

Guidelines for Parents

The commitment to safety is a core value at *FIRST* and we strive to provide every *FIRST* team member with the safest possible experience as they learn and grow through our programs. We cannot do this alone, but working together with you and your community, we can help make your child's experience with *FIRST* a safe one. These Guidelines for Parents provide you with important information to help us do this.

Get Involved

Parental involvement is important for team members' safety and *FIRST* encourages every parent and guardian to become involved with their child's team. There are many ways to become involved. You can serve as a Coach or Mentor, or volunteer to help with the team's regular activities. You can drive team members to meetings and events, or contribute supplies or snacks to the team. These are just a few examples. The team's Lead Coaches/Mentors will guide you in ways you can best help the team. Often, this means being a supportive observer without compromising the team's work and group dynamics. Another very important way to become involved is simply to get acquainted with the Lead Coaches/Mentors and other adults who work with the team, talk with other parents or guardians, and meet your child's teammates. Become familiar with the place where the team ordinarily meets, especially if the team meets in a private home, or other non-public space. Even if only occasional, your presence can help keep team members safe. In fact, you may see ways to improve team safety that others do not. The more caring adults are involved, the safer the team will be. Your involvement may provide team members with one more adult they can trust who has time to listen, and who is interested in any concerns they may have.

Time spent with the team may help the Lead Coaches/Mentors and other parents or guardians understand that their efforts are appreciated. It may also help you understand how the team assigns various roles and how

your child interacts with the group. It may give you a better sense of how team members' skills complement each other, and how the team is managed.

Your presence at team meetings and events can provide a powerful benefit in helping the team members and other adults working with the team maintain a gracious attitude, especially during times of stress. When time pressure mounts, when a mistake is made, or when a match is lost, team members and adults may be tempted to resort to berating one another or behaving ungraciously toward members of other teams. At such times, you may be able to help defuse a stressful situation, especially if another parent or guardian is involved. Everyone involved with a *FIRST* team deserves respect, even under difficult circumstances. You can help promote this value and may be able to show others healthy ways of dealing with anger and stress.

Understand What *FIRST* Does To Keep Children Safe

The *FIRST* Youth Protection Program (*FIRST* YPP), available through the [FIRST website](#), covers a broad range of safety measures. Working in combination, the following program elements greatly increase the likelihood of each team member having a safe and rewarding experience:

- Two Lead Coaches/Mentors trained in safety measures and who know the provisions of the *FIRST* YPP oversee a team's activities.
- Everyone on a team, or working with the team, should be comfortable talking about, and listening to, discussions of the Code of Conduct in age-appropriate terms, and be committed to complying with it.
- Everyone working with a team understands acceptable boundaries and behaviors, and actions necessary if these are not honored.
- Parents and guardians are aware of, and to the extent possible, involved in, their child's team activities.

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Understand the Risks of Child Abuse and How You Can Help Prevent It

FIRST recognizes that child abuse is a problem in every corner of society and the risks can be hard to see or anticipate, even for trained professionals. Child abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual – see [Child Abuse Defined](#)) can occur undetected in isolation and silence. If you talk to your child about healthy relationships that are appropriate for his or her age, and your own beliefs and expectations concerning relationship risks and appropriate boundaries, it will be easier for your child to tell you if anyone tests these boundaries. Consult childwelfare.gov if you need help talking with your child about these matters or to learn more about the risks.

The information below provides guidance for reducing and dealing with the risks of child abuse.

Help Your Child Learn Preventive Behavior

Adults working with *FIRST* teams are **required** to follow the [Code of Conduct](#). We encourage you to read the Code and discuss it with your child in age-appropriate terms. Emphasize his or her responsibility to tell you about things anyone does or says that don't seem right, even if he or she is not involved, so that all team members are kept safe. At a minimum, discuss with your child the following ways of dealing with potential overstepping of normal boundaries or inappropriate behavior:

- Encourage your child to tell you (or another trusted adult) if anyone asks them to keep things they have said or done a secret, or if anyone offers them special favors, invitations, gifts, or money.

