



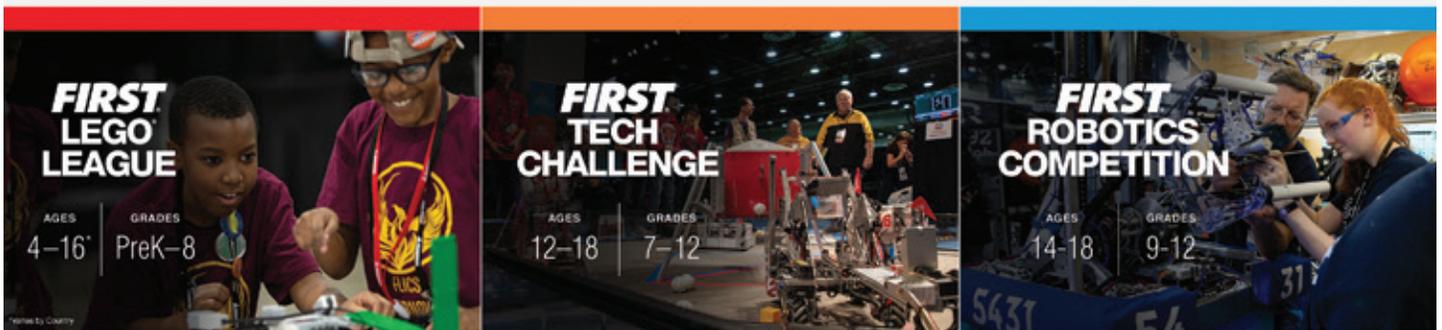
# **FIRST<sup>®</sup> Youth Protection Program Guide**



# About *FIRST*<sup>®</sup>

*FIRST*<sup>®</sup> is the world's leading youth-serving nonprofit advancing STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education. For over 30 years, students from all walks of life have developed self-confidence in STEM and valuable, real-world skills through *FIRST* that open pathways to a better future.

***FIRST*<sup>®</sup> is a global robotics community that prepares young people for the future.**



## *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> Programs

Through a suite of team-based robotics challenges and backed by a global network of mentors, coaches, volunteers, alumni, and sponsors, *FIRST* helps young people discover a passion for STEM and develop the skills they'll need to succeed in today's competitive workforce. Students can start their journey with *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> LEGO<sup>®</sup> League and progress through *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> Tech Challenge and *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> Robotics Competition, or join any of our three programs based on age or grade level.

### *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> LEGO<sup>®</sup> League Divisions

**Discover** – Grades PreK-1 (Ages 4-6)

**Explore** – Grades 2-4 (Ages 6-10)

**Challenge** – Grades 4-8 (Ages 9-16\*)

\*ages and grades vary by country

### *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> Tech Challenge

Grades 7-12 (Ages 12-18)

### *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> Robotics Competition

Grades 9-12 (Ages 14-18)

## *FIRST* Vision, Mission, and Impact

**OUR VISION** is to transform our culture by creating a world where science and technology are celebrated and where young people dream of becoming science and technology leaders.

**OUR MISSION** is to inspire young people to be science and technology leaders and innovators, by engaging them in exciting mentor-based programs that build science, engineering, and technology skills that inspire innovation, and that foster well-rounded life capabilities including self-confidence, communication, and leadership.

**OUR IMPACT** *FIRST* programs are proven to encourage students to pursue education and careers in STEM-related fields, but they also inspire kids to become leaders and innovators in any industry.

