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# COACHES

## RISK MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION .....	Section A
PROPERLY PLAN ACTIVITIES .....	Section B
PROVIDE APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION .....	Section C
PROVIDE PROPER INSTRUCTION .....	Section D
PROVIDE ADEQUATE & SAFE EQUIPMENT .....	Section E
EVALUATE FOR INJURY AND INCAPACITY .....	Section F
PROVIDE SAFE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT .....	Section G
MATCH ATHLETES ACCORDINGLY .....	Section H
WARN OF INHERENT DANGERS .....	Section I
INITIATE MEDICAL RESPONSE .....	Section J

## SECTION A

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Pop Warner Coaches Risk Management Handbook! Whether you are a new coach or a veteran, this handbook will provide valuable information and ideas on how you can manage your coaching program and team to minimize risk of injury to athletes and risk of liability to yourself. Coaching a Pop Warner team or squad offers great opportunities to be a positive influence in a child's life, teach meaningful lessons through sports, and have fun! At the same time, coaching comes with significant responsibility. When parents drop their children off for practice or come to a game, there is an expectation that their children will return home in the same condition, or better. The great thing is that, although we all know that there are inherent risks in sports and kids may get hurt, we all share the same goal of protecting the well being of the athletes who participate in Pop Warner.

This handbook provides materials and information that you can easily and directly incorporate into your coaching program to increase success and safety. We have provided checklists, instructions, and sources where you can find more information on relevant topics. The handbook is organized to highlight your responsibilities as a coach in managing the risks that are associated with sports and working with young people. These responsibilities are as follows.

- Responsibility 1 - Properly Plan Activities
- Responsibility 2 - Provide Appropriate Supervision
- Responsibility 3 - Provide Proper Instruction
- Responsibility 4 - Provide Adequate and Proper Equipment
- Responsibility 5 - Evaluate for Injury and Incapacity
- Responsibility 6 - Provide a Safe Physical Environment
- Responsibility 7 - Match Athletes Accordingly
- Responsibility 8 - Warn of Inherent Dangers
- Responsibility 9 - Initiate Medical Response

Please review, understand, and carry out these responsibilities; it is in everyone's best interests, including your own. Have a great season!

## SECTION B

### PROPERLY PLAN ACTIVITIES

In order to comply with Pop Warner rules and to provide a safe environment for the athletes, it is essential to plan activities for practice in advance and to document the time spent and the techniques taught. Appropriate documentation ensures that the proper procedures are followed and also aids in your defense in the event of alleged negligence. Advanced planning will result in a more organized and effective practice that will also decrease accidents.

It is important to incorporate the following items into practices and competitions to ensure that athletes avoid injury and reach their athletic potential for the demands of the activity:

#### WARM-UP & COOL DOWN

Beginning a practice or competition without warming up greatly increases the chance of injury. A proper warm-up helps athletes train and compete without being injured by:

- Increasing body temperature.
- Increasing respiration (oxygen availability).
- Increasing heart rate.
- Reducing the risk of muscle and tendon sprains by stretching tight muscles.
- Reducing the risk of ligament sprains.

Guidelines for Warm-Up:

1. Inform athletes of the importance of properly warming up.
2. Instruct athletes in the warm-up activities to perform before training and competing.
  - First, appropriate calisthenics (for strength) to raise body temperature.
  - Second, appropriate stretching exercises (for flexibility).
  - Third, partial- and full-motion activities for each athlete's particular position or event, at varying speeds, distances, or intensities.
3. Direct warm-up activities of athletes to ensure a slow increase in the intensity of motion, particularly the motion actually used in the sport.
4. Ensure that warm-up activities are tailored to each athlete's conditioning and position or event.
5. Ensure that athletes warm-up for 10 minutes or longer.
6. Monitor warm-up activities to make sure they do not cause fatigue.

Blood and muscle lactic acid levels drop faster during active cool-down than during rest. Abruptly stopping intense physical activity can result in muscle cramps, soreness, and stiffness and may increase the potential for fainting or dizziness caused by blood pooling.

Guidelines for Cool-Down –

1. Inform athletes of the importance of properly cooling down the body after exercise.
2. Instruct athletes in the cool-down activities to perform after training and competing:
  - First, partial- and full-motion activities for each athlete's particular position/event, at reduced speeds, distances, or intensities.
  - Second, light calisthenics
  - Third, stretching exercises
3. Direct cool-down activities to ensure a gradual reduction of the intensity of the activity.
4. Ensure that athletes perform the cool-down activity for at least 10 minutes.

## TRAINING

Training methods and type, frequency, duration, and intensity of practices should vary among athletes, depending on the athlete's age, experience, physical conditioning, mental state, and training goals. The purpose of training is to prepare for competition. Training is not to be used as a disciplinary activity, unsupervised play, or competition itself.

Guidelines for Training –

1. Recommend that training begin before the season starts so athletes are in good condition for the first day of practice. Injuries are more likely when poorly conditioned athletes over-train early in the season.
2. Pay attention to ensure that training balances fitness and skill development in all training sessions.
3. Ensure that training intensity increases gradually. Trying to increase too rapidly often leads to injury.
4. Teach athletes to be aware of their training levels.
5. Note athletes' changes in skill levels and techniques.
6. In warmer and more humid climates, modify training to prevent heat-related emergencies.
7. Coaches should insure sufficient water breaks and encourage the athletes to drink water.
8. If supplied by the team/squad or by the practice facility, the water should be healthful and potable.
9. Water delivery systems should be designed to prevent the spread of any infection and/or contagious disease.

