

PLAYERS HEALTH GUIDEBOOK

VIOLENCE PREVENTION

AND RESPONSE AT
YOUTH SPORT EVENTS



INTRODUCTION

Sports should be a joyful, formative experience for children, centered on teamwork, skill-building, and fun. Yet too often, adults undermine this by bringing aggressive, even violent behaviors to the sidelines and fields. When parents and coaches focus excessively on winning or engage in hostile confrontations, they create a stressful, intimidating environment that strips away the playfulness that makes sport so rewarding. This intense atmosphere can discourage kids from participating and damage their self-esteem. By prioritizing healthy competition and respect over heated disputes, adults can help preserve the true spirit of youth sports: a positive, inclusive space where kids can develop and enjoy themselves without fear.

Players Health recognizes that running and hosting opportunities for youth to enjoy sports and healthy competition is an integral part of what sports organizations do. Keeping these events and places free from violence and poor behavior by spectators and attendees is essential.

Who Should Use This Guide

This guide focuses primarily on local or regional independent, small to medium-sized sporting events at the youth level (under 18) operated by a league, local sport club or community serving youth sport program. Scholastic, collegiate and professional event operating entities should refer to their state associations, the NCAA or other governing bodies for best practices and guidance in dealing with violence in sport prevention and response.

Consider the following about your sport organization...

- » Do you host games, playdays, tournaments or other competitions which spectators are invited to attend?
- » Are you primarily staffed with volunteers, but might have paid staff in attendance during these events?
- » Is hosting sporting events and games a part of what your organization does but not its primary function?
- » Do you want to protect those at your event from dangerous or violent behavior, including looking out for the safety of officials?

THEN THIS GUIDE IS FOR YOU.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED

This guide should not be used in isolation but in conjunction with your entire athlete safety program and policies, facility safety policy, and other on-site protocols you may have such as inclement weather, sudden cardiac arrest and AED response, etc.

The purpose of this guide is primarily to address steps your organization can take to proactively mitigate chances of violence at your event and what to do if there is an incident, including one in which firearms or weapons are involved.

This includes singular games, multi-game settings, tournaments, and any time outside spectators are welcomed on-site to enjoy competitive activities between sport teams.

This guide is organized into two parts:

- » **Part 1: Preparation**
- » **Part 2: Response**

This guide is meant to provide an overview and compiled directory of best practices and resources for preventing violence at sporting events; it is for informational purposes only. Each sport program is responsible for the appropriate application of the information herein. Many variables are not, and cannot, be addressed in this brief publication. This guide does not replace any certifications or official event operator training and is not a comprehensive report on violence prevention and response; it merely seeks to point readers in the direction of deeper resources and develop a general awareness of best practices for approaching violence prevention and response in the sport event setting. The guide does not provide legal, medical, or any other advice.



PART 1: PREPARATION

Culture First.....	5
Policy Next	9
Event Day Preparation.....	11
Staff to Participant Ratios.....	13
Training	14

PROTECTING YOUR EVENTS FROM VIOLENCE

When thinking about ensuring appropriate behavior at your sport event, it is helpful to align your approach with two important statements. They are:

- » We're not going to allow aggressive or violent behavior at our events.
- » We're going to do something about it if it does occur.

Having this mindset can guide your preventative and responsive actions.

CULTURE FIRST

CULTURE=THE WAY WE DO THINGS HERE

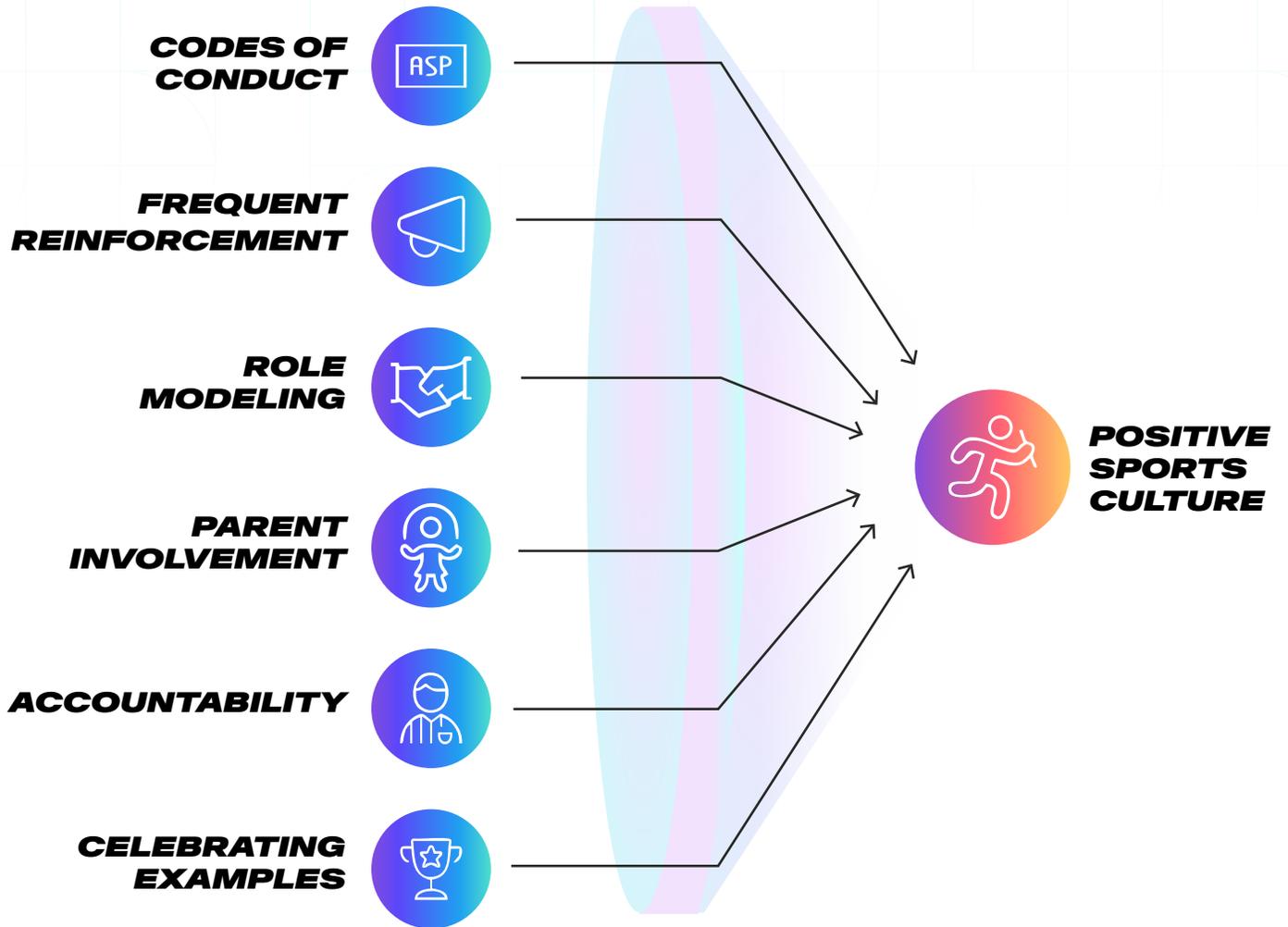
Protecting your event from dangerous or violent behavior begins with prevention. Prevention begins with defining and overtly communicating how anyone attending or participating is expected to behave. What are your organization's core values? How are participants (including spectators) expected to show respect to officials, opponents, coaches, and fans? Positivity, respect and sportsmanship can be sensed from the moment people arrive at your site.

Youth sports organizations can effectively communicate their culture by embedding core values into every aspect of their programming. Here are some key strategies:

1. **Clear Codes of Conduct:** Develop a well-defined code of conduct that outlines the organization's values, such as respect, sportsmanship, teamwork, and safety. Ensure all participants—players, parents, coaches, and officials—agree to these principles by signing off on them at the start of the season.
2. **Frequent Reinforcement:** Regularly remind everyone involved about these values through meetings, newsletters, social media posts, and event announcements. Reinforcing expectations throughout the season keeps the culture top-of-mind and helps build a supportive environment.
3. **Role Modeling by Coaches and Officials:** Coaches and officials should model the organization's values both on and off the field. Their behavior sets a powerful example for young athletes, demonstrating respect for the game, for competitors, and for each other.
4. **Parent Involvement and Education:** Host preseason meetings with parents to discuss the organization's culture, stressing how they can support a positive experience. Encouraging positive sideline behavior and zero tolerance for aggressive confrontations can greatly influence the atmosphere.
5. **Accountability and Consistent Enforcement:** Ensure everyone is aware of the consequences of violating the code of conduct. Enforcing standards consistently promotes fairness and helps create a safe, respectful environment.
6. **Celebrating Positive Examples:** Recognize and reward instances of sportsmanship, teamwork, and respectful behavior. Highlighting these moments during games or on social media reinforces the organization's values and encourages players to embody them.