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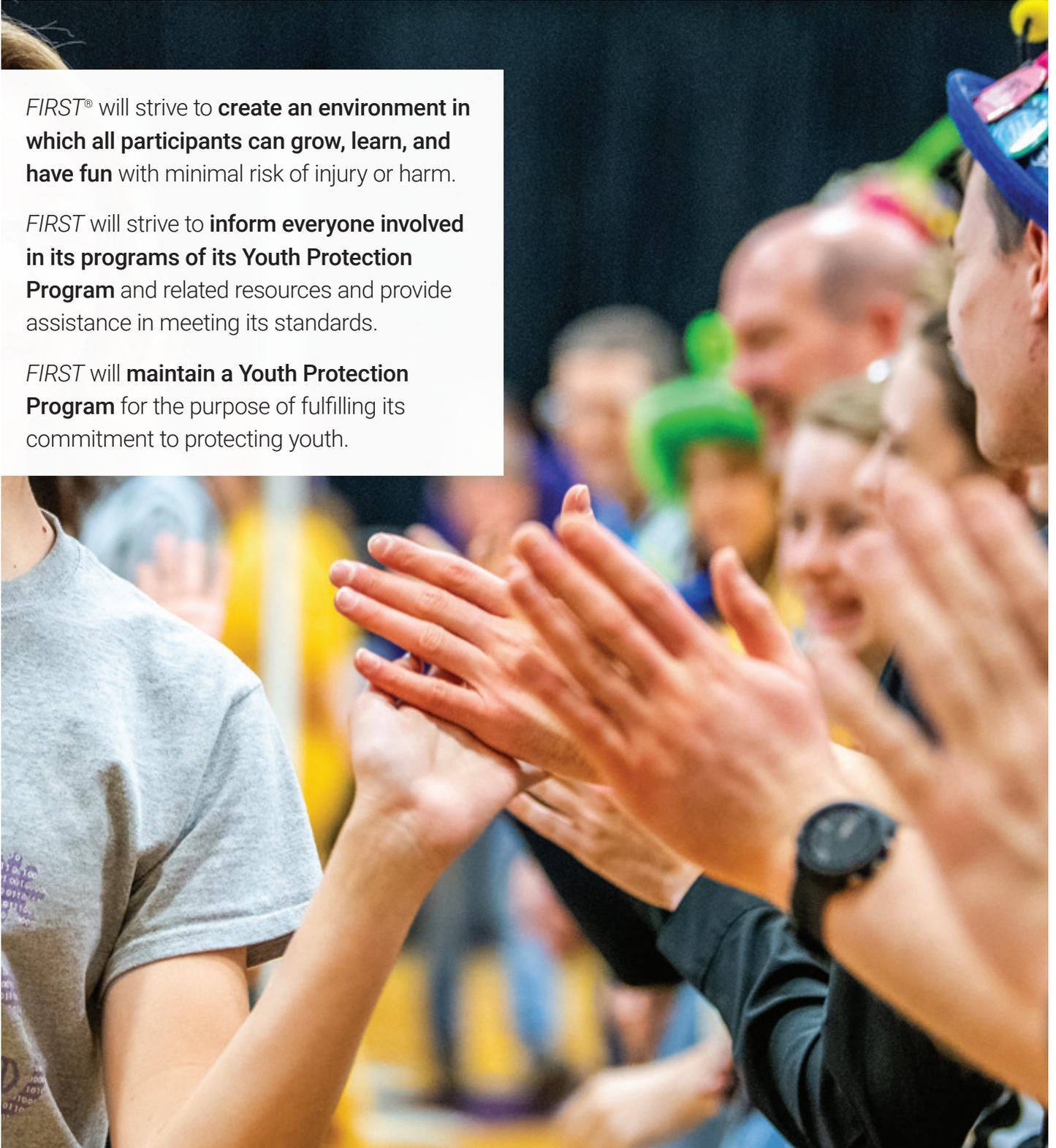
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# Commitment to Protecting Youth

*FIRST*® will strive to **create an environment in which all participants can grow, learn, and have fun** with minimal risk of injury or harm.

*FIRST* will strive to **inform everyone involved in its programs of its Youth Protection Program** and related resources and provide assistance in meeting its standards.

*FIRST* will **maintain a Youth Protection Program** for the purpose of fulfilling its commitment to protecting youth.



# Purpose and Strategy

The purpose of the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program is to provide coaches, mentors, event volunteers, employees, Program Delivery Partners, teachers, team members, parents, guardians of team members, and others working with *FIRST* programs with information, guidelines, and procedures to create safe environments for *FIRST* participants. The *FIRST* Youth Protection Program sets minimum standards for *FIRST* events and team-based activities.

Adults working in *FIRST* programs must be knowledgeable of the standards set by *FIRST* Youth Protection Program, as well as those set by the school or organization hosting their team. *FIRST* expects all teams in the United States and Canada to adhere to all provisions of the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program.

*FIRST* also expects that the standards set forth in the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program be applied outside of the United States and Canada to the extent possible based on local laws and regulations. At a minimum, adults in *FIRST* programs must comply with local regulations regarding youth protection.

Many schools and organizations hosting *FIRST* programs already have effective youth protection programs in place. The conditions in which a particular team operates, especially if a team is in a school-based setting, may be such that applying all provisions of *FIRST* Youth Protection is not necessary or feasible, and alternative measures may be more effective. Elements that are labeled as required are mandatory in the United States and Canada and may not be waived without the approval of *FIRST* Youth Protection. In addition, the purchase and use of a *FIRST* Class Pack curriculum falls outside the scope of the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program, which is designed to ensure the safety of youth participating in team-based *FIRST* activities. It is the responsibility of the organization or entity purchasing and/or using *FIRST* Class Packs to ensure that adequate youth protection measures are in place to protect participating students.

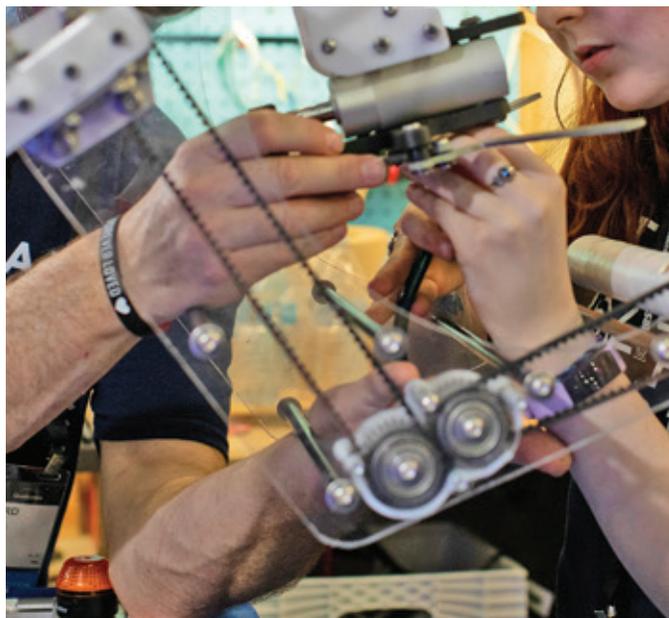
The *FIRST* Youth Protection Program addresses a wide spectrum of safety risks. While many safety risks can be readily identified and remedied, others may be less obvious or not easily understood. *FIRST* participants, whether they are children or adults, may not be able to identify

all safety risks, including potential abusers. However, by providing *FIRST* participants, parents, and guardians with information that raises their awareness of the risks of child abuse, and by setting standards of behavior that can prevent child abuse, *FIRST* gives its participants the resources necessary to significantly reduce the chances of harm.