Coaches should always start practices by inquiring whether anyone is hurt or is not feeling well before starting warm-up and respond accordingly. When appropriate, the following is an example of an effective way to conduct a practice. Practices should include:

- Practicing previously taught skills
- Teaching and practicing new skills
- Practicing under competitive conditions
- Discussing things that need improvement, which were successful or which need to be eliminated.

## SECTION C

### PROVIDE APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION

Coaches are responsible for providing appropriate supervision to prevent unnecessary risk of injury. There are two types of supervision.

**General** - General supervision is the oversight of all areas and events taking place during the session, whether training or competition.

**Specific** - Specific supervision is the oversight of specific elements or skills being performed.

For the coach, balancing supervisory responsibilities is important for protecting the well-being of

athletes, since as the level of specific supervision increases while the level of general supervision often decreases. The coach must continue to be aware of the activities of all athletes present.

### **Guidelines for Appropriate Supervision**

A coach's supervisory responsibilities start when the first athlete arrives at the facility and do not end until the last athlete leaves. It is imperative that the coach implement a contingency supervision plan in the event that he/she needs to step away from the activity site, and is no longer in the position to observe, instruct, correct or supervise.

There should always be at least 2 coaches present. The head coach should direct to ensure all athletes have adult supervision while at practice and/or competition. **Coaches should avoid any situation where a single adult is alone with one or more minors.**

1. Consider athletes' maturity, age, size, weight, conditioning, and skill when determining the degree of supervision required. Generally, the lower the age the greater the required ratio of supervisors to athletes.
2. Supervise athletes in all activities related to the sport including:
  - Dressing, assembling equipment, and otherwise preparing for training and competition
  - Warming up
  - Training and competing
  - Cooling down
  - Putting equipment away, showering, and otherwise concluding training and competition
  - Receiving treatment for injuries
  - Maintaining equipment
  - Traveling to and from training and competition, when appropriate
  - Staying overnight
  - Eating meals
3. Act quickly and decisively to correct conditions and actions that could lead to injury or damage.
4. Plan and direct activities.
5. Increase the level of specific supervision as the risk of injury increases.
6. Insist that athletes use appropriate training techniques.
7. Ensure that athletes use equipment in accordance with its intended use.
8. Make sure that athletes use facilities, fields, and courses as they are intended to be used.
9. Be alert to conditions that require additional supervision.
10. Be alert to changing conditions that could increase the risk of injury.
11. Increase the level of supervision when athletes are learning new techniques or equipment.
12. Develop and follow medical emergency response procedures.
13. Document and investigate accidents or injuries.
14. Check all facilities and equipment for noticeably dangerous conditions and/or defects and report your findings immediately to those responsible for maintaining.

### **Responsibility**

It is the responsibility of the coaches to set the standard of behavior for the team/squad. Additionally, it is the Head Coach's responsibility to control the actions and attitudes of the athletes, coaching staff and parents.

## **Respect**

Coaches must always show respect for athletes, Officials, parents and other coaches. All coaches deserve the same respect in return.

## **Officials**

Coaches must respect the integrity, judgment and objectivity of the Officials. Coaches must always demonstrate appropriate, respectful behavior to Officials.

## **Appropriate Behavior**

Please review the Coaches Code of Conduct in the Pop Warner National Rule Book. In addition, to confirm those guidelines, the following guiding principles should be upheld:

1. Abuse of any kind is not permitted in Pop Warner. Abuse may consist of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse, and is not tolerated in Pop Warner coaches or administrators.
2. Physical and sexual abuse, which may include, but is not limited to, striking, hitting, kicking, biting, indecent or wanton gesturing, lewd remarks, indecent exposure, unwanted physical conduct, any form of sexual conduct or inappropriate touching, are expressly forbidden within our organization.

## **Language**

Offensive and insulting language by coaches or administrators is prohibited. Coaches should model good, positive communication skills. Language that is demeaning and language that references gender, race, national origin, disability, sexual orientation or religion is forbidden.

## **Discrimination**

Coaches and administrators must never discriminate in any manner, including:

- Race
- National origin
- Religion
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Disability

## **Emotional Conditions**

Coaches and administrators should use discretion in providing constructive criticism and discipline to the young athletes in Pop Warner. Even well-meaning coaches may cause or aggravate emotional conditions at the developmentally tricky ages of their young athletes.

## **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional and verbal abuse is prohibited. Such abuse may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Insults
- Threats
- Mocking
- Demeaning gestures or behavior
- Making offensive statements regarding an athlete or parent

## **Dealing with Parents**

At the first meeting of the season, Coaches should make clear guidelines for acceptable interaction and communication. Coaches should never argue with a parent or exhibit any hostility. If a situation with a parent becomes difficult, the coach should document all communications by himself/herself and the parent(s) and copy their local Pop Warner Association or League.