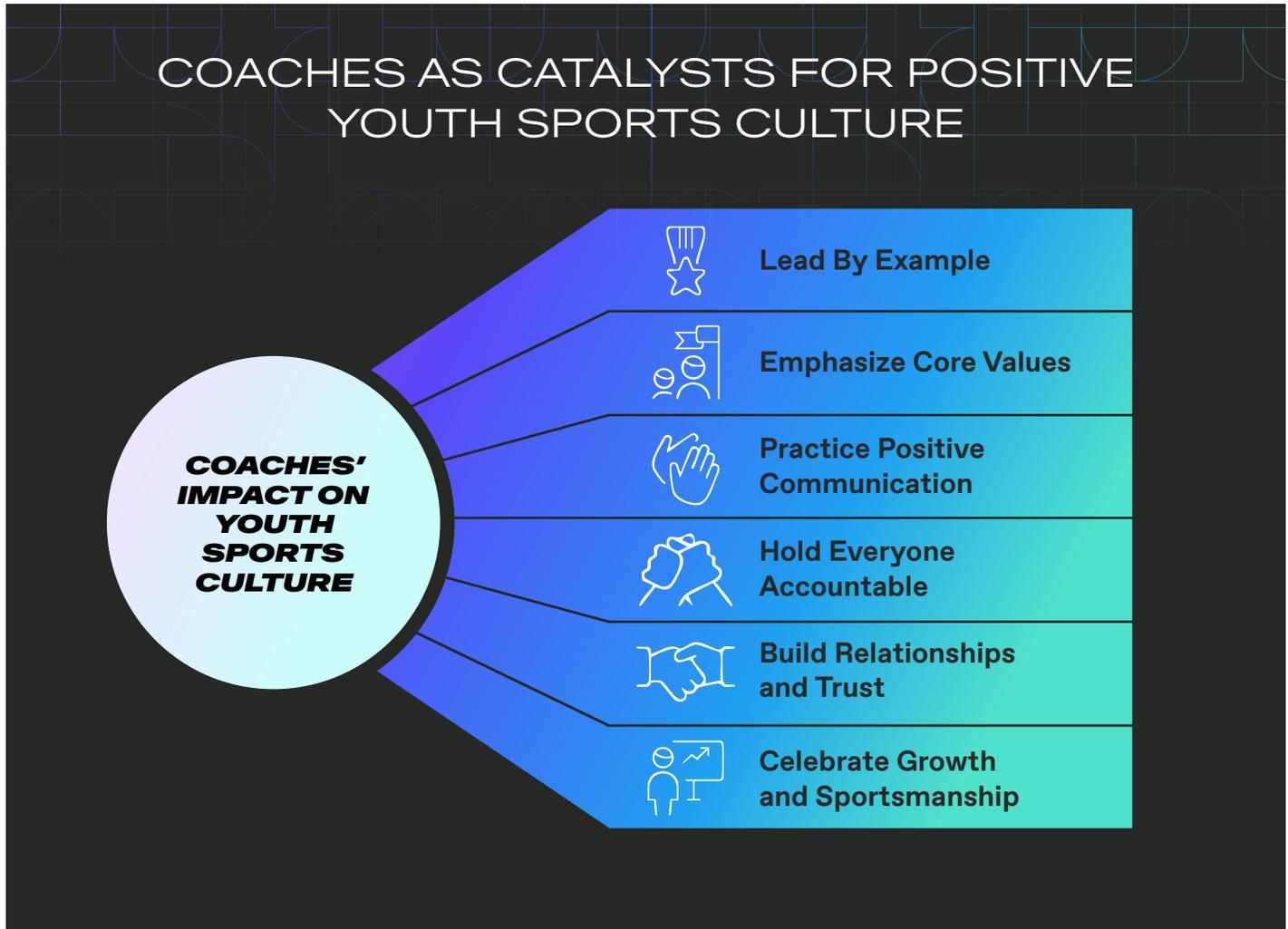
By embedding these practices, youth sports organizations can create a culture that prioritizes personal growth, mutual respect, and a love for the game.

BUILDING A RESPECTFUL EVENT ENVIRONMENT THROUGH CULTURE



A WORD ABOUT THE POWER OF COACHES

Coaches play an incredibly powerful role in shaping and demonstrating culture in youth sport. As mentors and role models, they set the tone for behavior, attitude, and values on and off the field, guiding young athletes not just in the game, but in life skills. When coaches set the right tone, they reinforce respect for everyone involved in the game, opponents and officials included, making them powerful influences in preventing bad behavior in sport.



Here are some ways coaches can make a positive impact on youth sports culture:

- 1. Lead by Example:** Coaches who consistently demonstrate respect, patience, and integrity set a strong example for players. When coaches handle wins humbly and losses graciously, they teach athletes to value effort and improvement over results.
- 2. Emphasize Core Values Over Winning:** Focusing on qualities like teamwork, perseverance, and respect encourages players to prioritize personal growth and collaboration. Coaches who recognize these behaviors create an environment where young athletes feel valued for their character as much as their performance.

3. **Practice Positive Communication:** Coaches can influence culture by using constructive feedback and encouraging language. When coaches celebrate effort, resilience, and good sportsmanship in addition to skill, they build players' confidence and foster a positive, inclusive atmosphere.
4. **Hold Everyone Accountable:** Setting clear expectations and reinforcing them helps create consistency in how athletes, parents, and coaches act. When coaches address unsportsmanlike behavior quickly and fairly, it reinforces a culture of respect and accountability.
5. **Build Relationships and Trust:** Coaches who genuinely connect with their players foster a sense of belonging and trust. By understanding each player's strengths, challenges, and personal goals, coaches can create an environment where athletes feel safe and motivated.
6. **Celebrate Growth and Sportsmanship:** Recognizing moments of sportsmanship, effort, and improvement—even in losses—helps players understand that success is about more than the scoreboard. Highlighting these values in practices and games reinforces the organization's culture in tangible ways.

When coaches prioritize and model these cultural values, their example teaches players lessons that extend beyond the game, shaping their attitudes and interactions for life.



POLICY NEXT

Your organization should have a prohibited conduct policy in place*. This policy defines any unsafe and harmful conduct that is unallowable by participants in your program and must be reported through your reporting mechanism. Incidents of prohibited conduct must be dealt with according to your program's policies for responding to reports and resolving them.

To protect your event and competition spaces, Players Health recommends adding language to your prohibited conduct policy that states that anyone on-site at your competitions or events, including parents and spectators, are considered to be under this policy for the duration of their time as your guest and anywhere being used to facilitate the event, including parking lots.

**Note: Players Health provides sport organizations with templates to create this policy.*

MAKING THE POLICY ACTIONABLE

A policy is only effective if people know about it. Here are some suggested ways you can inform all participants of the prohibited conduct policy and their responsibility to avoid these behaviors and report any violations they may observe.

Coaches:

- » Accepting a code of conduct every season
- » Include education on prohibited conduct in pre-season training
- » Reminders of game-day behavior
- » Consider coach trainings in positive coaching such as that offered by the Positive Coaching Alliance

Players:

- » Coaches should reinforce respect for rules, opponents, officials, teammates and themselves
- » With older athletes an athlete code of conduct can be discussed and used
- » Have clear, consistent consequences for players who do not respect others



Parents:

- » Communicate at registration; present code of conduct for them to sign at each registration
- » Remind throughout the season prior to game-days or tournaments
- » Include reminders on any online ticket platforms or digital tools

On-Site Guests (including spectators and fans):

This can be a challenging audience as spectators may not receive regular communication from your program and may not understand your expectations prior to attending the event.

- » Include reminders on any online ticket platforms or digital tools guests might use.
- » If possible, schedule PA announcements reinforcing your policies.
- » Post visible signage in multiple locations alerting spectators to expected behaviors. Include a QR code to your prohibited conduct information
 - This can be presented as a Spectator Code of Conduct with signage alerting spectators that upon entry to the premises they are considered to agree to the code.
 - Include your organization's link to report poor conduct*

See the appendix of this guide for sample language for signage.

**Note: Players Health provides sport organizations with guidance on establishing a reporting process.*



EVENT DAY PREPARATION

STAFF

Event day preparation is the foundation of a safe and successful youth sports event. A well-structured plan and clear communication among all staff and volunteers are critical to ensuring a positive experience for participants, spectators, and families.

PRE-EVENT SAFETY BRIEFING

On the day of the event, a mandatory safety briefing should be conducted for all staff and volunteers. This meeting serves to assign roles, clarify responsibilities, and ensure everyone understands their part in maintaining safety and organization. However, this safety briefing should not replace periodic training, education, and mock incident response walkthrough.

Pro Tip 1:

Many coaches, parents, guardians, and volunteers within your organization are first responders (i.e., law enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, etc.). Identifying these members of your organization at the time of registration will allow you to be aware of their presence at any given event, as well as an opportunity to enlist as potential volunteers on your safety team.