Working in combination, the following elements greatly increase the likelihood of team members having a safe and rewarding experience:

- Two lead coaches/mentors trained in safety measures, who know the provisions of the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program, oversee a team's activities.
- Everyone working with a team or participating on a team understands and can discuss the [Code of Conduct](#) in age-appropriate terms.
- Everyone working with a team understands acceptable boundaries and behaviors, as well as the actions necessary to address inappropriate behaviors.
- Parents and guardians are aware of, and to the extent possible, involved in their child's team's activities.
- Team activities should be open to team members' parents and guardians whenever possible.

Adhering to the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program will significantly reduce safety risks of program participants.



# Fundamentals

## Supervision of program activities.

*FIRST* provides guidance for its volunteers – coaches, mentors and event volunteers – to recognize situations that may pose any threat to youth participant safety, and to take the actions necessary to prevent and report injuries.

## Openness.

*FIRST* maintains a culture where concerns about the safety of team members can be raised and addressed, and where the involvement of team members’ parents and guardians in enhancing program safety is encouraged and highly valued.

## Clear lines of communication, authority, and decision-making.

*FIRST* has well-defined procedures so that youth protection issues are promptly and effectively reported and addressed.

## Trust, dignity, and respect.

*FIRST* takes all disclosures and indications of risk seriously, while honoring every individual’s right to privacy.

## Collaboration and cooperation.

*FIRST* works with other organizations that can assist in addressing safety risks including child protection, law enforcement, and legal counsel.

## Regular review.

*FIRST* periodically assesses the effectiveness of *FIRST* Youth Protection policies and makes improvements, if warranted.



# Child Abuse Key Terminology

## Child/Youth Defined

For purposes of the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program, a “child” is defined as any person under 18. An “adult” is anyone 18 or older. For the purposes of this guide, child, youth, student, team member, and youth participant may be used interchangeably.

## Child Abuse

The majority of reported acts of child abuse are committed by someone the child is related to or knows and trusts. The fact that a parent, guardian, or relative of a team member is working with the team in no way precludes the possibility of them engaging in abusive behavior. Individuals who seek to abuse or exploit children frequently attempt to gain access to children through youth serving organizations. These individuals may spend months purposely building an emotional connection with a child or group of children and work to make inappropriate behavior seem normal. They are often socially skilled and adept at giving convincing excuses when confronted with inquiries about having overstepped normal boundaries.

## CHILD EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse is behavior toward a child that is demeaning or disrespectful. Examples include verbal threats, social isolation, intimidation, unreasonable demands, or the intentional damaging of a child’s self-esteem.

## CHILD PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is defined as the non-accidental use of physical force against a child in such a way that the child either sustains bodily injury or is at risk of bodily injury, however slight.

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is defined as any form of sexualized interaction involving a child and a more powerful individual (age, size, knowledge). Child sexual abuse may occur through inappropriate physical contact, as well as through behaviors that do not involve actual physical contact, for example, inviting a child to view pornography. Experts estimate that 30 to 50 percent of all acts of child sexual abuse are committed by children under 18 victimizing a younger, smaller, or less able child.



# Code of Conduct

*FIRST* expects all adults and youth participating in its programs to conduct themselves following standards of behavior that protect the safety and wellbeing of every team member. Adults should keep the best interests of children front of mind and remember that they are role models for the students participating in our programs.

All participants in *FIRST* programs are expected to abide by the *FIRST* Code of Conduct:

- Exhibit *Gracious Professionalism*® at all times. *Gracious Professionalism* is a way of doing things that encourages high-quality work, emphasizes the value of others, and respects individuals and the community. With *Gracious Professionalism*, fierce competition and mutual gain are not separate notions.
- Ensure the safety of all participants in *FIRST* activities.
- Refrain from any form of bullying, harassment, use of profane or insulting language, or any actual or threatened violence.
- Adhere to all *FIRST* Youth Protection Program policies.
- Report any unsafe behavior to event or local *FIRST* leadership.

Adults working in *FIRST* programs are also expected to set an example of *Gracious Professionalism*, and consistently provide/maintain:

- Environments where team members can learn, have fun, and feel safe.
- Age-appropriate oversight by caring adults modeling integrity and respect.
- Knowledge, experience, and skills with a positive and flexible approach.
- Encouragement to learn by doing, fostering cooperative learning.
- Environments where team members can develop supportive relationships, while observing appropriate boundaries.
- Diligent efforts to protect team members from harm.
- Appropriate boundaries with students by, for example:
  - Being alert to the imbalance of power that exists in relationships between adults and students or young adults.
  - Acting as role models for students.
  - Setting appropriate limits with students and encouraging their growth, learning, and autonomy.
- Environments that are safe and inclusive for all participants and adhere to our [FIRST Core Values](#) and commitment to [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#).