## **Discipline**

Coaches should demand a sport environment that is free from:

- Hazing
- Fighting
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Drugs
- Unsportsmanlike conduct
- Profane language or behavior
- Violent aggression

Coaches and administrators should be consistent in enforcing these policies. Discipline solutions should be established in advance with all coaches. By doing so, any liability concerns of “on-the-spot” discipline can be avoided.

## **Physical Contact**

Coaches must be aware that any physical contact may be misinterpreted. Physical contact should be limited to only that necessary and appropriate to teach a skill, treat an injury, or console or congratulate an athlete. In teaching a skill, minimal physical contact should take place, and none which places the coach in a position of power or intimidation.

Physical intimidation, corporal punishment and threats are inappropriate and forbidden.



## SECTION D

### PROVIDE PROPER INSTRUCTION

Sports coaches are responsible for instructing athletes on sport-specific techniques and skills, game rules, safety rules, and sportsmanship.

It is important that coaches comply with the following responsibilities when providing instructions to the athlete:

- Follow the accepted practices for teaching sport specific.
- Follow the drills and other methods that are considered standard for the sport.
- Maintain familiarity with trends in the sport.
- Provide instructions that focus on the more hazardous areas of a particular sport and/or techniques that are counter-intuitive such as certain blocking/tackling techniques and stunts.
- Be familiar with the venue surroundings and instruct athletes to do the same.
- Maintain records of instruction and training.

While it is important to understand the rules, skills, and strategies of the sport, it is equally important to know how to teach the rules, skills, and strategies. The following is a helpful guideline for successful coaching.

1. Introduce the skill to your athletes.
2. Demonstrate the skill.
3. Explain the skill.
4. Pay specific attention to athletes practicing the skill.

#### **Introduce the Skill**

Athletes, especially young and inexperienced ones, need to understand what skill they are learning and why it is important. Coaches should take the following steps into consideration when teaching a new skill:

- Ensure that you have the athlete's attention.
- Name the new skill.
- Explain the importance of the skill in detail

#### **Demonstrate the Skill**

The demonstration step is the most important part of teaching the skill to young athletes since they often have never done anything similar to it. They need to see how the skill is properly performed. If you are unable to perform the skill correctly, have an assistant coach or someone skilled perform the demonstration. Your demonstrations will be more effective if you:

- Use correct form.
- Demonstrate the skill several times.
- Slow down the skill, if possible, during one or two performances so athletes can see every movement involved.
- Demonstrate the skill from both the left and right sides, as well as from different angles.

## **Explain the Skill**

Athletes are able to comprehend more complex skills when they are broken down and explained in more manageable parts. Coaches should break down new skills into the following parts:

- Show athletes the entire skill correctly and explain the function in the sport.
- Break down the skill and point out its component parts to the team.
- Require the athletes to perform each of the component skills.
- Re-explain the entire skill, after the athletes have demonstrated their ability to perform the separate parts of the skill in sequence.
- Have athletes practice the skill.

## **Pay Attention to Athletes Practicing the Skill**

Some athletes may need to be physically guided through the movements during their first few attempts. Once your athletes have demonstrated that they understand how to perform the skill, a significant part of coaching will involve closely observing the performances of your athletes.

As you observe athletes' efforts in practices and competitions, it is important to:

- Point out what the athlete did correctly.
- Let the athlete know what was done incorrectly and provide instruction on how to correct it.
- Offer positive, corrective feedback.
- Document progression.

## SECTION E

### PROVIDE ADEQUATE & PROPER EQUIPMENT

It is very important to inspect equipment prior to each practice and game. Proper equipment can protect athletes from injury or reduce the severity of injury if an incident occurs. Conversely, improper equipment can create vulnerabilities and increase the risk of injury. In football, for example, protective pads tend to wear down and pants can lose their stretch allowing thigh pads to slip. This could leave a player vulnerable to a severe thigh bruise. Moreover, coaches can be sued based on injuries allegedly resulting from improper fit, lack of maintenance and care, and noncompliance with standards, accepted practices and rules.

To maximize injury prevention, equipment must be:

- Available and used by athletes
- Appropriate
- High-quality
- In good condition
- Sized properly
- Fitted correctly
- Maintained
- Repaired or replaced when damaged.

The coach is responsible for:

- Determining what equipment will be used in training and competing, regardless of the supplier.
- Selecting appropriate equipment. Refer to the following sections in the Official Rules:
  - Cheer – Rule 11, S-2 – Participant Apparel
  - Football – Rule 13 – Required Equipment
- Ensuring that equipment is available.
- Overseeing the use of equipment, and ensuring that equipment is properly maintained and replaced when needed.
- Establishing procedures to inspect athletes' equipment before they engage in the activity to ensure that they are using proper and non-defective equipment.

**Coaches should never modify equipment without consulting with and obtaining written consent from the manufacturer. Any modifications to equipment may void equipment warranties and create liability.**

#### Guidelines for Equipment Selection and Use

1. The purchaser of equipment should:
  - Be knowledgeable about the different types of equipment available, including new developments in equipment material and design.
  - Deal only with reputable suppliers and authorized dealers. Coaches should check references.
  - Provide quality equipment that is appropriate for the sport and size, strength, and skill level of the user.
  - Ensure that equipment is reconditioned annually by a reputable re-conditioner.
  - Re-certify helmets every two years.