Pro Tip 2:

Deterrence is a viable option to augment event safety measures within the violence prevention/response context. Posting a highly visible sign at entrances akin to, “Off-Duty Police Officers, Please Check in with Staff”, will serve an effective deterrent to would-be disrupters and bad actors. This will also offer your event an opportunity to identify additional first responders outside of your organization that are present at the event.

NOTE: First responders are bound by a Duty to Act when off duty.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE SAFETY BRIEFING INCLUDE:

1. Review of Safety Protocols:

- » Cover all emergency procedures, including evacuation plans, communication protocols, and the chain of command.
- » Provide a focused review of incident responses to verbal, physical, and firearm/weapons; scenarios to prepare staff for high-risk situations.

2. Role Assignments:

- » Clearly define individual responsibilities, from coaches and event staff to security and volunteers, to eliminate confusion during the event.
- » Assign specialized roles, such as crowd control, first aid responders, and emergency point-of-contact personnel. This would be ideal, however, limited staffing may require individuals shouldering multiple responsibilities.

3. Venue and Equipment Overview:

- » Walk through the event space, highlighting emergency exits, first aid stations, equipment, storage areas, and any potential hazards or suspicious circumstances/individuals.

4. Communication Channels:

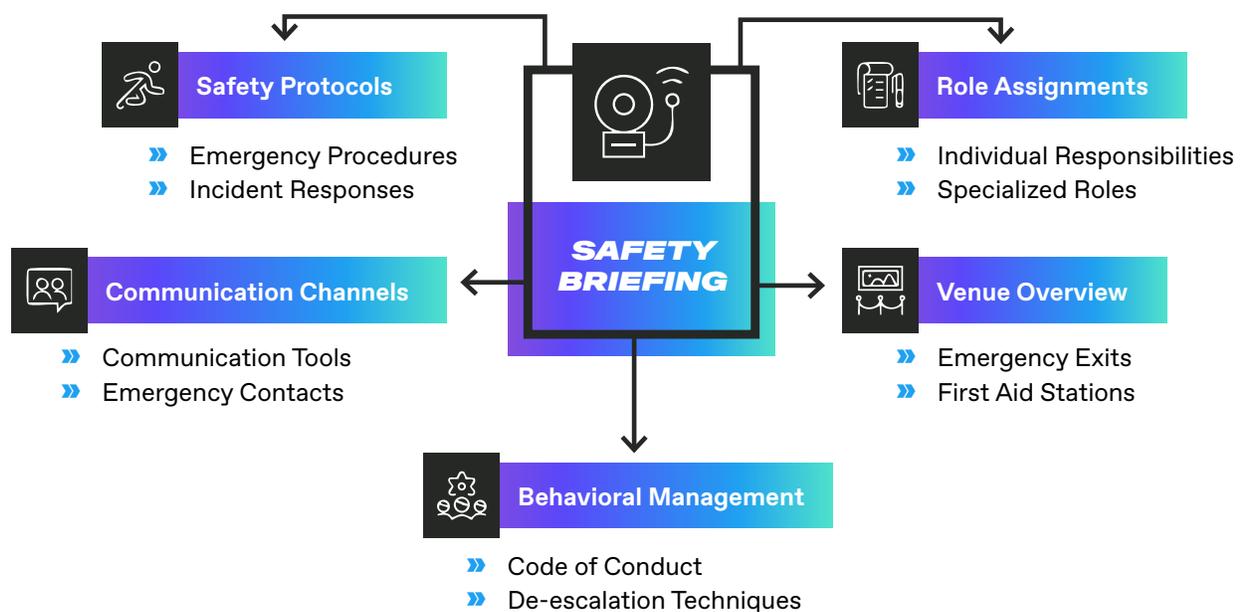
- » Ensure all staff have access to radios, phones, or other communication tools for immediate reporting of incidents.
- » During an emergency, keep communications simple and to the point. DO NOT assign any one specific staff member the sole responsibility of calling 911 for emergency law enforcement or other first responder response. All event staff should be empowered to request police or medical assistance. Assuming that one specific staff member has the sole responsibility of calling 911 may delay the emergency response.
 - Please note that in the event of an actual emergency within the context of violence, the police dispatcher will likely stay on the line with the 911 caller until police arrive. This is important to note, as other event staff members will need to take over the 911 caller's emergency plan role during the incident.
- » Share emergency contact numbers for event managers, medical responders, and local authorities.

5. Behavioral and Conflict Management:

- » Reinforce the importance of adhering to the organization's code of conduct and outline procedures for addressing disruptive behavior.
- » Review basic de-escalation techniques to help staff handle disputes calmly and effectively.

By conducting a thorough pre-event safety briefing, event organizers can foster a culture of preparedness, ensuring that all personnel are equipped to handle any challenges that arise. This proactive approach lays the groundwork for a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.

Keep in mind that in the event of an actual emergency incident, chaos, stress, and rapidly evolving unpredictability will seem overwhelming. All event staff will revert to their training during the emergency, and we cannot emphasize enough the importance of ongoing training and preparedness.



STAFF TO PARTICIPANT RATIOS

In youth sports, maintaining appropriate ratios of adults to participants is essential for creating a safe, organized, and enjoyable experience. Ratios should consider both the number of events happening simultaneously and the expected attendance to ensure adequate supervision, support, and crowd control.

Here's how ratios can be organized effectively based on these factors:

1. **Player-to-Coach Ratios:** Each team or group should have a manageable player-to-coach ratio (e.g., 1 coach per 10 players for younger kids, 1 coach per 15-20 players for older age groups) to ensure athletes get individual attention, proper instruction, and supervision. When multiple teams or events occur at once, it's critical to maintain this ratio for each team independently.
2. **Event Staff and Safety Supervisors:** For large events with multiple games happening at the same time, additional support staff or safety supervisors should be present to manage the overall event space. This includes personnel for crowd control, emergency response, and general event oversight. A good rule is to have at least 1-2 safety supervisors or event staff per 100 attendees, adjusting based on the venue layout and complexity.
3. **Parent/Guardian Ratios for Younger Athletes:** For younger age groups, having a higher ratio of parents or guardians present (e.g., 1 adult per 1-2 children) is often necessary to manage needs like bathroom breaks or assistance with equipment.
4. **Spectator Management and Security:** As attendance numbers increase, organizations may need additional security or volunteer staff to monitor entrances, parking areas, and spectator zones to maintain a safe environment. A ratio of one security or volunteer staff per 50-100 spectators is often recommended for crowd control, particularly in larger, public events.
5. **First Aid and Medical Support:** At events with substantial attendance, at least one certified first aid responder should be present, with more responders or medical personnel as attendance and event numbers increase. A ratio of 1 medical responder per 100-200 people, or 1 per 4 fields in larger multi-field events, can help ensure rapid response in case of injuries.

By planning these ratios carefully, youth sports organizations can create an environment where each participant is supported, crowds are well-managed, and the focus remains on the enjoyment and safety of the games.

TRAINING

Effective event day preparation for youth sports requires thorough training across multiple roles to ensure smooth operations, safety, and a positive experience for all participants. Here's a breakdown of essential training areas to consider for staff, volunteers, and coaches:



Safety and Emergency Protocols:

- » Staff, coaches, and volunteers should be trained in safety protocols, including emergency evacuation plans, communication procedures for emergencies, and crowd control techniques.
- » CPR and first aid training are essential for designated personnel, especially for larger events, to handle any injuries or medical incidents swiftly.

Role-Specific Training:

- » Coaches: Coaches should be well-versed in team management, sportsmanship, positive communication, and game-day expectations. Training should emphasize reinforcing core values and handling issues like player conduct or sideline disputes.
- » Officials: Referees and officials should undergo rules and conduct training for the specific sport. They should also be trained in conflict de-escalation, as they may encounter intense interactions with coaches, players, or spectators.
- » Event Staff and Volunteers: Train staff and volunteers in their specific roles, including ticketing, registration, field setup, security, and concessions. Clear guidelines on handling unexpected situations, such as lost items or crowd management, are essential.

Communication and Conflict Resolution:

- » All personnel should be trained in effective communication and conflict resolution. They should know how to calmly address disputes among spectators, parents, or players and when to escalate situations to a supervisor.
- » Encourage positive, proactive communication between coaches, officials, and parents to foster a collaborative, supportive atmosphere.

Equipment and Facility Management:

- » Training in equipment handling (e.g., setting up goals, scoreboards, and safety barriers) and understanding the venue layout is important for a smooth setup.
- » Staff should know where all resources are located, including first aid kits, fire extinguishers, restrooms, and exits, and how to access or manage them during the event.



Crowd Control and Spectator Management:

- » Volunteers and security should be trained in crowd control techniques, especially for larger events. This includes managing entry and exit points, handling ticketing or check-ins, and monitoring spectator zones to prevent overcrowding or unsafe situations.

Technology and Scorekeeping:

- » For events requiring scorekeeping or technology use (e.g., digital scoreboards, timing systems, or online streaming), designated individuals should be trained in advance to avoid technical difficulties and ensure accuracy.

Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity:

- » Training in cultural awareness and sensitivity can enhance the inclusiveness of the event. Staff should understand how to handle interactions with diverse groups of participants and spectators with respect and understanding.

Review of Code of Conduct:

- » All personnel should review the code of conduct, including the organization's values and behavioral expectations for players, parents, and coaches. Staff should be clear on enforcement procedures and know how to address violations effectively.

By covering these areas, youth sports organizations can equip everyone involved with the knowledge and skills needed for a safe, organized, and positive event day experience. This preparation helps foster a supportive environment, reinforcing the values and goals of youth sports.



PART 2: RESPONSE

Responsibilities	18
Protecting Officials	20
Preventing and Managing Altercations	23
Decision Making for Assessing & Responding to Altercations.....	26
Incidents Involving a Firearm.....	28

RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS

RESPONSIBILITIES

On event days in youth sports, organizers bear a crucial responsibility to ensure a safe, orderly, and positive environment for all participants, spectators, and staff. When issues or emergencies arise, organizers are accountable for responding effectively and swiftly to protect the well-being of everyone involved. The responsibilities listed here are focused on protection from altercations, but other responsibilities also include effective response to medical and environmental emergencies. Please refer to the Players Health policy templates regarding these types of emergency responses. Here's a breakdown of key responsibilities:

**1. Ensuring Safety and Preparedness**

- » **Emergency Plan:** Organizers should have a comprehensive emergency action plan in place, covering situations like injuries, severe weather, lost children, fire, and other crises. This includes evacuation plans, crowd management, and emergency medical response. All staff and volunteers should be familiar with the plan and know their roles.
- » **Medical Readiness:** Designate a first aid station and ensure at least one trained medical responder is on-site, with first aid supplies accessible across the venue. In case of serious injuries, organizers should have a protocol for contacting emergency medical services (EMS).
- » **Safety Inspections:** Before the event begins, organizers should inspect fields, equipment, and facilities to ensure they meet safety standards and address any hazards (e.g., broken bleachers, exposed wires, uneven surfaces).

2. Clear Communication Channels

- » **Chain of Command:** Establish a clear chain of command so everyone knows whom to contact in case of an incident. Designate specific personnel responsible for handling specific types of issues (e.g., security, medical, logistics).
- » **Emergency Contacts:** Ensure all coaches, officials, and staff have emergency contact numbers for event managers, medical responders, and local authorities.
- » **Broadcasting Important Information:** Use loudspeakers, signage, or mobile alerts to quickly inform participants and spectators of any urgent announcements, such as weather delays or venue changes.
- » **Reporting Incidents:** Provide information on how anyone on-site can communicate an incident of prohibited conduct. This can be provided by a 3rd party such as Real Response or generated by the organization.

3. Addressing Behavioral Issues and Conflicts

- » **Enforcing Codes of Conduct:** Organizers should ensure all parties—players, coaches, and spectators—adhere to a code of conduct. For disruptive behavior, they should intervene swiftly, issuing warnings or removing individuals from the venue if necessary.
- » **Conflict Resolution:** Have trained personnel or supervisors handle conflicts between spectators, parents, or players to maintain a positive environment. Staff should be trained in de-escalation techniques to prevent confrontations from escalating.
- » **Spectator Control:** For larger events, organizers may need security personnel or volunteers to manage entrances, monitor crowd behavior, and respond to any disputes that could impact the safety or enjoyment of others.
- » **Reporting Mechanism:** Provide access on-site for anyone to report an incident of prohibited conduct. This can be provided by a 3rd party such as Real Response or generated by the organization.

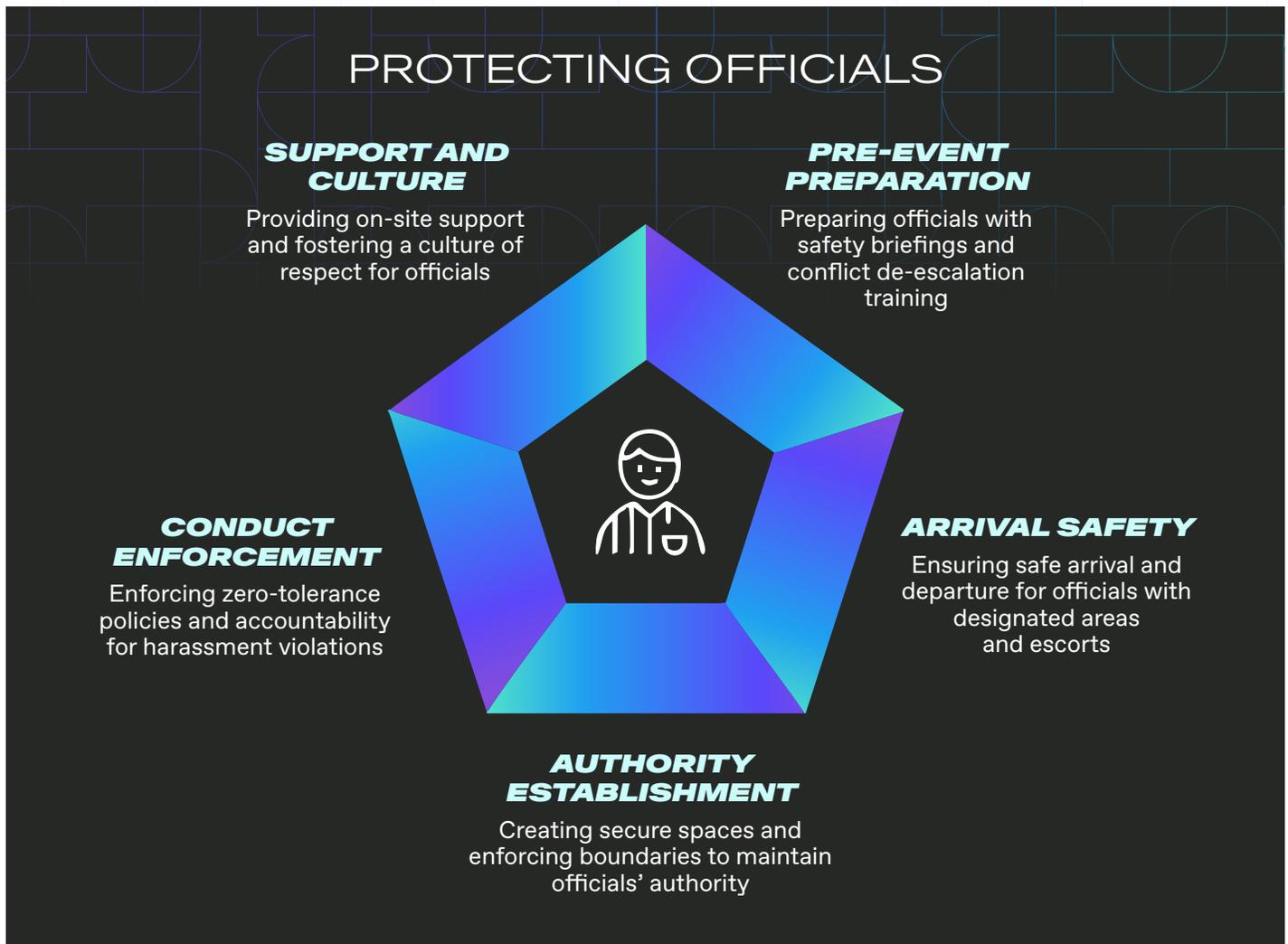
4. Post-Incident Follow-Up and Reporting

- » **Documenting Incidents:** Maintain detailed records of all incidents and emergencies, including medical treatments, behavioral incidents, and responses. This documentation is essential for liability purposes and future improvements.
- » **Feedback Collection:** After the event, gather feedback from staff and volunteers on incident handling. Use this input to refine protocols and training to improve future event preparedness.

By proactively preparing for potential issues, establishing clear procedures, and training staff thoroughly, organizers can respond effectively to a range of situations on event days. This readiness ensures that youth sports events remain a safe, supportive, and positive experience for everyone involved.

PROTECTING OFFICIALS

Officials are essential to maintaining fairness, enforcing rules, and ensuring the integrity of youth sports events. However, they are often vulnerable to verbal abuse, physical threats, and violence. Protecting officials is not just about ensuring their safety during the game but also safeguarding their well-being from the moment they arrive until they leave the venue.



STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTING OFFICIALS:

1. Pre-Event Preparation and Training:

- » **Safety Briefing:** Include officials in the pre-event safety briefing to review emergency protocols, conflict management techniques, and support mechanisms.
- » **Conflict De-Escalation Training:** Equip officials with strategies to handle tense interactions with players, coaches, or spectators.
- » **Arrival and Departure Protocols:** Establish safe arrival and departure procedures, such as designated parking areas and secured entry/exit points.

2. Arrival and Departure Safety:

- » **Designated Parking Areas:** Reserve parking spots near the venue entrance for officials, ensuring their quick and safe access to the facility.
- » **Security Escorts:** Provide security or event staff to escort officials to and from their vehicles, especially after contentious games.
- » **Staggered Departure:** Stagger the departure of officials to reduce the likelihood of confrontations with disgruntled players, coaches, or spectators.