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## Code of Conduct and Youth Protection Violations

Any adult working with a *FIRST* team who is aware of a violation of this Code or violation of any youth protection requirements, or who is in doubt about whether a behavior is appropriate, is required to immediately consult a lead coach/mentor (if a team lead coach/mentor is not the potential violator), the hosting school or organization, local *FIRST* leadership or *FIRST* Youth Protection.

The following behaviors ordinarily constitute violations:

- Engaging in any activity that endangers the safety, security, or integrity of a youth participant; deliberately makes a child feel shame or humiliation; or demeans a youth, such as making threatening remarks or behaving in a manner that deliberately intimidates or frightens a child.
- Engaging in personal exchanges such as phone calls, e-mail, texting, social networking, etc., with a youth outside the context of team activities, educational matters, or career concerns. A copy of written communications with a child should ordinarily be provided to a parent, guardian, or second adult working with the team.
- Engaging a youth participant in activities that are not related to the *FIRST* program, educational matters, or career concerns; or spending personal time with a child outside of *FIRST* program activities (unless the adult is a family member or family friend).
- Keeping any activities with a youth participant secret; encouraging a youth participant to keep any activities secret; or deliberately concealing activities from parents, guardians, or other adults working with the team.
- Making sexually explicit remarks; showing or displaying sexually explicit material; inappropriate physical exposure or contact; or using offensive language or gestures.
- Failing to follow the [Communication and Reporting Requirements](#).

# Understanding Grooming, Boundary Violations, and Appropriate Adult/Youth Interactions

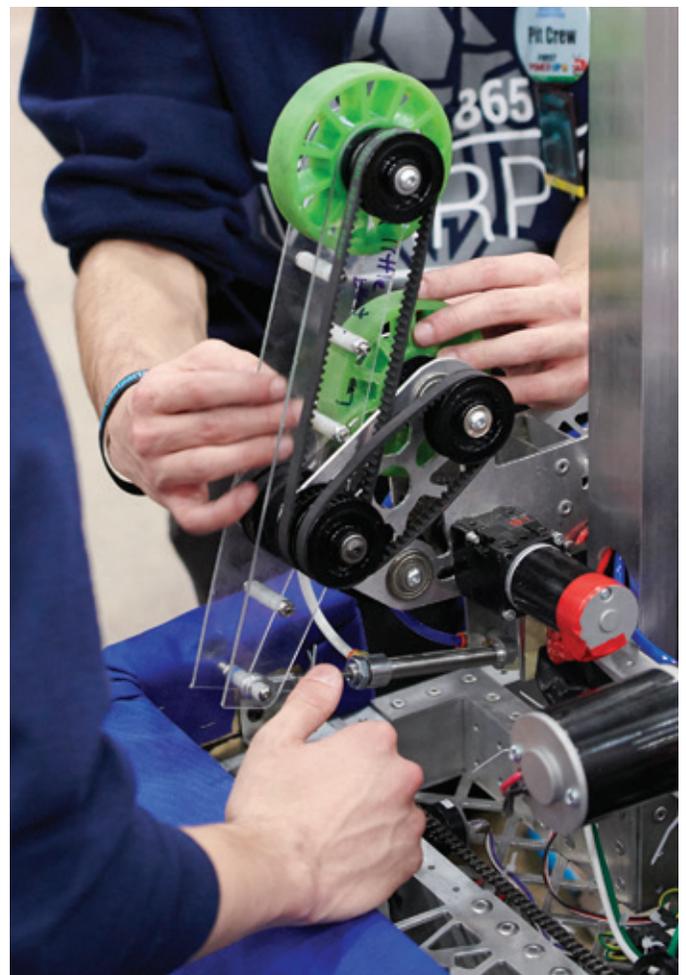
The [list of violations on page 9](#) is intended to set behavioral boundaries that will protect children and adults working with teams from engaging in activities that might place them at risk. The behavior of all adults working in *FIRST* programs should be (and should appear to be) well within the bounds of appropriate conduct. This will not only protect youth participants but may also protect adults working with teams from false accusations of misconduct.

## Philosophy

A core philosophy of *FIRST* programs is the importance of adult mentorship in helping our participants learn and grow in a safe environment. All *FIRST* programs are conducted in a manner that not only teaches technical skills, but also aims to build trust and camaraderie among team members as well as with the lead coaches/mentors and others working with the team. Mentoring is a vital aspect of the *FIRST* experience and essential to inspiring team members, building their confidence, and preparing them for higher education and the workplace. Although we hope that both children and adults working with a team will develop positive, supportive relationships and a sense of belonging to a community, the adult has primary responsibility for establishing and maintaining appropriate physical and emotional boundaries. As such it is critical that adult volunteers understand that there is a power imbalance between adults in leadership/mentorship roles and student participants.