2. Require the use of helmets, eye protection, mouth guards, and other critical safety equipment where appropriate. Always follow Pop Warner rules on appropriate equipment.
3. Inspect all equipment at the beginning of each season for quality and defects before use and periodically through the season for wear and tear. Be cautious of hand-me-down equipment.
4. Always follow manufacturers' recommendations for sizing equipment.
5. Instruct athletes on the proper use, fit, cleaning and maintenance of equipment.
6. Warn athletes about any dangers associated with equipment use and misuse.
7. Instruct athletes and parents to report equipment damage.
8. Direct athletes and parents to repair or replace their personal equipment when necessary.

Coaches have a duty and a right to prohibit players from participating if they do not have the proper equipment. Sport specific requirements are identified in the Pop Warner Official Rules for football and cheer.

## SECTION F

### EVALUATE FOR INJURY AND INCAPACITY

Sports injury care consists of two basic elements - prevention and recognition/treatment. Coaches must include both elements in their coaching programs.

1. **Prevention** – Coaches should incorporate methods for preventing injuries and illnesses in their coaching programs including pre-participation screening, strength training, conditioning, and awareness of the nature, cause, and mechanisms of sport specific injuries.
2. **Recognition and Treatment** – Once the coach realizes that an injury or illness has occurred, the magnitude must be assessed and appropriate care initiated.

Pop Warner recommends that coaches ask athletes whether they are hurt or not feeling well prior to any practice or competition.

#### **Return-To-Play Guidelines:**

If an athlete has been injured or ill but seems to have recovered, you may need to decide whether the athlete should return to play. The severity of an injury or illness is not easily determined. An injury or illness that is incorrectly identified and for which the athlete does not receive medical attention may become worse. Recovery time may be longer if proper care is delayed, and the athlete could experience increased or permanent damage.

1. Pop Warner rules require athletes that have been removed from a game because of injury sit out at least one down, and may not re-enter the game without approval of attending medical personnel.
2. The absence of pain does not signify that the injury is not serious. Do not return an athlete to play simply because he or she says the pain is minimal.
3. With an injury causing pain, swelling, or redness, do not ask the athlete to try to “walk it off.” Movement may aggravate the injury.

4. Do not let the athlete move at all with any suspected injury to the head, neck or back. Do not let others touch the athlete or roll him or her over. Call EMS immediately.
5. An athlete exhibiting any of the following signs needs immediate medical care:
  - Deformity of limb.
  - Any extreme localized pain.
  - Joint pain.
  - Altered level of consciousness, including drowsiness, disorientation, seizure, unconsciousness.
  - Repeated vomiting or diarrhea.
  - Unequal pupil size.
  - Severe bleeding.
  - Breathing difficulty or breathing irregularly.
  - Fluid leaking from nose or ears.
  - Any eye injury affecting vision.
  - Chest pain.
6. If an athlete reports any pain, or there are other symptoms, or signs of a potential head or neck injury, do not let the athlete return to play. When in doubt, play it safe.
7. Following a serious injury or illness, return to play should be guided by a physician's recommendation and release. These include injuries that have resulted in unconsciousness, concussion, surgery and/or missing several consecutive days of training.
8. An athlete should be able to demonstrate a pain-free full range of motion in the injured areas before returning to play.
9. A participant who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or a head injury in a practice, game or competition shall be removed from practice, play or competition at that time based on evaluation and determination by the Head Coach. However, if an official licensed athletic trainer or other official qualified medical professional is on site and available to render such evaluation, that person shall always have final authority as to removal or return to play of the participant.

When an official licensed athletic trainer or other official qualified medical professional is not present, and a parent or guardian of the injured player is serving as head coach, the final authority on removal of a participant shall rest with the league president, association president or the top ranking assistant head coach; whomever is present and highest the in the Pop Warner chain of command.

Any Pop Warner participant who has been removed from practice, play or competition due to a head injury or suspected concussion may not return to Pop Warner activities until the participant has been evaluated by a currently licensed medical professional trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and receives written clearance to return to play from that licensed practitioner.

In the absence of an official licensed athletic trainer or other official qualified medical professional, at regional Pop Warner events, the Regional Director shall be the final authority on removal of a participant for a suspected head injury or concussion. At national events, the National Football Commissioner or National Cheer Commissioner, depending on the sport in which the participant was engaged, or in their absence the Executive Director, shall be the final authority on removal of a participant for a suspected head injury or concussion.

Pop Warner recommends that all decisions be made in the best interest of the children and that when any doubt exists as to the health of the participants, they sit out.