3. Establishing Boundaries and Authority:

- » **Private Spaces:** Create designated, secure areas for officials, such as changing rooms and lounges, where they can prepare and take breaks without interference.
- » **Sideline Management:** Enforce strict boundaries between officials and spectators or coaches during the game. Spectators or participants who cross these boundaries should face immediate removal.
- » All coaching staff should be reminded of the zero-tolerance policy in effect to protect officials and be enlisted to educate as well as maintain control of the behavior of their players, parents/guardians, and team-side spectators.
- » If practical, suggest officials change out of their uniform or wear a top clothing garment to better blend in as an event goer as they arrive and depart the event.

4. Code of Conduct Enforcement:

- » **Zero-Tolerance Policies:** Clearly communicate and enforce zero-tolerance policies for harassment, verbal abuse, or physical threats directed at officials.
- » **Accountability for Violations:** Spectators, coaches, or players violating these policies should be removed from the event and reported to league administrators.

5. Event Day Support:

- » **On-Site Safety Personnel:** Assign security or trained staff to monitor officials and be available for immediate intervention if conflicts arise.
- » **Direct Communication:** Provide officials with radios or telephone numbers for direct access to event managers, security or staff.
- » **Real-Time Monitoring:** Have designated staff positioned near officials during contentious games to ensure their safety.

6. Post-Incident Response:

- » **Incident Documentation:** Require all incidents involving harassment, threats or abuse toward officials to be documented and reported by initiating your incident reporting, response and resolution protocols.
- » **Support Systems:** Offer counseling or other resources to officials who experience threats or physical violence, ensuring their well-being and encouraging retention.
- » **Coordination with Law Enforcement:** Follow the altercation response guidelines in this guide to triage incidents accordingly which will dictate the event staff and potential law enforcement response.

7. Fostering a Culture of Respect:

- » **Education and Awareness:** Conduct awareness campaigns to educate participants, spectators, and coaches about the vital role of officials and the need to respect their authority with the continued emphasis on zero tolerance.
- » **Public Recognition:** Acknowledge and appreciate officials publicly during events to reinforce their importance and authority.

WHY PROTECTING OFFICIALS MATTERS

Ensuring the safety of officials from their arrival to their departure creates a secure and respectful environment that allows them to focus on their responsibilities without fear. When officials feel supported and valued, they are better equipped to enforce rules impartially, contributing to the fairness and enjoyment of the event. By prioritizing their safety and well-being, youth sports organizations demonstrate a commitment to integrity, safety, and the long-term success of their programs.



PREVENTING AND MANAGING ALTERCATIONS

Preparedness is the cornerstone of ensuring safety at youth sports events. Altercations, whether verbal or physical, can arise unexpectedly, fueled by emotions, environmental factors, unresolved tensions, and preexisting relationship dynamics. Without a clear plan, these incidents can escalate quickly, jeopardizing the safety of players, spectators, and staff.

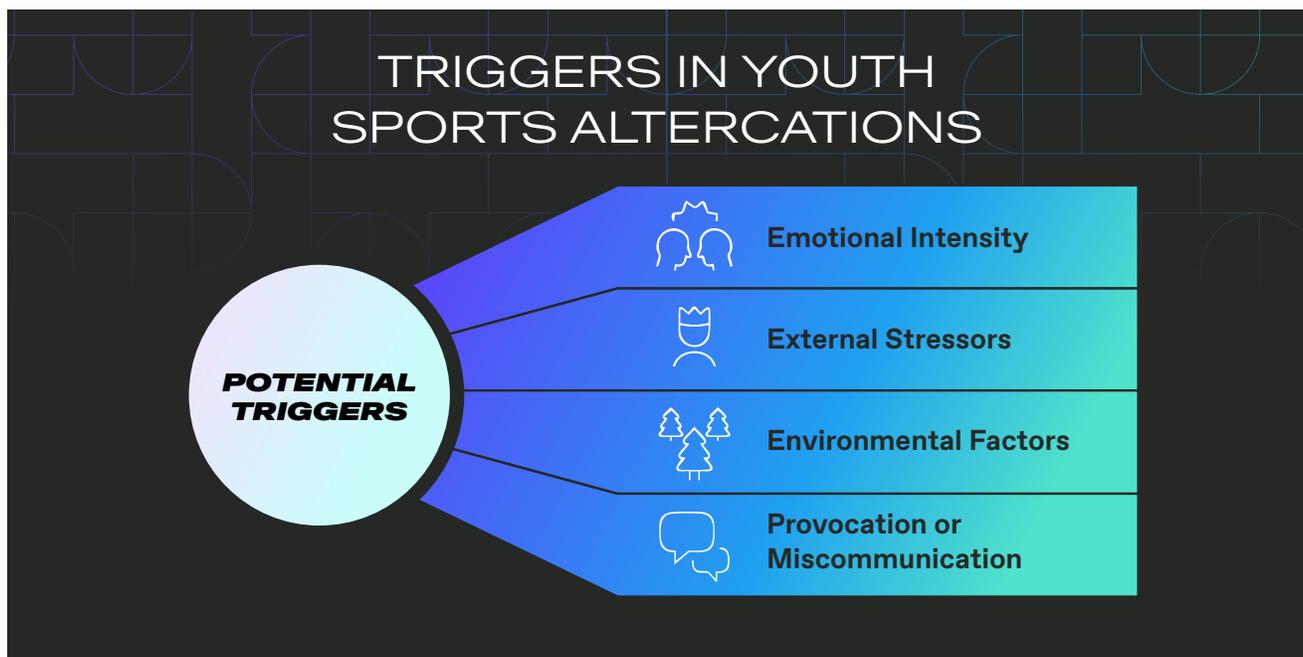
This section provides a comprehensive guide to recognizing early warning signs, assessing risks, and taking decisive action to prevent or manage altercations effectively. By understanding potential triggers, implementing de-escalation strategies, and fostering partnerships with law enforcement, event organizers can create a safer environment.

The key to success lies in anticipation and readiness—having systems, protocols, and trained personnel in place to respond swiftly and appropriately. A proactive approach not only minimizes risks but also ensures the integrity and enjoyment of youth sports for everyone involved.

PRE-ALTERCATION PRECURSORS AND POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Understanding and addressing potential triggers is key to preventing altercations at youth sports events. Common precursors include:

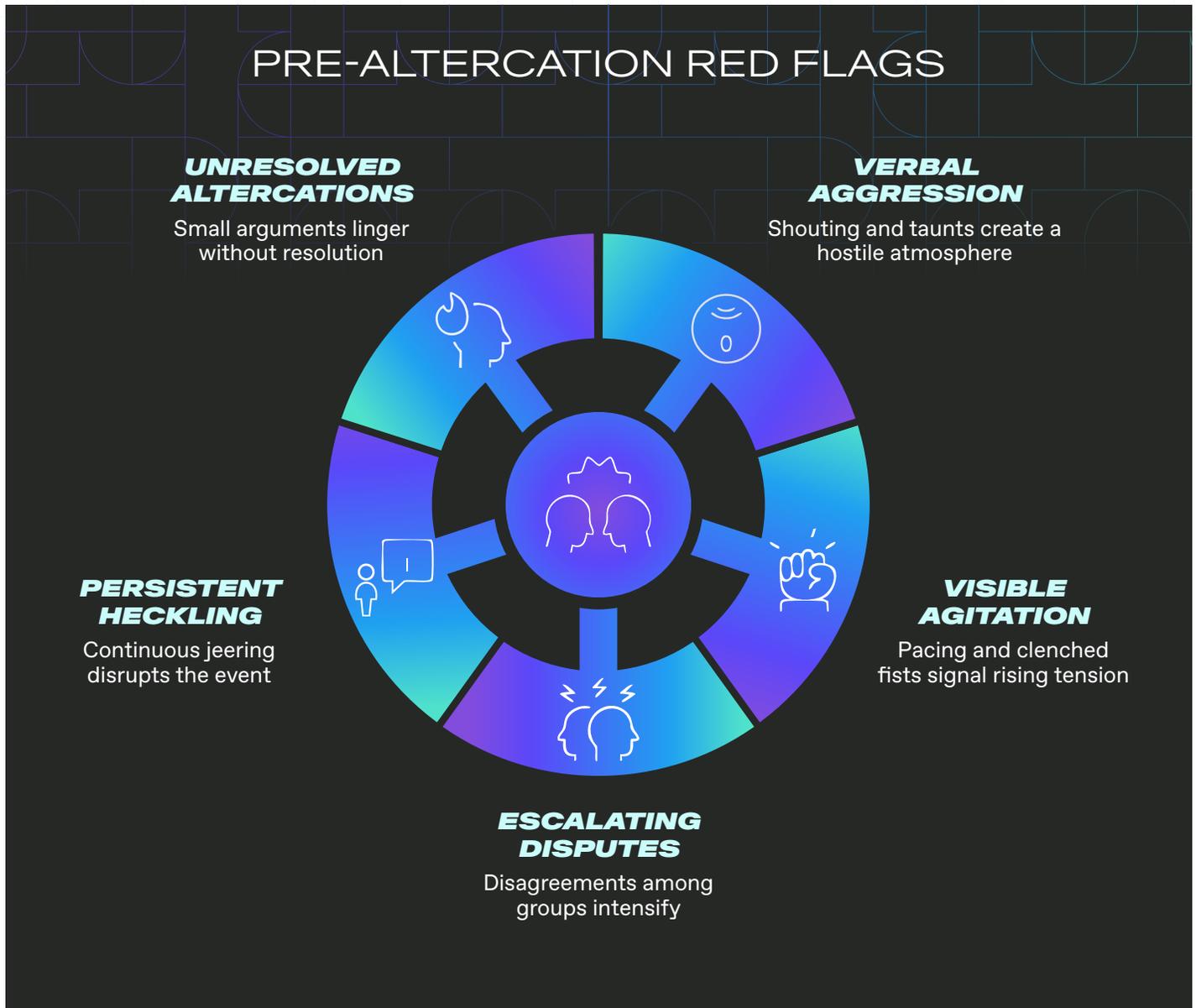
- » **Emotional Intensity:** High-pressure games, heated rivalries, or close scores.
- » **External Stressors:** Family/relationship dynamics, financial strain, or personal issues brought to the event.
- » **Environmental Factors:** Overcrowding, poor event management, inadequate security, or lack of clear rules.
- » **Provocation or Miscommunication:** Misinterpreted gestures, perception of biased officiating, or hostile commentary from spectators.