- Encourage your child to trust his or her instincts and feelings. If an activity doesn't feel right they should not participate; discuss possible scenarios with your child and ways to firmly say "no thank-you" and move to a safer setting; discuss what your child will be comfortable saying if this situation arises.
- Tell your child to make sure his or her privacy is respected.
- Tell your child to say "no" to unwanted touching or affection.
- Tell your child that, if any of these things happen, to call you (or another trusted adult) and ask to be brought to a safe place.

If you discuss these options with your child, he or she will be aware of situations that could lead to abuse; be better able to recognize inappropriate behavior; and be better prepared to get away from the situation. Make your child aware that even seemingly nice adults and children bigger or older than they are, and who they know well, trust, and admire, can do inappropriate things such as showing pictures of people not fully dressed, or trying to touch them in a way that doesn't feel right.

Talking with your child lets him or her know there are trustworthy adults who will take the time to listen, and who will believe them. This can significantly reduce the chances that your child will feel powerless or confused by a risky situation.

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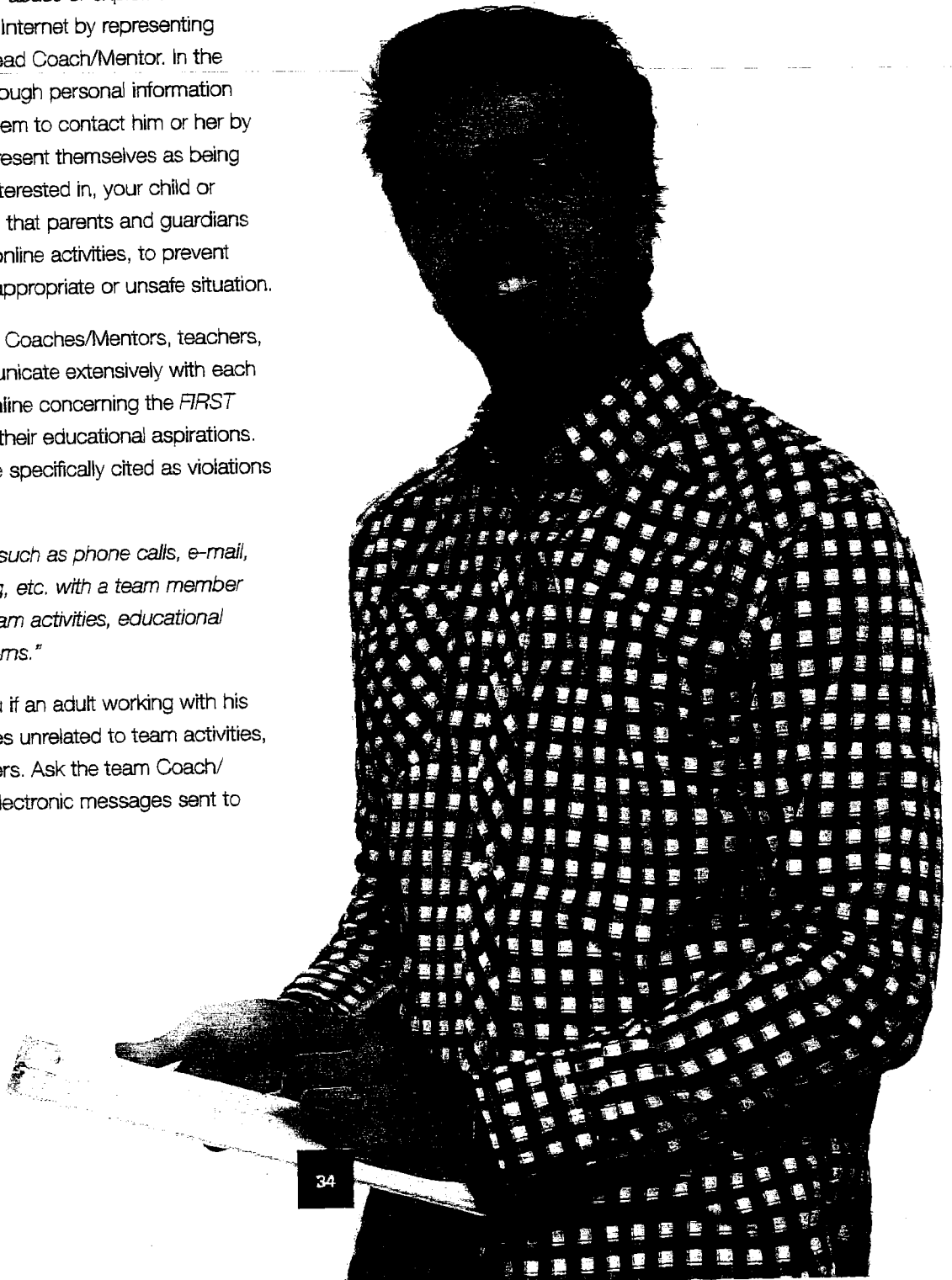
Guidelines for Your Child's On-Line Activities