## SECTION G

### PROVIDE SAFE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Although facility managers, building owners and other operators have certain responsibilities for providing a safe environment in and around their facilities, coaches are responsible for inspecting all areas to be utilized in practice and competition to identify hazards. This includes locker rooms, workout rooms, gymnasiums, equipment and fields. Coaches also should ensure that proper emergency care and safety equipment is available and accessible. Coaches should document their facility inspections because they can be beneficial in defending against certain lawsuits. **In addition, please note it is not sufficient simply to identify a hazard. You should take action by having the item corrected, posting warning signs, and/or keeping athletes/spectators away from the hazard.**

#### Guidelines to Provide a Safe Environment

1. Regularly and thoroughly inspect all building areas, equipment, fields, courses and other playing surfaces used by the athletes.
2. Inspect potentially dangerous equipment, heavy-use equipment and protective equipment frequently.
3. Ensure that unused equipment is not stored in or dangerously close to a playing area.
4. Ensure that wall-mounted devices that could cause injury are padded and light bulbs have protective coverings.
5. During extreme weather, inspect equipment and fields, courses, and other outside playing surfaces, including support structures that could become unsafe.
6. Ask athletes to report any unsafe conditions related to the facility, equipment, fields, courses, and other playing surfaces.
7. Report (in writing) damage to the facility, fields, and courses, and request to have it repaired. Inspect repairs when completed. Include photos of the damage with the written report if possible.
8. Prevent athletes from using unsafe building areas, equipment, fields, courses, and other playing surfaces. In particular, remove unsafe equipment immediately to prevent inadvertent or prohibited use.
9. Ensure the facility provides access to water for adequate fluid replacement for athletes during all practices and competitions, or provide a separate source. Report any water quality problems to those responsible.
10. Ensure easy access to emergency equipment and first aid supplies.
11. Ensure telephone or radio access to enable contact with emergency medical services.
12. Ensure, if possible, telephone contact with parent or guardian if not present.

\*See Facility checklist included at the end of this manual.

#### Inclement Weather

Monitoring weather conditions is the responsibility of the game officials, coaches, and league and association administrators. All should be aware of the potential dangers posed by different weather conditions and work together to keep the players and other participants as safe as possible. Coaches should monitor weather conditions including warnings and watches issued by the National Weather Service. According to the National Weather Service, a “watch” means

severe weather is possible during the next few hours, while a “warning” means that severe weather has been observed or is expected soon.

Prior to a game, coaches and game officials should discuss the procedures they will follow if inclement weather becomes an issue.

In the case of inclement weather a game may be called for two reasons:

- Condition of the playing field
- Weather at game time

Coaches and referees must exercise their best judgment to determine whether or not a field is in playable condition or if lightning is a potential hazard. If the area has had a large amount of rain and the fields are not in playing shape, games should be called as early as possible. If there is any lightning in the area at game time, the game official is to cancel the game immediately. In addition, if it is raining heavily at game time, the game official can call the game.

If a decision is made to continue play (this should never be the case if lightning is an issue), and a parent does not agree with the decision, the coach should support the parent’s decision to remove the child from the game.

## **Severe Storm**

Severe storms can produce damaging high winds, hail, heavy rain, lightning and/or tornadoes. If a severe storm approaches the playing area, the safety of the players may require that the game be suspended and immediate shelter sought. Coaches should always err on the side of caution when considering whether to call a game or cancel a practice for weather concerns.

## **Lightning**

Lightning is the second leading cause of storm related deaths (flooding is first). Lightning can strike up to 10 miles outside of a thunderstorm, literally a bolt from the blue. The danger from lightning can persist for at least 30 minutes or more after a thunderstorm has passed. The National Weather Service does not issue watches or warnings for lightning by itself.

If a person can hear thunder, or see lightning, the danger is already present. A clear, sunny sky overhead with storm clouds nearby can still be dangerous.

The following guidelines are recommended to determine if hazardous conditions exist:

- If lightning is within 5 miles, the game(s) should be suspended and shelter sought. A lightning detector can identify the distance accurately but may not be available. A rough guideline is to measure the time between the lightning flash and hearing the corresponding thunder. If it is 30 seconds or less, seek shelter. It may not be possible to determine which lightning strike generated which roll of thunder.
- Know the availability and location(s) of nearby shelter(s) in advance.

- Shelter should be in larger, enclosed structures. Do not stay in open, unprotected areas. Smaller, open structures such as tents, trees, and isolated areas should be avoided. Cars, with windows rolled up, or buses can provide good shelter. Avoid contact with metal or other conducting materials to the outside surfaces.
- Games should not be restarted for at least 30 minutes after the last roll of thunder is heard.
- The team(s) should be advised of notification and evacuation plans and places to seek shelter near practice and competition sites.

Coaches should discuss methods for notifying athletes of cancelled events (competition or practice) at the beginning of the season. For example, the coach may want the athletes to call him or her directly for the status or may want to implement a phone tree notification system.

### **Transportation**

Some of the most devastating losses for a coach or organization involve motor vehicle accidents. Coaches and administrators should protect themselves against the risks with driving while they are volunteering. **Transportation of those with injuries or illnesses should be handled only by emergency response personnel or the parent(s) of the injured/ill.**

Coaches and administrators should avoid driving alone with a non-family athlete. However, in the event an athlete remains at a field waiting for transportation, the coach should wait with the athlete to guarantee the athlete's safety and well-being. (Coaches should stress to the parents the responsibility for safe and timely transportation to and from the field.)

## **SECTION H**

### **MATCH ATHLETES ACCORDINGLY**

Pop Warner places great emphasis on the importance of matching players to reduce the risk of injury and avoid unfair competitive advantage. Coaches have a duty to exercise reasonable care to prevent foreseeable risks of harm to others. One of the duties that has emerged is the duty to match athletes of similar competitive levels. Numerous court cases have arisen out of the failure of a sports organization to appropriately match the size, age and skill of sports athletes. Courts have indicated that coaches have an obligation to match their athletes using reasonable guidelines.