PRE-ALTERCATION RED FLAGS

Recognizing early warning signs can help event staff or coaches intervene before tensions escalate:

- » Verbal aggression (e.g., shouting, taunts, or hostile exchanges).
- » Visible agitation, such as pacing, clenched fists, or aggressive body language.
- » Escalating disputes among spectators, parents, or coaches.
- » Persistent heckling of players, referees, or opposing teams.
- » Small altercations or arguments that appear unresolved.



TYPES OF ALTERCATIONS

Altercations at youth sports events can take various forms, including:

- » Verbal Altercations: Heated exchanges of words among spectators, parents, coaches, players or directed at game officials, referees, event staff, and volunteers.
- » Physical Altercations: Fighting, shoving, or other physical aggression.
- » Team or Crowd Conflicts: Escalation involving multiple individuals or groups.
- » One-on-One Incidents: Targeted disputes between specific individuals.

TYPES OF ALTERCATIONS

VERBAL ALTERCATIONS

Involves heated exchanges among spectators, parents, coaches or officials

TEAM OR CROWD CONFLICTS

Involves multiple individuals or groups escalating the situation



PHYSICAL ALTERCATIONS

Involves fighting or physical aggression

ONE-ON-ONE INCIDENTS

Involves targeted disputes between specific individuals

ESCALATION TRIGGERS AND DE-ESCALATION STRATEGIES

Escalation Triggers to Avoid:

- » Confrontational or judgmental language
- » Engaging in personal attacks or blame
- » Physical attempts to restrain individuals without proper training

De-escalation Techniques:

- » Stay calm and composed, modeling the behavior you expect.
- » Use clear, non-threatening language to establish authority and boundaries.

HOW TO HANDLE A CONFLICT SITUATION EFFECTIVELY

AVOID ESCALATION

Prevents the situation from worsening by avoiding confrontational actions



USE DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES

Reduces tension and establishes control through calm communication

DECISION-MAKING GUIDE

FOR ASSESSING AND RESPONDING TO ALTERCATIONS

DECISION MAKING FOR ALTERCATION RESPONSE

IDENTIFY NATURE OF ALTERCATION

Determine if the altercation is verbal or physical and assess involvement and presence of weapons

ASSESS IMMEDIATE RISKS

Evaluate if anyone is in immediate danger and if vulnerable individuals are at risk

CHOOSE ACTION FOR VERBAL ALTERCATIONS

Decide on actions like calling 911 or de-escalating based on the threat level

CHOOSE ACTION FOR PHYSICAL ALTERCATIONS

Call 911 and alert security, maintaining distance until help arrives

INVOLVE LAW ENFORCEMENT

Contact law enforcement for serious threats or physical altercations

DOCUMENT AND FOLLOW UP

Collect witness information and initiate internal reporting

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE NATURE OF THE ALTERCATION

- » Is it verbal, physical, or escalating?
- » Who is involved? (e.g., spectators, coaches, players, officials, referees, volunteers, or staff)
- » Are weapons, alcohol, or drugs present?

STEP 2: ASSESS IMMEDIATE RISKS

- » Is anyone in immediate danger?
- » Are children or vulnerable individuals involved or at risk?
- » Is the altercation confined or spreading to others?

STEP 3: CHOOSE THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION

1. For Verbal Altercations:

- » Dial 911 should verbal threats of bodily harm and/or use of weapons are uttered by any of the involved parties.
- » Regardless of successful de-escalation, police response is highly recommended in this type of verbal threat scenario.
- » Remove or relocate the involved parties in the presence of law enforcement.

- » Assign staff to de-escalate with calm, neutral communication.
- » Separate parties to diffuse the tension.
- » Remind them of the code of conduct and consequences.
- » For verbal altercations with no threats of bodily harm and/or use of weapons, use discretion and the safety of the event on whether allowing the parties to remain or remove from the venue.

2. For Physical Altercations:

- » Dial 911, for all physical altercations & alert on-site security or event staff.
 - Maintain a safe distance and stay connected to 911 until law enforcement arrives on scene.
 - Remove or relocate the involved parties in the presence of law enforcement.
 - Physical altercations between minor players during the course of play may not require a police response, and should be dependent on egregiousness, injuries, and wishes of parent(s)/guardian(s).
 - NOTE: Verbal and physical altercations between minor athletes often evoke outward reaction from respective parent(s)/guardian(s).
- » Protect bystanders, especially children.
- » Consider evacuating nearby individuals if the situation escalates.

3. Involving Law Enforcement:

- » Always Contact law enforcement for:
 - Verbal threats of bodily harm and/or weapon use
 - Physical altercations regardless of if weapons are present or not.

Step 4: Document and Follow Up

- » Gather all witness information.
- » In all instances where Law Enforcement Responded, obtain:
 - Agency Name & Case/Incident Number
 - Officer(s) Name & Badge/ID Number
- » Initiate Internal Incident Reporting, Response, and Resolution protocols.
- » Notify all relevant authorities, including league officials.
 - Maintain a safe distance while addressing concerns.
 - Redirect focus to the safety and well-being of all attendees.

HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT CAN BE YOUR ALLY

Law enforcement officers play a critical role in maintaining safety and order:

- » **Preventative Presence:** Partner with local law enforcement for high-risk events to provide a visible deterrent. All law enforcement agencies will have the zone assigned patrol vehicle show presence upon request. Prior to the event, contact the law enforcement agency of jurisdiction over the event location and request a “Watch Order” or “Area Check” during the event (These terms will vary from agency to agency).
 - Consider hiring an off duty uniformed officer for your event.
- » **Crisis Intervention:** Officers are trained to de-escalate volatile situations and ensure public safety.
- » **Support for Event Policies:** Work with law enforcement to align your policies with local laws and ordinances. It is commonplace where certain jurisdictions will require you to hire off duty officer(s) for your event should the attendance threshold exceed established safety levels. This varies by jurisdiction.
- » **Post-Incident Support:** Law enforcement can help document incidents, file reports, and investigate.

INCIDENTS INVOLVING A FIREARM

NOTE: Review of Players Health Active Shooter In Sport Guidebook is highly recommended.

