



Engaging the Community to Create a Healthy and Safe Youth Sport Environment *Putting the U.S. National Physical Activity Plan SPORT Sector into Action*

HOW CAN WE HELP?

The National Youth Sports Health & Safety Institute (NYSHSI) is a strategic partnership initiative between the American College of Sports Medicine and Sanford Health. NYSHSI encourages a deliberate early introduction of diverse functional movements and activities that are healthy and fun, as a catalyst for developing a critical foundation, capacity, and enthusiasm for sustainable physical activity (sports and otherwise) through childhood, adolescence and beyond. NYSHSI further urges all youth sports stakeholders to provide a positive and healthy environment for our kids to enjoy sports – that is, have fun, learn sports skills and the rules of the game, and develop as capable and confident young athletes at any level of athletic success in a way that will help them to be good citizens of the game and community, healthy and fit, and performing well in all domains of life.

We recognize that the organization we highlighted, South Dakota Junior Football, is not representative of all communities and circumstances, and this program is unique, in its location, players, coaches, and community partnerships – particularly with their local healthcare provider, Sanford Health. Although it may not incorporate another program's individual circumstances, this program serves as one example of how a sports organization can come together over time to create a healthy, supportive youth sports experience that will hopefully inspire physical activity for a lifetime and shows a way to fulfill the four tactics of strategy 5 within the U.S. National Physical Activity Plan SPORT Sector. Our hope is to inspire other youth sports organizations from diverse backgrounds and communities to create programs that work for their environment.

Below are a few methods your organization can begin to develop and/or strengthen your existing sports organization within each of the four tactics of the U.S. National Physical Activity Plan SPORT Sector, Strategy 5:

Tactic 1 – Establish policies and practices that ensure sports programs put the highest priority on the health and safety of participants

- Sports evolve over the years, so should your coaches.
 - Provide coach education and coach certification opportunities/access
 - Resources are widely available and may be free through national youth sports organizations and governing bodies
- Provide appropriate, well-maintained, and properly fitted protective equipment.
- Educate parents, athletes, and coaches to the rules of your child's sport/game to minimize the risk of injury.
- Implement mandatory coach background screenings prior to the start of any season.
- Be transparent with parents about the coach education process, certifications, background screenings, etc.
- Every sports organization should develop an Emergency Action Plan and distribute it to coaches and parents prior to the start of the season.
- Set safety policies and procedures that have the athlete's best interest at heart – physically and mentally.

Tactic 2 – Educate parents, athletes, coaches, teachers, and others about the signs and symptoms of sports injuries and conditions (e.g., brain injury, heat illness, and exertional sickling)

- Implement annual health/wellness workshops for parents and coaches.
 - Consider seeking a partnership/sponsorship relationship with a local healthcare organization.
- Provide links on your website to free resources provided by credible national youth sports organizations.
- Create a coaching manual with information about the most common injuries and conditions in your sport.
- Reach out to your sport's national governing body headquarters and offer your organization as a program where they can pilot test new sport programming like how USA Football collaborated with South Dakota Junior Football to implement their Heads Up Football Program.
- Remember, increasing athlete participation rates are great, but maintaining player retention from season to season is even better! Strong community partnerships create fertile environments for player and program growth and an overall positive youth sports experience.

Tactic 3 – Ensure that sports equipment, uniforms, playing surfaces, and environmental conditions are checked for safety and best conditions

- Depending on your sport:
 - Ensure proper equipment fittings, equipment recertification, and standard of care for player equipment is being met - all equipment should be up to date and safe.
 - Follow equipment manufacturer guidelines to keep players healthy and safe, showing parents you're committed to provide the best overall sports experience possible for their children.
 - Communicate with your local school district or parks department to make sure fields and facilities are properly maintained.
- Perform thorough testing of playing surfaces before, during, and after each season.
- Always have plans to keep kids safe under various environmental conditions.
- Reach out to local high school and college coaches who may be able to provide guidance and support.

Tactic 4 – Encourage importance of collaboration with medical professionals to ensure safe outcomes during play

- Start small and work with the healthcare organization to provide medical bags for each team consisting of band aids, rolls of athletic tape, wraps, ice bags, and possibly t-shirts for the kids, and equipment and/or discount coupons to a local sporting goods store to purchase equipment for the team.
- Explore opportunities to have certified athletic trainers present at games or major events you are hosting.
- Discuss research project collaboration ideas with the healthcare partner.
- Reach out to your sport's national governing body headquarters and offer your organization as a program where they can pilot test new sport programming like how USA Football collaborated with South Dakota Junior Football to implement their Heads Up Football Program.
- A community partnership with a healthcare organization can ultimately grow over time; however, start small, have some success, meet post-season to review your successes and challenges, and commit to collectively working together to improve and grow your program to provide the best experience for your young athletes!

Additional resources that may be helpful to your organization:

[*NYSHSI Best Practices Partner*](#)

[*NYSHSI Youth Sports e-Toolkit*](#)

[U.S. Center for SafeSport](#)

[U.S. Center for Coaching Excellence](#)

[Positive Coaching Alliance](#)

[National Athletic Trainers' Association Emergency Action Plans](#)

[Aspen Institute/Project Play Children's Bill of Rights in Sports](#)

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Eric Utterback, Program Director, National Youth Sports Health & Safety Institute at utterback@acsm.org.