The following factors should be considered when matching athletes:

- Skill
- Experience
- Height and weight
- Injuries or incapacitating conditions
- Age
- Maturity
- Mental state
- Gender



It is important to:

1. Have knowledge of the skill and experience levels of the athlete prior to performing a skill
2. Understand the physical and emotional conditions of an athlete that may restrict participation.
3. Document factors that you utilized when matching your athletes

For specific ages and weights, please refer to the following sections in the Pop Warner Official Rules:

- Cheer – Ages and Divisions, Rule 1
- Football – 11-Man Tackle Playing Rules, Rule 1 – 5

## **SECTION I**

### **WARN OF INHERENT DANGERS**

The failure to advise and inform athletes and their parents of the risks of participation is a prevalent allegation in sport injury litigation. Private and public institutions, school districts, youth league organizations, sports administrators, and coaches have been found negligent for failure to warn athletes about the risks in playing sports.

Some of the allegations involved are:

- Not informing the athletes about the general nature of risk
- Not explaining the specific risks involved with the sport
- Not explaining the risks of using improper techniques
- Not explaining the need for purchasing, inspecting and maintaining proper equipment

An effective method of advising athletes and their parents of the dangers associated with playing is through an Orientation Meeting. This is also a good time to receive an acknowledgement from the athletes and their parents that they agree to participate with full understanding of the risks by reading and signing an Informed Consent Form.

The Orientation Meeting should include the following information regarding understanding and minimizing the risk of injury:

1. Inform athletes/parents what injuries can be expected
2. Inform athletes/parents of the required medical exam prior to participation.  
Per Pop Warner rules, page..... “All athletes...”
3. Explain injury prevention measures that are commonly used for games and practices
4. Provide information on your plan for checking playing/practice areas and equipment
5. Explain what equipment the athletes need and where it can be purchased. Be prepared to provide tips on the proper care, inspection and maintenance of equipment.
6. Describe procedures that will be used in case of an emergency

Following is a sample script that you might utilize for this portion of your Orientation Meeting.

## **Football**

“As athletes and parents, you may be concerned about possible injuries that could occur in Pop Warner. As in any sport, you could get hurt during a practice or game. It is a part of sports. We need to work together during the season to do everything we can to prevent injuries, especially serious injuries. How can we do this? First of all, we will have a warm-up and cool down, including flexibility exercises whenever we practice or play. If you are late to a practice or need to leave early, you need to take the time to do this on your own. This is one of the most effective methods for preventing sports injuries. In addition, coaches will instruct athletes on proper techniques. The proper techniques on skills such as blocking and tackling are designed to minimize the risk of injury so it’s important that you pay attention and follow instructions. You need to avoid improper techniques such as grabbing another player’s facemask, helmet-to-helmet contact, or head slapping with the forearm as you could seriously injure your teammate.

Parents, it is also essential that your kids are fed and hydrated when they arrive at practices and games. Lack of proper hydration and improper diet can provide inadequate fuel for athletes, induce fatigue, and enhance the risk for injury. Finally, encourage activity year-round so kids are in shape when we begin practice each year.

The bottom line is, we all need to be aware that injuries can and do happen, and then work together to prevent them wherever possible.”

## **Spirit**

“As athletes and parents, you may be concerned about possible injuries that could occur in Pop Warner. As in any sport, you could get hurt during a practice or competition. It is a part of sports. We need to work together to do everything we can to prevent injuries, especially serious injuries. How can we do this? First of all, we will have a warm-up and cool down, including flexibility exercises whenever we practice or compete. If you are late to a practice or need to leave early, you need to take the time to do this on your own. This is one of the most effective methods for preventing sports injuries. In addition, coaches will instruct athletes on proper techniques. For example, proper positioning of the base and hand placement is important in preventing falls which can cause serious injury.

Parents, it is also essential that your kids are fed and hydrated when they arrive at practices and competition. Lack of proper hydration and improper diet can provide inadequate fuel for athletes, induce fatigue, and enhance the risk for injury. Finally, encourage activity year-round so kids are in shape when we begin practice each year.

The bottom line is, we all need to be aware that injuries can and do happen, and then work together to prevent them wherever possible.”

## **Informed Consent**

Although you will do everything you can as a coach to prevent injuries, there are inherent dangers in sports and athletes may get hurt while participating. In today's litigious society, you may be named in a lawsuit resulting from an incident that takes place while you are coaching. For your protection and the protection of Pop Warner, Pop Warner has developed an informed consent form that all parents and athletes should sign. You should collect these forms prior to allowing an athlete to participate and submit them to your League for storage purposes. Duplicate copies of these forms should be made and stored at another location in case the original become destroyed.

While these forms do not prevent lawsuits, they may be a valuable tool in providing a defense as they show that the athlete and athlete's parents were aware of and consented to the risks of participation.

## SECTION J

### INITIATE MEDICAL RESPONSE

As a head coach it is your responsibility to make sure the rules are followed. If a first aid certified coach is not available, the practice or competition cannot take place. Pop Warner rules require that at least one coach certified in basic first aid and CPR be present at all practices and competitions. The coach should follow the scope of his/her training in administering first aid and not exceed the scope of that training. The purpose of first aid is to stabilize the situation by preventing it from worsening. Once the situation has been stabilized, all other treatment should be provided by a doctor. Coaches should renew their training in accordance with certification guidelines to ensure they remain current on the changes in procedures and nature of treatment. In addition, all coaches are expected to have a thoroughly planned and well-organized emergency medical plan.

