerning the quote, "When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things." There are many adults who love to interact and play with children. However, adults who seem overly involved in the lives of children, who prefer relationships with children over relationships with adults, and who continually seek out alone time with children should raise red flags with both parents and organizations.

One of the best defenses against grooming behaviors is to start talking to kids early and often about their bodies, sex, and boundaries. Let them know if ANYONE makes them feel uncomfortable, whether it's a family member, friend, or youth worker, they can come to you any time.

Limits to Physical Contact/One-on-One Interactions

Physical contact should be limited to that necessary and appropriate to teach a skill, treat an injury, console or congratulate a player. In the instance of teaching a skill, minimal contact should be involved and none which places the adult in a position of power or intimidation.

A volunteer/coach (other than a parent or legal guardian) alone in a one-on-one situation with a player is generally inappropriate or may be misconstrued as such. If an adult is alone with a player then the adult should do so in a visibly public site.

There are those volunteers who are expressive by using their hands to give a pat on the back, a rub of the head, or other acts of touching to show appreciation or indicate a job well done. In a public setting those acts are understood. Georgia Soccer/SSA acknowledges there are appropriate times and places for showing such affection.

However, there should be no such touching in a one-on-one situation. Volunteers/staff should act in a defensive mode so that there is no air of impropriety. During an out-of-town tournament, a non-parent/custodian adult shall not share any sleeping arrangement with a player or players.

Adults should respect the privacy of players. Adults should provide privacy to players in changing rooms, showers, and bathrooms.

Suspicious behavior by an adult or claims of a sexual nature shall be reported to law enforcement.

Molestation can be real, or the allegation can be a tool of revenge. Molesters can be registered at the local police department or they can exist for years without detection. Checking through records may or may not reveal a molester. Therefore, it is everyone's concern to deal with this issue.

It is US Soccer's goal to exclude participation by those who have committed violent crimes or crimes that may bring an unnecessary risk to the health and well-being of the participants. SSA will not knowingly allow the participation of anyone that has a history of molestation or other criminal activity wherein the health of kids may be jeopardized. On the other hand, Georgia Soccer will preserve individual rights and not allow for unjustified pursuit of rumor based claims on a person's character.

Reporting of Abuse

Mandatory Reporting

Following the recent USA Gymnastics scandal, Congress enacted a new federal law intended to require coaches and team managers to report any suspicion of child abuse, including sexual abuse. The new law, known as the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017, became effective February 14, 2018.

According to the U.S. Center for SafeSport, the Act “extends the duty to report suspected child abuse, including sexual abuse, within 24 hours to certain adults who are authorized to interact with minor or amateur athletes at a facility under the jurisdiction of a national governing body,” including U.S. Soccer.

Any individual who is required, but fails, to report suspected child abuse will now be subject to criminal penalties. Club coaches (volunteer and paid), and team managers are considered mandatory reporters under federal and state law. To better protect children from the various forms of abuse and neglect, GA DFCS provides a free online training resource for mandated reporters:

https://www.prosolutionstraining.com/store/product/?tProductVersion_id=1093

Reporting Procedures

A complaint by a victim or their representative, or a report by another person who is aware of a possible offense, is to be made to the police or local law enforcement.

A person, other than a mandated reporter, with knowledge of an incident having reasonable cause to believe that an illegal act has been committed by a participant or non-participant, or that the health, safety and welfare of participants is at risk is encouraged to report their concerns to law enforcement or child welfare services.

Club Coaching Staff (Volunteer and Paid), Designated Team Managers

Club coaches (volunteer and paid), and team managers, as mandatory reporters under federal law, **shall report or cause reports of such abuse to be made within 24 hours if there is reasonable cause to believe that suspected child abuse has occurred.**

Contact Information: Department of Family and Children Services

Reports are taken 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-855-GACHILD / 1-855-422-4453, or online:

<https://dfcs.georgia.gov/child-abuse-neglect>

Additionally, any instance of suspected harassment, abuse, or molestation should also be reported to the club, via the Executive Director and Operations Manager (using the information posted on the www.ssaelite.com website under 'Contacts'.) All information submitted will be kept in strictest confidence to the extent that the law provides.

Enforcement

In order to provide for a process that is materially free of bias and conflicts of interest, any allegation of misconduct is subject to a review/grievance process pursuant to US Soccer Bylaw 704.25.

Initially, the process, and any decision made under the process regarding a complaint, is subject to review by a committee made up of club board members are defined in the club's Bylaws.

Furthermore, the review/grievance process, and any decision made under the process regarding a complaint, is subject to further review by US Soccer, or by its assigned provider.