Preparedness and rapid decision-making are essential to protect lives. The following steps outline how to assess and respond effectively:

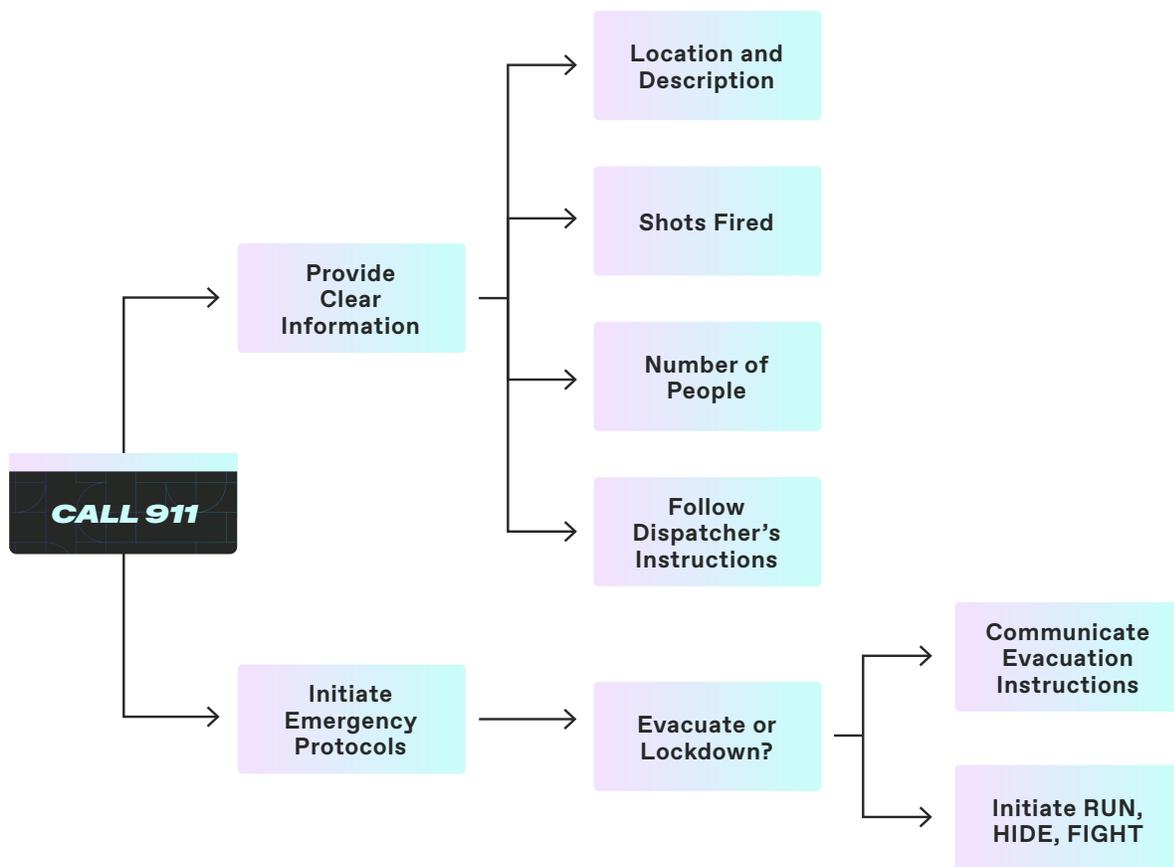
IMMEDIATE STEPS:

1. Call 911 Immediately Alerting Law Enforcement, Stay Calm and Assess

- » Be prepared to provide clear, concise information about the situation.
- » The location and description of the individual with the firearm.
- » Whether shots have been fired.
- » The number of people in the immediate vicinity.
- » Follow the dispatcher's instructions carefully.

2. Initiate Emergency Protocols

- » Activate the event's emergency response plan, including evacuation or lockdown procedures.
- » Communicate instructions calmly but firmly to staff and attendees:
 - "Everyone, please remain calm and proceed to the nearest exit in an orderly fashion."
- » If evacuation isn't possible, initiate the RUN, HIDE, or FIGHT protocol outlined in the Players Health Active Shooter in Sport Guidebook.



DURING THE INCIDENT:**1. Prioritize Safety**

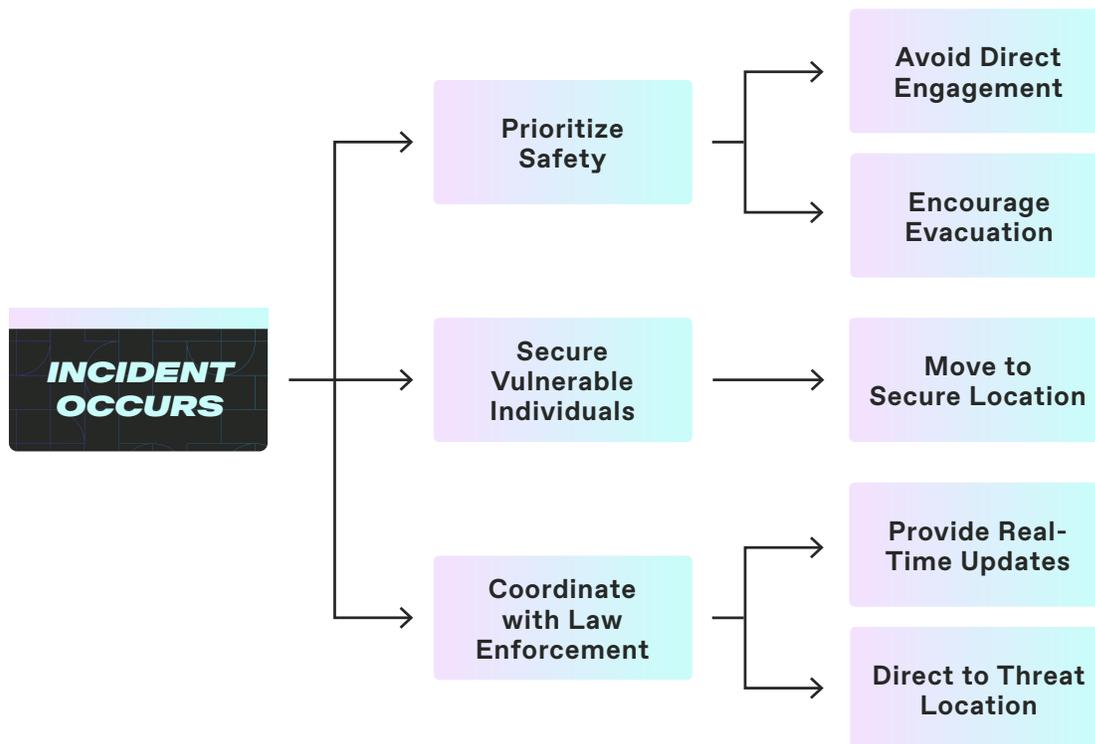
- » Avoid engaging directly with the individual unless you are a trained professional and there is no other option.
- » Encourage staff and attendees to move away from the threat while avoiding panic.

2. Secure Vulnerable Individuals

Ensure that children, athletes, and vulnerable adults are moved to a secure location.

3. Coordinate with Law Enforcement

- » Provide law enforcement with real-time updates as they arrive on the scene.
- » Direct them



POST-INCIDENT ACTIONS

1. Support Victims and Witnesses

- » Arrange for medical attention for any injured individuals that have not been identified by responding first responders.
- » Offer counseling and psychological support to those affected.

2. Document the Incident

- » Identify the Law Enforcement Primary Reporting Officer, Detective, or Incident Commander and obtain:
 - Agency Name & Case Number
 - Officer(s) Name & Badge/ID Number
- » Initiate Internal Incident Reporting, Response, and Resolution protocols.
- » Notify all relevant authorities, including league officials.

3. Review and Improve Protocols

- » Conduct a thorough review of the event's safety measures and identify areas for improvement.
- » Update training programs and protocols to address any gaps.

KEY PREPAREDNESS TIPS

- » **Emergency Plans:** Ensure all staff and volunteers are trained in firearm-specific emergency protocols.
- » **Drills and Training:** Conduct regular active shooter or firearm threat drills tailored to youth sports events.
- » **Visible Deterrents:** Employ visible security personnel and communicate zero-tolerance policies for weapons at events.
- » **Rapid Communication:** Equip staff with radios or communication devices to report threats immediately.

LAW ENFORCEMENT IS YOUR ALLY

Law enforcement is critical in managing firearm-related incidents. Their expertise ensures:

- » **Rapid Neutralization of the Threat:** Officers are trained to handle armed individuals and secure the area.
- » **Safety of Attendees:** Their presence helps to control panic and manage evacuation.
- » **Incident Follow-Up:** Law enforcement will assist with investigations and legal processes.

FINAL NOTES WHEN A FIREARM IS INVOLVED

When a firearm is involved, the primary goal is to minimize harm and protect lives. Preparation, swift action, and collaboration with law enforcement can make the difference between chaos and effective crisis management. When a firearm is present or suspected during an altercation, the stakes and risks escalate dramatically.

YOUTH SPORTS

EVENT SAFETY FAQ

1. WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS IN CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT AT OUR YOUTH SPORTS EVENTS?

Establishing a positive and respectful culture is paramount. This involves:

- » Defining clear codes of conduct: Outline expected behaviors for players, parents, coaches, and officials, emphasizing respect, sportsmanship, and safety.
- » Consistent reinforcement of values: Regularly communicate and reinforce these values through meetings, announcements, and various platforms.
- » Role modeling by leaders: Coaches and officials must exemplify the desired behaviors, setting a strong example for young athletes.
- » Parent involvement and education: Engage parents in preseason meetings, stressing their role in fostering a positive environment and discouraging aggressive behavior.
- » Accountability and enforcement: Ensure everyone understands the consequences of violating the code of conduct and consistently enforce standards to promote fairness.