As a youth-serving organization, we encourage supportive relationships between our students and all the adults who coach and mentor them through all *FIRST* projects, teamwork, and competitions. Even adult/student relationships that begin as supportive may develop into ones that are unhealthy or harmful. This section of the guide explores behaviors to be alert for and how to report conduct that is harmful to our students.

Individuals seeking to exploit children are known to use mentoring roles to create unhealthy relationships. Team members and adults working in *FIRST* programs must be aware of this risk and if they have concerns about possible unhealthy relationships or efforts being made to form unhealthy relationships, they are required to report their concerns to a team lead coach/mentor (if not involved in the matter) or contact *FIRST* Youth Protection.



## Dating/Romantic/ Intimate Relationships

At the core of our philosophy is a reminder that there is a power imbalance between adults and students under the age of 18.

Regardless of the age of consent in the particular location of a *FIRST* program, we consider any dating, romantic, or intimate interactions between adult volunteers and student participants under age 18 to be against *FIRST* policy.

We understand that students may form intimate attachments with each other while participating in *FIRST* activities. If a student transitions to a volunteer coach/mentor role, they are not permitted to work with a team in which they had any prior or current romantic involvement with a current youth participant on that team. We also discourage adult volunteers from initiating romantic relationships with recent alumni to avoid the appearance or perception that grooming may have occurred while the alum was still a youth participant.

## Grooming

Experts indicate that the term “grooming” describes prior activity intended to prepare a child for abuse and not actual illegal or abusive activities themselves. However, there is no single agreed upon definition of “grooming”. Moreover, sexual grooming, by its very nature, is designed to avoid detection. Common sexual grooming behaviors are often subtle and may not appear inappropriate. Consequently, educators and others working in youth organizations find it difficult to distinguish between mentoring, done for the benefit of the child, and grooming, done for the benefit of the offender. For these reasons, we also think it important that team members understand the term “boundary violations”, which we find to be a more useful concept when evaluating adult misconduct toward children.

## Boundary Violations

Individuals who seek to sexually abuse or exploit children frequently attempt to gain access to children through youth serving organizations. These individuals may spend months purposely building an emotional connection with a child or group of children and work to make inappropriate behavior seem normal. They are often socially skilled and adept at giving convincing excuses when confronted with inquiries about having overstepped normal boundaries.

We encourage supportive relationships between our students and all the adults who coach and mentor. However, even adult/student relationships that begin as supportive may develop into ones that are unhealthy or harmful.

Unlike grooming, which focuses on the intent of the adult’s behavior, the concept of “boundary violations” focuses on the impact of the adult’s behavior on the child. “Boundary violations” refers to the failure of an adult to set and maintain healthy personal boundaries, appropriate for the circumstances, with the student. Boundary violations can include ambiguous physical contact by the adult, such as hugs, lap sitting, kisses on the cheek, text messaging etc., which, depending on the age and maturity of the child, can cause the child confusion or even distress. Boundary violations can also include private behavior between an adult and child, such as personal phone calls, asking a child to keep a secret, meeting with a child alone, etc., which can cause a child distress or create the appearance of favoritism. Depending on the circumstances, boundary violations can be detrimental to healthy childhood development regardless of whether they are sexual in nature.

# Communication and Reporting Requirements

Protecting children on a *FIRST* team from emotional or physical injury requires knowledge, judgment, and diligent oversight by adults who make it a priority to promptly report any concerns about potentially inappropriate behavior, and who listen carefully to indications or disclosures of behaviors or conditions that might lead to abuse or otherwise be unsafe.

Anyone working with a *FIRST* team who believes that a child may be the victim of, or at risk of, child abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual) from any source is required to immediately report their concerns. The individual reporting the possibility of abuse should not attempt to investigate or confront the suspected offender, even if they know the person well.

The report should be made to the state or local government child protection agency, or to the local police. If the hosting school or organization has established procedures for reporting child abuse, those reporting procedures should be followed. *FIRST* Youth Protection should also be notified (to the extent the agencies involved, and the hosting school or organization permit this).

Most states mandate that adults (including volunteers) working in youth-serving organizations report suspected cases of child abuse to their state child protection agency. If you are unsure of your state's reporting requirements, check the state's child protection agency website. The [National Children's Advocacy Center](#) provides contacts for individual state agencies. *FIRST* Youth Protection requires any adult regularly working with a *FIRST* team to comply with applicable laws and regulations on reporting child abuse.

Anyone who believes a team member's safety may be compromised by risks other than child abuse (such as a team working in a space that houses dangerous chemicals not properly secured) is required to take action to remove the team member(s) from the situation or act to eliminate the source of risk, if this can be done safely and will likely prevent injury. If the risk may have resulted from deliberate actions or lack of care, it may be appropriate to report it to the local police, the school or organization hosting the team, and to *FIRST* Youth Protection (to the extent the hosting school or organization permits this).



*FIRST* Youth Protection is available to advise any individual with concerns about the safety of children in *FIRST* programs and may be contacted directly and anonymously if information or guidance is needed. All information regarding complaints or incidents of [Code of Conduct](#) violations or non-compliance with the *FIRST* Youth Protection is treated as private information, including the identity of the individual making the report. Information will only be disclosed on a need-to-know basis, or as required by law.

