



Laguna Niguel Girls Softball

Safe Haven Coach's Handbook

Laguna Niguel Girls Softball has adopted the Child and Volunteer Protection Program known as "Safe Haven" currently being used by AYSO. The purpose of this excellent program is to screen and provide education and awareness to all volunteers, and to promote a safe, positive environment for participants of LNGS.

THE GOOD SIDE OF YOUTH SPORTS

Sports can be a wonderful part of growing up. Here are some good reasons to be in sports:

1. To have fun
2. To learn skills
3. To be part of a team
4. To learn what it means to be good sports.

When these things happen, the experience is gratifying for everyone. LNGS wants youth sports to be safe, fair, and fun. To make sure that happens, we want to make sure the adults involved:

1. Do not have histories of hurting kids;
2. Know what kids need to help them improve in sports;
3. Show young athletes how to be "good sports" by being one themselves.

CHILD ABUSE IN YOUTH SPORTS

Child abuse in youth sports can range from hurtful words to physical injury. There are a lot of different objects of abuse: personal feelings, bodies, or property. When a person is abused, he or she begins to ask questions that often lead to further victimization, such as, Why me? Or, did I do something to deserve this?

Psychologists, legislators, and educators around the country now recognize five types of abuse:

1. Emotional abuse: the most common; attacking the emotional well-being and stability of an individual.
2. Physical: the most obvious; harming the physical well-being of an individual.
3. Sexual: frequently hidden; harming an individual through inappropriate sexual conduct, lewd behavior, etc.
4. Neglect: not always easy to identify; harming an individual by abandoning, ignoring, or rejecting basic needs.
5. Ethical: harming an individual by convincing her to do an act that is against her physical, moral, or ethical interests.

LAGUNA NIGUEL COACHES FINGERPRINTING POLICY

It is the policy of LNGS to fingerprint all volunteer coaches and officials acting in a supervisory role with children. Each coach is required to sign a disclaimer that states no previous record. In addition, the league is updated if that status changes while still a coach for LNGS.



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THE PREVENTION CYCLE

There are eight elements in the Safe Haven Prevention Cycle. These are proactive steps that provide the medium for positive, healthy child development.

1. **Foster Meaningful Relationships**
 - The coach-player relationship can be one of the most influential relationships in a child's life.
 - It is important for coaches and all volunteers to understand that they are role models for our youth.
2. **Make Kids Full Participants**
 - Kids want to be listened to, they want to be part of the decision making process.
 - Most players feel that they have some good ideas and ways to improve their softball experience.
 - We encourage you to solicit and validate the opinions of your players.
3. **Promote Ethical Behavior**
 - We're talking about Right versus Wrong.
 - Remember, kids will follow your lead. We are the ultimate example of ethical behavior.
 - Teach kids that it really IS about how they play the game and how they treat each other. It's not about winning.
 - Be consistent. Say what you mean, mean what you say, and try to always say it kindly.
4. **Model and Teach Conflict Resolution**
 - There is a saying, "If We Don't Model What We Teach, We Are Teaching Something Else".
 - We set the example in how we interact with each other as adults.
 - We may not agree with other coaches' decisions or an umpire's call, but what matters most is how we handle ourselves at these times.
 - We need children to see that all situations can be discussed calmly.
5. **Encourage Kids to Speak Out**
 - When working with young people it's important to keep in mind that all kids have different levels of confidence when it comes to speaking out or expressing their opinions.
 - Let's try to find ways through kind words and genuine interest to draw kids out in a safe environment that is created by the adults in charge.
6. **Cultivate Kids' Self-Images**
 - Having a positive self-image is the foundation to a successful adulthood.
 - That's not an image build on empty praises; kids know when we're telling the truth. Praise kids for the qualities they bring to the field.
7. **Implant Excellence in Individual Achievement**
 - We need to help players set goals.
 - There must be a reason for each action. If a child is given a task, the reason for that task must be clear in the mind of the adult and explained to the child. A coach should not have 6-year-olds run 5 laps for a bad play because "it builds character and stamina." Running laps at the start of practice might be justified as a means of warming up muscles. Good coaching is showing and telling children how it's done, not punishment for mistakes.
8. **Keep Things FUN**
 - This is more than just one layer. LNGS should be fun for both players and volunteers.
 - It's important to focus on how players and volunteers interact.
 - Let's make an effort to put a positive spin on all that we do.
 - A successful season happens when the coaches make it their number one priority to create an environment in which the girls have a rich and rewarding playing experience. The journey truly is the reward.



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PREVENTING FALSE ACCUSATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

- A female adult (coach, assistant coach, manager or team Mom) is required at all practices and games. At least two adults should be in attendance at all practices and games.
- Avoid situations in which you are alone with a child. This includes not transporting children alone in your car.
- When it is necessary to speak privately with a child, find a place out of earshot, but within sight of others for your conference.
- Privacy of children in situations such as toileting and changing clothes should be respected. When it is necessary to supervise children in these situations, at least two adults should be present and intrude only to the extent that the health and safety of the child require. Adult volunteers should preserve their own privacy in these situations also.
- When hugging is appropriate, hug from the side over the shoulders, not from the front.
- Sexual jokes, comments of a sexual nature, kissing or sexual gestures are not appropriate behaviors.
- Do not use corporal punishment in any form – spanking, slapping, hitting, etc.
- It is the adult's responsibility to set and respect boundaries. When a child attempts to involve an adult in an inappropriate behavior, the adult must reject the overture.

Adults who work with children should take precautions to protect kids from abuse and also to protect themselves from misunderstandings or accusations.

THE VOLUNTEER PROTECTION ACT OF 1997

The screening and training process of Safe Haven has the added benefit of protecting you as a volunteer under the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997. Your personal liability is protected as long as you are:

1. Properly trained and certified as a coach by LNGS;
2. Acting within the scope your responsibilities; and
3. The harm was not caused by willful, reckless or criminal misconduct, gross negligence, or a conscious, flagrant indifference to the rights or safety of the individual harmed by the volunteer.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

If you see something occur at the fields that you think conflicts with the principles or goals of the Safe Haven program, please contact the LNGS Child and Volunteer Protection Advocate, Diane Craig. Her telephone number is 400-6605. Her e-mail address is: LNGS@aol.com. All information will be kept completely confidential.

THANK YOU

Thank you for volunteering for Laguna Niguel Girls Softball. We appreciate your commitment to children, sports, and our community. We hope that the implementation of the Safe Haven Program will enhance our already wonderful softball league. Our goal this year, as always, is to teach the girls the game of softball, provide the opportunity to experience team competition and see that all players have a positive experience. Looking forward to a safe 2005 season!