#### **The basic duties of first aid are:**

- Check the scene for safety.
- Check the injured athlete and protect the athlete from further harm, following *universal precautions* when appropriate. Assume that all blood, body fluids and any other potentially infectious materials are infected with a blood-borne pathogen. Use latex gloves and sterilized bandages to administer first-aid. All bleeding must be stopped prior to re-entering the practice or competition. All uniforms, bandages and other materials must be properly disposed of.
- DO NOT MOVE THE ATHLETE.
- Activate the emergency medical plan.
- Care for the injured or ill athlete until EMS personnel arrive.

#### **Emergency Medical Plan**

An emergency plan is a necessary tool in preparing your athletes for the upcoming season. All head coaches are required to submit a general emergency plan in writing to their staff. The head coach should then discuss and review these procedures with assistant coaches, participants, volunteers, and parents. Coaches, and those who have designated roles in the plan, need to be specifically trained on how to activate the Emergency Medical Plan.

The plan should be in writing and readily available and should cover the following elements:

- Who telephones 9-1-1 or other predetermined emergency response telephone number and maintain procedures for calling 9-1-1 in his/her possession?
- Who attends to the injured athlete(s), controls immediate scene and has each athlete's Emergency Treatment Authorization Cards?
- Where is the nearest treatment facility?
- Who meets paramedics at gate and guides them to the injured athlete(s) and maintains all necessary keys in his/her possession?
- Who initiates crowd control and contacts security?
- Who notifies parents/guardians or alternate name on emergency card? At both practices and game?
- Who accompanies the injured athlete for treatment?
- Who transports injured athlete for treatment (ambulance or parents...not coaches)
- Who supervises the team?
- Who provides proof of insurance?
- Who documents all information relating to the incident and the emergency response?

An alternative plan should be formulated when traveling to other facilities.

### **Emergency Treatment Authorization Cards**

Coaches and other personnel should have easy access to the Emergency Treatment Authorization Cards (ETAC) that give permission for medical treatment in case of an emergency. Each athlete is required to have an ETAC prior to participating in practice or competition. It is recommended that each coach have a binder that includes a copy of the ETAC for each player. Coaches should always have the binder during practice and competition. If the coach will not be present, it is his or her responsibility to ensure that the replacement coach has the binder. The following information should be on each card.

- Name of athlete
- Date of birth and age of athlete
- Name of parent or guardian (home, work and cell)
- Address of athlete
- Alternate emergency contact and their number in case parent/guardian cannot be reached
- Special medical conditions of athlete
- Medication athlete is taking
- Allergies
- Physician's name and phone number
- Insurance information
- Date information was reported
- Notary (if required by hospital or state)

### **First Aid Kit**

Keep a first aid kit nearby during all coaching and sporting activities in order to be prepared for an emergency. Whenever possible, have a second kit for multiple injury situations at a practice or competition site.

A sports first aid kit should include the following essential items:

- List of athletes with special conditions (asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, allergies, etc.)
- List of emergency phone numbers
- Adhesive bandages with gauze pads – assorted sizes
- Antiseptic
- Arm sling (triangular bandage is fine)
- Bandage scissors
- Butterfly closures
- Cotton swabs
- Elastic tape
- White tape
- Elastic wraps
- Emergency blanket
- Latex/nitrile gloves (multiple pairs)
- Plastic bags and bags for ice packs
- Resuscitation (CPR) mask/face shield
- Sterile Water

Coaches may purchase already stocked first aid kits from many sporting goods stores.

The following are additional items to consider including in your first aid kit:

- Alcohol/alcohol preps
- Betadine solution
- Eye Patch and Eye Wash
- Flashlight and batteries
- Foam padding, assorted thickness
- Moleskin
- Nail clippers
- Nonstick wound dressing pads
- Petroleum jelly
- Plastic bags and bags for ice packs
- Resuscitation (CPR) mask/face shield
- Safety pins
- Sunscreen
- Tongue blades
- Tape remover
- Tape underwrap
- Thermometer
- Tweezers
- Powder

## **Heat-Related Emergencies**

Heat-related emergencies are progressive conditions caused by overexposure to heat. Heat emergencies fall into three categories of increasing severity: heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke. Heat illnesses are easily preventable by taking necessary precautions in hot weather. If recognized in the early stages, heat-related emergencies can usually be reversed.

Without intervention and resolution of the problem, heat cramps (caused by loss of salt from heavy sweating) can lead to heat exhaustion (caused by dehydration), which can progress to heatstroke, a life-threatening condition. Heat related emergencies can be avoided by canceling practice or competition in extreme weather (high temperature and/or high humidity) and taking frequent breaks for water.