When children are online, they are in a public place, among thousands of people who are online at the same time. Adults seeking to abuse or exploit children may initiate contact over the Internet by representing themselves as a child or a Lead Coach/Mentor. In the process, they may obtain enough personal information about your child to enable them to contact him or her by phone or in person, and represent themselves as being in some way related to, or interested in, your child or the team. It is very important that parents and guardians closely monitor their child's online activities, to prevent them from getting into an inappropriate or unsafe situation.

FIRST team members, Lead Coaches/Mentors, teachers, and team Volunteers communicate extensively with each other by phone, text, and online concerning the FIRST program, their careers, and their educational aspirations. The following exchanges are specifically cited as violations of the Code:

"... personal exchanges such as phone calls, e-mail, texting, social networking, etc. with a team member outside the context of team activities, educational matters, or career concerns."

Instruct your child to tell you if an adult working with his or her team sends messages unrelated to team activities, career, or educational matters. Ask the team Coach/Mentor to copy you on all electronic messages sent to your child.



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Responding to Indications, Disclosures, and Other Signs of Abuse

The strongest indication that a child has been abused is the child's own statement that it occurred, but children who have been abused often do not report it, so parents or guardians should be alert for other signs, such as refusing to participate in an activity they once enjoyed, emotional withdrawal, unexplained cuts or bruises, acting out adult sexual behavior, or using language a child that age is unlikely to know. For more specific signs, consult childwelfare.gov.

If your child tells you they have experienced or observed what may be abusive behavior, your first reaction can be very important in helping the child through the ordeal. The following guidelines may help you:

DO assume that your child is telling you the truth, respect your child's privacy, and take him or her to a place where the two of you can talk without interruptions or distractions.

DO reassure your child that he or she is not to blame for what happened, and that you appreciate being told about the incident and will help to make sure that it won't happen again.

DO consult your family doctor or other child abuse authority about the need for medical care or counseling.

DO tell a child protection agency or the police what happened and follow their direction regarding confidentiality and notification of the school or organization hosting your child's team and the *FIRST* Youth Protection Department (*FIRST* YPD), if the school or organization permits this.

DON'T panic or overreact to your child's disclosure, or show alarm or anger.

DON'T criticize your child or tell your child he or she misunderstood what happened.

DON'T express remorse that the child wasn't more careful, put him or herself at risk, or is in any way at fault.

DON'T attempt to conduct an investigation or confront the suspected offender, even if you know the person well.

The *FIRST* Youth Protection Department (*FIRST* YPD) is available to any individual with concerns about the safety of *FIRST* team members and can be contacted directly, if additional information or guidance is needed. The *FIRST* YPD will become involved, if necessary, to ensure safety threats or violations of the Code are promptly and effectively resolved. With your help, we can provide your child with a safe, enjoyable, and inspiring experience.