2. HOW CAN WE PREPARE OUR STAFF FOR POTENTIAL INCIDENTS ON EVENT DAY?

Thorough pre-event preparation is key:

- » Mandatory safety briefing: Conduct a detailed briefing for all staff and volunteers, covering emergency procedures, roles and responsibilities, venue overview, communication channels, and behavioral management techniques.
- » Training in various areas: Provide training in safety protocols, CPR and first aid, communication and conflict resolution, equipment and facility management, crowd control, and technology use, depending on roles.
- » Clearly defined staff-to-participant ratios: Ensure adequate supervision and support by establishing appropriate ratios for coaches, event staff, security personnel, medical responders, and parent/guardian presence.

3. WHAT MEASURES CAN WE TAKE TO PROTECT OFFICIALS FROM HARASSMENT OR ABUSE?

Officials are vital to fair play and deserve protection:

- » Pre-event briefing and training: Include officials in safety briefings, providing conflict de-escalation training and outlining support mechanisms.
- » Safe arrival and departure: Designate parking areas near the venue entrance and consider security escorts, especially after contentious games.
- » Clear boundaries and authority: Establish designated areas for officials and enforce strict sideline boundaries during games.

- » Zero-tolerance policies: Implement and enforce zero-tolerance policies for harassment or abuse directed at officials, holding violators accountable.
- » On-site support and monitoring: Assign security personnel or trained staff to monitor officials and provide immediate intervention if needed.

4. HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE AND ADDRESS POTENTIAL ALTERCATIONS BEFORE THEY ESCALATE?

Proactive identification and intervention are crucial:

- » Understand common precursors: Be aware of triggers like emotional intensity, external stressors, environmental factors, and miscommunication.
- » Recognize red flags: Watch for verbal aggression, agitation, escalating disputes, persistent heckling, or unresolved arguments.
- » Implement de-escalation strategies: Train staff in techniques like remaining calm, using non-threatening language, separating parties, and reminding individuals of codes of conduct.

5. WHAT STEPS SHOULD WE TAKE WHEN RESPONDING TO A PHYSICAL ALTERCATION?

Immediate action is required to ensure safety:

- » Call 911: Alert law enforcement immediately.
- » Protect bystanders: Ensure the safety of those not involved, especially children, considering evacuation if necessary.
- » Document the incident: Gather witness information and details for reporting and follow-up.



6. WHAT IS THE RECOMMENDED RESPONSE TO AN INCIDENT INVOLVING A FIREARM?

Firearm incidents require immediate, decisive action:

- » Call 911: Immediately alert law enforcement.
- » Activate emergency protocols: Initiate the event's emergency response plan, including evacuation or lockdown procedures, communicating instructions clearly.
- » Prioritize safety: Avoid direct engagement with the individual unless absolutely necessary.
- » Secure vulnerable individuals: Ensure the safety of children and vulnerable attendees.
- » Coordinate with law enforcement: Provide real-time updates and direct them to the threat location.

7. HOW CAN WE PROMOTE A CULTURE OF RESPECT AND SPORTSMANSHIP IN OUR ORGANIZATION?

Creating a positive culture is an ongoing effort:

- » Education and awareness: Conduct campaigns emphasizing the importance of respect, sportsmanship, and the roles of officials and volunteers.
- » Public recognition: Acknowledge and appreciate individuals exhibiting positive behaviors.
- » Coach leadership: Encourage coaches to emphasize core values over winning, using positive communication and holding everyone accountable.

8. WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP OUR ORGANIZATION DEVELOP SAFETY PROTOCOLS?

Various organizations offer support and guidance:

- » Players Health: Provides resources like policy templates, signage samples, and an Active Shooter in Sport Guidebook.
- » Real Response: Offers a digital communication tool for incident reporting and response.
- » Local law enforcement: Can provide guidance on safety measures and offer support for high-risk events.



CONCLUSION

Effective preparation, awareness, and proactive decision-making are essential for preventing and managing altercations. This action plan must be backed by your emergency response plan, prohibited conduct policies, combined with training and collaboration.

Preparation ensures that youth sports events remain safe and enjoyable for all participants.

Players Health offers the following resources to sport organizations in the online Athlete Safety Library

- » Partnership with Real Response, a digital on-site communication tool for incident reporting and response
- » Policy templates including the prohibited conduct policy
- » Sample on-site signage for altercation prevention
- » Active Shooter in Sport Guidebook

To learn more about access to the Players Health Athlete Safety Library, contact us at

PLAYERSHEALTH.COM/CONTACT



APPENDIX

SAMPLE EVENT SIGNAGE CONTENT

Below is some sample wording for inclusion into signage your organization may want to post throughout your event site. Think about high traffic areas where the message will be visible. Feel free to adapt to your specific situation.

Consider including:

- » A way for guests to access your prohibited conduct policy or overview (a QR code, website link etc.)
- » Short wording alerting all attendees that abusive behavior is not tolerated
- » A way for guests to report incidents of prohibited conduct and poor behavior (QR code, phone number, website link etc.)

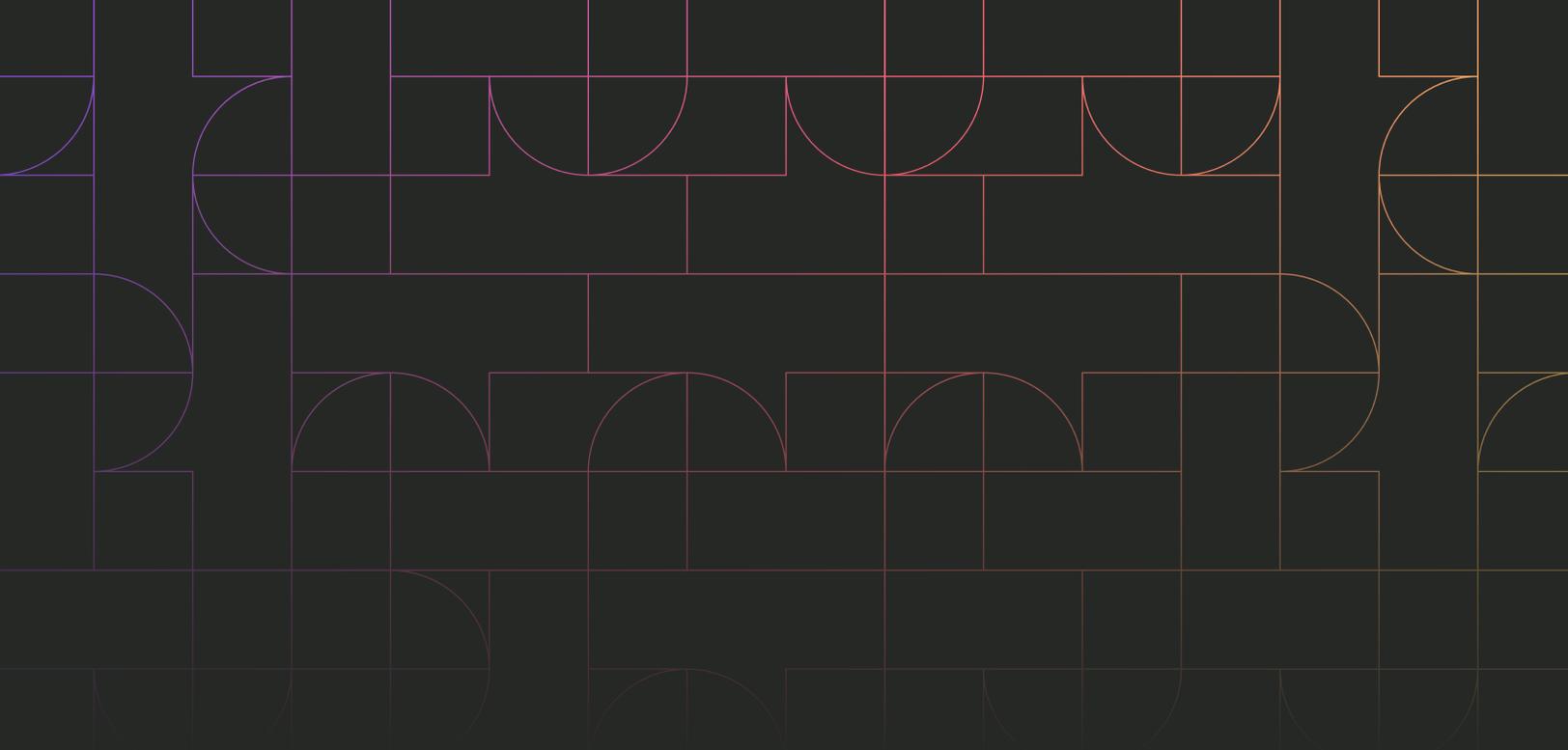
SAMPLE LANGUAGE:

PLEASE SHOW RESPECT/PLEASE KEEP OUR EVENT SAFE

(Name of Organization) does not tolerate any type of abusive or threatening behavior toward spectators, coaches, officials, players or anyone at this event.

To view our policy on prohibited conduct, (scan this QR code, visit this link).

To report an incident of verbal or physical abuse toward anyone at this event, please report it at (insert qr code, phone number, web link etc).



Copyright 2025 Players Health

www.playershealth.com

www.playersheath.ca



@PLAYERSHEALTH



PLAYERS HEALTH