Individuals who fail to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) or *FIRST* Youth Protection may be excluded from working in *FIRST* programs and at *FIRST* events.

## Reporting Concerns to *FIRST*

All *FIRST* participants of any age may report Youth Protection Concerns, Medical Incidents, and Other concerns to *FIRST* using the [FIRST Reporting Portal](#), or by emailing [safetyfirst@firstinspires.org](mailto:safetyfirst@firstinspires.org) or by calling (603) 206-2050.

Someone from *FIRST* will review reports and contact reporters, as appropriate/necessary, to set up time to discuss the issue. When reporting an issue to *FIRST*, it is helpful to provide any supporting documentation about the concern (photos, emails, videos, screen shots of text messages, etc.)

*FIRST* prohibits any form of retaliation against anyone for making a good faith report of concern. If you feel any form of retaliation occurs because of reporting a concern, Youth Protection should be notified immediately.

## REPORTING YOUTH PROTECTION CONCERNS

Youth Protection Concerns can encompass a wide variety of one-time or ongoing issues such as suspected abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination, questionable behavior or comments by adult volunteers, conflicts among volunteers or issues that haven't been resolved by local leadership.

## REPORTING MEDICAL INCIDENTS

All medical and physical injuries/illnesses, however, slight, taking place at a *FIRST* event must be reported to *FIRST* Headquarters. Physical injuries/illnesses that take place during a team's activities, not at an event, need only be reported if the injury is related to *FIRST* game materials, *FIRST* field design, or *FIRST* rules. Names may be removed if privacy regulations require it.

Reporting is important for risk management purposes and to help keep the number and severity of future event injuries as low as possible. It may also help to protect those responsible for the event, or involved in the incident, should questions arise later regarding the way the incident was handled.

All persons on-site who are responsible for operating the event should be able to recognize threats to safety and be prepared to take prompt remedial action. Youth Protection Concerns should be dealt with as quickly as possible in whatever manner is most appropriate to ensure the safety of everyone at the event. This may involve contacting event security, the police, parents, guardians, local youth protection authorities, and/or management of the hosting entity. Safety concerns may even require shutting down an event (e.g., power outage or health concern). *FIRST* requires that all safety concerns be reported to the party conducting the event and to *FIRST* Headquarters.

## REPORTING OTHER CONCERNS

If you are unsure where a concern falls, we encourage you to make a report and we will ensure that your report gets to the appropriate department to be addressed.

## ANONYMOUS REPORTING

Reporters may provide anonymous reports by not providing their name in the reporting portal. However, anonymous reports may limit the ability of *FIRST* to address the concern and prevent Youth Protection from following up with the individual reporting the concern.

# Lead Coach/Mentor Role

## Lead Coaches/Mentors (Age 18 or older)

Because effective youth protection depends upon knowledge, experience, and good judgment, the role of the lead coach/mentor is critical. Lead coaches/mentors are the individuals who exercise the most control over a team's activities, and are best able to help team members prevent, and, if necessary, deal with, risky situations.

Every *FIRST* team is required to register two adults, 18 or older, as its lead coaches/mentors. These should be the two individuals who direct a team's day-to-day activities. It is recommended that one be at least 25 years old.

*FIRST* relies on lead coaches/mentors to support the standards set by the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program Policies. It is essential that lead coaches/mentors are available and approachable if a team member, parent, guardian, or anyone else connected with the team needs guidance in understanding what behaviors are appropriate or needs to report unsafe conditions or [Code of Conduct](#) violations.

*FIRST* strongly recommends that no lead coach/mentor, or other adult be the only adult present with one (or more) children under 18, unless it is in a regular classroom setting and in conformity with school policy. If coaches, mentors, or volunteers are alone for a short period of time with a student, the interaction should be observable

and interruptible. Having at least two adults within sight when a child is present will ensure that help will be available in the event of an emergency and may provide clarity in assessing and reporting safety concerns or questionable incidents.

The specific Youth Protection duties that lead coaches/mentors are required to carry out are listed below. A lead coach/mentor may delegate these duties to other adults who regularly work with their team if, in the lead coach's/mentor's judgment, the individual can be relied on to carry them out responsibly.

- Being familiar with the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program Policies in this guide; providing leadership in directing the team's activities according to its standards; and exercising judgment over the application and interpretation of its provisions.
- Conducting a Team Safety Meeting at the beginning of the season, as described under [Training and Guidance for Team Members](#).
- Determining if a safety matter warrants reporting to a child protection agency, the police, the school or organization hosting the team, or *FIRST* Youth Protection. Although anyone involved with a *FIRST* team may report safety incidents or concerns without the knowledge or approval of a lead coach/mentor, the judgment and advice of a lead coach/mentor will often be sought.



- If possible, contacting the parent(s) or guardian(s) of each team member within 30 days of the team member's regular involvement or the team's initial registration; making them aware of the Guidelines for Parents and Guardians; encouraging their involvement in team activities; and providing them with the names and contact information of the two lead coaches/mentors.
- Determining at what point any adult working with the team is "regularly involved" and required to undergo youth protection training and screening; and closely directing adults who have not undergone training and screening.
- Assessing the suitability of individuals, including team members, to participate in the team's activities. Excluding individuals from working with the team if they are unsuitable due to safety concerns and notifying *FIRST* Youth Protection of any adult who has been denied from volunteering with a team due to suitability concerns.
- Please note that this assessment does not substitute for the requirement that adults who will have regular and potentially unsupervised contact with students undergo Screening ([Youth Protection Clearance](#)), as described in this Guide, to ensure their suitability to working with children.