Signals of heat-related illnesses:

- *Early stages of heat illness*
  - Profuse sweating
  - Fatigue
  - Thirst
  - Muscle Cramps
- *Later symptoms of heat exhaustion:*
  - Headache
  - Dizziness

- Weaknesses and light-headedness
- Cool, moist skin
- Nausea and vomiting
- Dark Urine
- Symptoms of heatstroke:
  - Fever (body temperature above 104 degrees F)
  - Irrational behavior
  - Extreme confusion
  - Dry, hot, and red skin
  - Rapid, weak pulse
  - Seizures
  - Unconsciousness

Response:

1. Follow the basic duties of first aid.
2. Move the athlete to a cool place.
3. Loosen tight clothing.
4. Remove perspiration-soaked clothing.
5. Fan the athlete.
6. If conscious, give cool water to drink.
7. If unconscious, call EMS personnel (911) immediately.

If the athlete refuses water, vomits, or starts to lose consciousness –

1. Send someone to call EMS personnel (911).
2. Contact parent or guardian if not already present
3. Place the athlete on his or her side.
4. Immediately decrease body temperature by hosing the athlete down with cold water or placing them in an ice bath.
5. Continue to cool the athlete by using ice or cold packs on the wrists, ankles, groin, and neck and in the armpits.
6. Continue to check breathing and pulse.

**POP WARNER  
FACILITY SAFETY CHECKLIST**

Inspector:

Date:

Facility Name/Location:

**\* If the answer to any of the questions below is “no,” corrective action must be taken \***

**ATHLETE AREAS**

Playing Surface:

1. Playing surface is in proper condition:
  - Field: free of large divots or holes
  - Gym: dry and clean Yes  No
2. Playing surface is free of obstructions and protruding objects (e.g. sprinkler heads, soccer goals, basketball nets, etc.)
  Yes  No
3. Out-of-bounds areas are free of obstructions and protruding objects
  Yes  No
4. Playing area is clearly marked
  Yes  No
5. Lighting appears adequate
  Yes  No
6. Free of lime
  Yes  No

Corrective Action Needed:

Corrective Action Taken:

Locker Rooms:

1. Floors are dry
  Yes  No
2. Lockers are secure and free of laceration exposures
  Yes  No
3. Bathrooms appear sanitary
  Yes  No
4. Housekeeping in locker room area is in order
  Yes  No
5. Possibility of scalding water
  Yes  No

Corrective Action Needed:

Corrective Action Taken:

**EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

Access to Emergency Service:

1. Telephones and the appropriate emergency numbers are accessible
  Yes  No
2. There is adequate passage for emergency vehicles
  Yes  No
3. Players' medical history forms are on site
  Yes  No
4. Players' emergency contact lists are on site
  Yes  No

Corrective Action Needed:

Corrective Action Taken:

First Aid Equipment Checklist:

- List of athletes with special conditions (asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, allergies, etc.)
- List of emergency phone numbers
- Adhesive bandages with gauze pads – assorted sizes
- Antiseptic
- Arm sling (triangular bandage is fine)
- Bandage scissors
- Butterfly closures
- Cotton swabs
- Elastic tape
- White tape
- Elastic wraps
- Emergency blanket
- Latex gloves (multiple pairs)
- Plastic bags and bags for ice packs
- Sterile Water
- Resuscitation (CPR) masks/face shield

**SPECTATOR AREAS**

**\* This section may apply to coaches or administrators, depending on who has the responsibility in their local Pop Warner program \***

Areas Adjacent to Field or Gym:

1. Adequate number of waste containers in place
  Yes  No
2. Areas are free of slip, trip and fall hazards

Parking Lot:

1. Lighting appears adequate
  Yes  No
2. Area is free of slip, trip and fall hazards

<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>3. Water fountain areas are free of puddles, algae build up and/or mud</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>4. Barriers to protect spectators are adequate and in good condition</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Corrective Action Needed:</p> <p>Corrective Action Taken:</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>3. Security is present</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>Corrective Action Needed:</p> <p>Corrective Action Taken:</p>
<p><b>Bleachers:</b></p> <p>1. Footers are blocked appropriately and do not move.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>2. Vertical openings between guardrails, footboards and seatboards are less than four inches</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>3. Metal bleachers are free of corrosion and/or damage</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>4. Wood bleachers are free of dry rot and/or damage</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>5. Transitional areas are clearly marked</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>6. Handrails, seats and supports are securely fastened</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>7. Seats and handrails are free from splinters</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>8. Bleachers appear sturdy enough for anticipated loads</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Corrective Action Needed:</p> <p>Corrective Action Taken:</p>	<p><b>Walkways, Steps, Stairs, Ramps:</b></p> <p>1. Walking areas are free of slip, trip and fall hazards</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>2. Transitional areas are clearly marked</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>3. Lighting appears adequate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>4. Handrails are securely fastened</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>5. Areas are free of trash, debris and other obstructions</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>6. Sufficient trash containers are provided</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>7. Entrance/exit areas are accessible</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Corrective Action Needed:</p> <p>Corrective Action Taken:</p>



**RECEIPT OF POP WARNER COACHES RISK MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

I have received a copy of the Pop Warner Coaches Risk Management Handbook, and I understand that I am responsible for reading the rules and practices described within it.

I agree to abide by the rules and practices contained in the Coaches Risk Management Handbook. I understand that I am responsible for reading and familiarizing myself with the information and recommendations contained in the Handbook.

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Signature

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Printed Name

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Position/Location

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Date