

# KEEPING YOUR KIDS SAFE ONLINE DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many of our lives to a screeching halt, particularly in the sports community. It is important to acknowledge that there are many of us, athletes included, that continue to work and life is more difficult.

As many of you already know, online communication poses unique safety risks. Youth and people with disabilities already experience high rates of abuse<sup>1</sup>, and increased time online may heighten these risks.



## The U.S. Center for SafeSport recommends all adults keep these guidelines in mind:

- Get parent/guardian permission for each type of online communication you use with athletes, including team apps, video sharing, and virtual training sessions.
- Should you need to communicate with an individual athlete, always copy the athlete's parent/guardian or another adult. This includes notifying them with dates, times, and links to individual virtual sessions.
- Just like in-person meetings, one-on-one virtual interactions must be observable and interruptible and require written consent.
- Include the entire team in communications whenever possible and appropriate.
- Be transparent and professional in all communication with athletes and parents/guardians.

<sup>1</sup>Approximately 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys are likely victims of sexual abuse (source: David Finkelhor, Director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center. University of New Hampshire). A child is bullied every 7 minutes, and 90% of LGBTQ students experienced harassment at school and online (source: StompOutBullying.org). People with disabilities experience rape and sexual assault at more than twice the rate of those without a disability (source: 2009 Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report on Crime Against People with Disabilities).



## FOR COACHES

- **Keep your communication professional, even when checking in on your athletes' mental health.** Ask open-ended questions (“How are you feeling about not being able to practice with your teammates in person?” or “How are you feeling about having to stay at home?”), then listen to what they say and validate their feelings (“It is OK to feel disappointed or angry.”). If necessary, support them in coming up with a plan to feel better (like regular check-in times with friends and teammates).
- **Ensure links to virtual meetings, hangouts, and other gatherings are not shared publicly and are password protected.** Remind athletes not to forward the links to anyone outside of the team without your permission. Adjust settings to ensure you initiate the meeting before athletes can join.
- **Be mindful that any video sharing, live streaming, and chat sites you use are secure and have privacy settings to limit who can post and view content.** Make sure you are following the program's security guidelines and are using the most up-to-date version. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has a library of [internet safety resources](#) for adults and children.
- **Restate team expectations about respectful communication and online behaviors.** Remind athletes not to engage in abusive behaviors like [sexual misconduct](#), [emotional misconduct](#), [cyberbullying](#), [hazing](#), and [harassment](#).
- **Keep physical safety in mind when suggesting home workouts or training routines.** Make sure workouts are appropriate for the athlete's level and don't require spotters or resources the athlete doesn't have at home. Remind athletes to take regular safety precautions like proper hydration and breaks. Teach them how to create a safe workout space so that they don't injure themselves on walls or furniture. Pay attention to workout safety for athletes with disabilities.
- **Share physical and online safety tips for virtual classes/training with athletes** (and parents/guardians when applicable).
- **School and sports may have been the only safe places for some athletes – look for warning signs of violence and abuse.** Provide emotional support and report any suspected or known child abuse. Visit the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) or the [U.S. Center for SafeSport](#) for more information on reporting child abuse.

### Special considerations for working with minor athletes

- **Make sure you have parent/guardian permission for each type of electronic communication you use.** If you already have permission to use one app with athletes, you still should get permission for each additional app you use.
- **Don't communicate one-on-one with individual minor athletes over personal text or social media accounts.** Team apps and virtual groups are a good way to stay connected without crossing boundaries.

- **Use your webcam in common areas of your home (like a living room or dining room), instead of private areas (like bedrooms and bathrooms).** Ask athletes to do the same. This sets a good example for appropriate online behavior.
- **Copy another adult (like another coach or parent/guardian) if you send technique or training videos to athletes.** If you request athletes send videos to you, make sure they copy another adult as well.
- **Virtual lessons or live stream videos must be observable and interruptible by another adult, such as another coach or parent/guardian.** Keep doors open and wear appropriate clothing. Get parent/guardian permission for individual virtual lessons and give them the link and time/date information.



## FOR PARENTS / GUARDIANS

- **Restate family values and expectations about appropriate behavior.** Talk about how you expect your child to behave and how they should expect to be treated by others.
- **Learn about the apps and websites your child is using, including how to control the privacy settings.** The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has a library of [internet safety resources](#) for adults and children.
- **Create clear guidelines about use of technology in your family's current context.** Include any new apps or platforms being used and set parameters around unsupervised use of technology.
- **[Talk with your child](#) about the potential for peer-to-peer abuse and adult-to-athlete abuse.** The Center has a [variety of free parent and age-appropriate youth resources that can help.](#)
- **Have your child use webcams (especially during private lessons) in a common area or a room with the door open. Bedrooms or bathrooms are discouraged.** Make sure they are aware of what and who is visible in the webcam or video shot. Cameras should also be covered when not in use.
- **Maintain open lines of communication with your child and pay attention to their emotional state.** Staying connected with friends and teammates is incredibly important for their mental health but can also open the door to hurtful and abusive behavior. Even if you are with your child all day, ask them about their day and check-in with them.





## FOR ATHLETES

- **If you are doing a private lesson, use your webcam in a common area or a room with the door open.** Bedrooms or bathrooms are discouraged. Be aware of what and who is visible in the shot. Cameras should also be covered when not in use.
- **Keep the door open during virtual hangouts or team meetings.** If you are in your bedroom, sit in a chair or on the floor instead of your bed. If you want privacy, use headphones instead of closing the door.
- **Understand the privacy settings of the apps and websites you are using.** The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has a library of [internet safety resources](#).
- **Hanging out with your teammates virtually is a great way to stay connected, beat boredom, and feel better.** Make sure any informal team gatherings include all teammates.
- **Say something to your coach, parents, or another trusted adult if you notice someone being cyberbullied, harassed, or sexually exploited.** This includes an adult asking for or sharing nude photos with a minor, someone sharing sexually explicit photos of another person, and spreading rumors about another person online.

## RESOURCES

- [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children - Protecting Your Kids Online](#)
- [RAINN - Social Media Safety](#) (includes information about security settings for popular apps)
- [National Network to End Domestic Violence: Technology Safety -Online Privacy and Safety Tips](#)
- [Cyberbullying Research Center - Livestreaming: Top Ten Tips for Teens](#)
- [Connect Safely - Tips for Safe Social Networking for Teens](#)
- [Think You Know - A Short Guide to Live Streaming](#)
- [U.S. Center for SafeSport](#)