## Youth Mentors (Under age 18)

*FIRST* encourages veteran team members to serve as Youth Mentors to teams with younger participants. It is part of the *FIRST* ethos and mission – giving back to the community, helping others succeed, and serving as a positive role model are all essential to the *FIRST* experience.

To minimize safety risks, teams with Youth Mentors are still required to have two adult lead coaches/mentors that are 18 or older.

Although these adult lead coaches/mentors may limit their role with the team to overall direction while the student coach(es)/mentor(s) provide leadership and instruction to the team, this adult oversight is key. The adult lead coaches/mentors of these teams are responsible for ensuring that the [Code of Conduct](#) and all other provisions of the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program are followed to protect the student coaches/mentors in the same manner that they protect the team members.

# Training and Youth Protection Clearance

## Youth Protection Clearance

Lead coaches/mentors are required to obtain *FIRST* Youth Protection Clearance, before beginning regular involvement with the team. Other adults who will regularly support the team should also undergo Youth Protection Clearance.

This process entails:

- Reading and agreeing to abide by the [Code of Conduct](#) and Youth Protection Guide
- Complete the [Youth Protection Training](#) on an annual basis
- Complete Youth Protection background screening process

Alternative (non-*FIRST*) screening performed by a school or other youth-serving organization, which includes a verification that the individual has undergone background check, may be accepted in lieu of *FIRST* screening at the discretion of *FIRST* Youth Protection. Adults who have not obtained Youth Protection Clearance may only work with teams under the close direction of a lead coach/mentor or their designee and may only work at *FIRST* Events under the close direction of another adult who has obtained Youth Protection Clearance. Similarly, youth mentors and event volunteers are not required to undergo a background screening but must be under the direct supervision of a youth protection cleared adult.



## Training

*FIRST* will make training, guidance, and information available to adults working in *FIRST* programs, parents, guardians, and team members so that they understand safety risks and prevention measures.

### YOUTH PROTECTION TRAINING

Adults working with *FIRST* teams are required to undergo training in youth protection once regular involvement with a *FIRST* program starts and at least at the beginning of every season. What constitutes “regular involvement” (or “regularly working with”) is a matter of the lead coaches’/mentors’ judgment. We suggest that if an individual participates in 30 percent or more of the team’s activities, they are regularly involved with the team.

The training is intended to enable adults working with *FIRST* teams to recognize situations that may pose a threat to team member safety and take the actions necessary to prevent and report injuries. The training shall include:

- Understanding child abuse and signs of abuse.
- Awareness of those who abuse and what to look for.
- Establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- Reviewing the key aspects of the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program.
- Full understanding and compliance with the [Code of Conduct](#).

Adults who have not completed youth protection training may only work with teams under the close direction of a Youth Protection screened lead coach/mentor.

### TRAINING FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

At the start of the season, or when a child joins a *FIRST* team, a lead coach/mentor should notify the parent or guardian of each team member that [Guidelines for Parents and Guardians](#) are available in this Youth Protection Guide and that they should review them carefully.

### TRAINING AND GUIDANCE FOR TEAM MEMBERS

At the start of the season, lead coaches/mentors should conduct a Team Safety Meeting. This meeting may be combined with the team’s existing start-of-season meeting or be held as a separate meeting. An earlier, separate meeting for parents, guardians, and adults working with the team may be advisable to review content.

Subject to the lead coaches’/mentors’ discretion and judgment, the Safety Meeting may be as brief or extensive as necessary and should include the following elements:

- View Team Safety Meeting Guidelines provided in this guide.
- Review of [Fundamental Safety Guidelines](#) in this guide and program-specific safety measures.
- Clear communication of behavioral limits as specified in the [Code of Conduct](#), discussing behavioral boundaries in age-appropriate terms.
- Clear establishment of responsibilities and means for reporting safety concerns.
- Encouragement for everyone involved with the team to discuss safety concerns with a lead coach/mentor or other trusted adult, knowing that the concerns will be taken seriously and there will not be negative consequences for the person raising the concern or for their child.
- Explain to team members how to report concerns to *FIRST* Youth Protection using the [FIRST Reporting Portal](#), [safety@firstinspires.org](mailto:safety@firstinspires.org), or phone (603) 206-2050.

*FIRST* recommends that all team members and adults working with the team attend the Team Safety Meeting. Parents and guardians should also be encouraged to attend. The lead coaches/mentors should conduct the meeting in a manner most appropriate for the ages of the team members; the levels of experience of the adults; and the concerns parents or guardians may raise. If needed, additional guidance for conducting the Team Safety Meeting is available through the *FIRST* website and from *FIRST* Youth Protection. Lead coaches/mentors should provide brief meetings covering the most crucial elements of the Team Safety Meeting for those unable to attend the initial Team Safety Meeting, or who become regularly involved at a later date.

# Fundamental Safety Requirements and Recommendations

## Safety Requirements for Team Activities

- Allow only appropriate interactions between individuals. Practice *Gracious Professionalism*, always adhering to the [Code of Conduct](#). Individuals who are not team members should not be allowed to participate in team activities without the permission of a lead coach/mentor and only under adequate supervision. *FIRST* recommends that lead coaches/mentors establish age-appropriate rules for their team regarding the sharing of personal information, particularly at events or on-line and in accordance with [FIRST Internet and Social Media Safety Guidelines](#).
- Do not allow violent, hostile, or potentially harmful behavior. Physical or verbal bullying, hazing, confrontational behavior, or corporal punishment must not be tolerated. If anyone involved in the team's activities behaves in a manner that might be harmful, that member should be separated from the group and their parent or guardian, a child protection agency, or the police should be called, as appropriate.
- Do not allow the use of controlled substances. Alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarettes, vaping, or other controlled substances must not be used during team activities or made available to team members. Exceptions may be made for alcohol served to adults of legal drinking age at receptions or gatherings related to team support, if controls are in place to prevent illegal use.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Procedures for emergencies related to weather, fire, lost students or adults, and site security should be established, including a well-stocked first-aid kit, a list of special medical needs (e.g., inhalers, food allergies), and contact information for each team member's parent or guardian.
- Encourage parents and guardians to get involved in team activities. If possible, keep parents and guardians apprised of the team's progress; encourage them to get to know the individuals working with the team; and make them aware of the time and place of team activities.
- Keep students safe during team fundraising activities. Developing financial support for the team can be a valuable part of the *FIRST* experience. The extent of adult supervision necessary must be based on the ages of the team members and the circumstances. Team members should not be allowed to engage in fundraising or other *FIRST*-related activities without appropriate adult supervision, as judged by a team lead coach/mentor.
- Ensure all youth participants have a Consent and Release signed by a parent or guardian at the start of each season.
- Keep team members safe while working with tools, robots, machinery, and materials. Become familiar with the *FIRST* Coach and Mentor Guides and the [FIRST Robotics Competition and FIRST Tech Challenge Safety Manual](#).



## FACILITIES

When possible, *FIRST* recommends that teams meet at schools or other facilities maintained for use by children or civic groups (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs). Such facilities are regularly inspected for safety hazards, will ordinarily accommodate individuals needing special access, and have security measures and emergency procedures in place. The following should be standard procedure for adults working with the team:

- Familiarization with the safety procedures of the facility.
- Regular survey of the space to eliminate any potential safety hazards.
- Understanding and following the safety regulations set by the school or organization hosting your team.

## ADULT SUPERVISION

The adult-to-student ratios should be sufficient that all team activities are supervised by a minimum of two adults with Youth Protection screening and training. If students are working in different spaces without sight lines, the number of supervising adults may need to increase. This is where parent or guardian volunteers or other non-lead coaches and mentors can add safety.

*FIRST* Program activities taking place in a classroom, as part of the regular school session, should follow the school's policy regarding adult supervision. These teams may be able to operate with only one Youth Protection cleared adult supervising if in accordance with school policies.

## Internet and Social Media Safety

### FIRST ONLINE PLATFORMS

*FIRST* has several online platforms that provide exciting new ways for *FIRST* teams to connect and compete while also expanding online communications between adults and *FIRST* students. In response to the increased use and reliance on electronic and cyber communications, these recommendations are intended to remind the *FIRST* community of best practices so we can all stay safe while staying connected. *FIRST* teams should be using these various platforms to communicate and interact about *FIRST* projects and events and should not share personal information about themselves or others when using these platforms. Participants must also adhere to any age or role restrictions established in the use of these platforms.

Those who seek to abuse or exploit minors may initiate contact over the Internet by misrepresenting themselves. In the process they may obtain enough personal information about a student to enable them to contact them by phone or in-person and represent themselves as being in some way related to, or interested in, a student or their team. It is very important that parents/guardians and coaches/mentors closely monitor *FIRST* student online activities to prevent any inappropriate or unsafe situations.

Given the size of our organization and our wide geographic footprint, *FIRST* cannot monitor the use of social media by any of its participants—adults or students—on platforms not hosted by *FIRST*. Nonetheless, we reserve the right to take action to respond to concerns of inappropriate posts on sites not hosted by *FIRST*, that may negatively impact the *FIRST* community or its participants. In addition, should *FIRST* become aware that any adult or student participant in any of our programs is engaged in any unlawful cyber activity, especially any activity related to the abuse, sexual abuse or exploitation of children, or activity meant to incite violence, *FIRST* reserves the right to terminate that individual's participation in *FIRST* programs and activities.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a broad term used to describe certain online communications. There are many social media platforms, including social networking sites (e.g., Facebook and Instagram), professional networking sites (e.g., LinkedIn), video sharing (e.g. YouTube), and blogs and microblogging (e.g. Twitter, Tumblr).

The *FIRST* community should follow the [FIRST Code of Conduct](#) for online activities just as you would for in-person activities. Social media can be a powerful tool for sharing the joys and triumphs of participating on a *FIRST* team, but if not used properly, it can be a detriment to having a positive *FIRST* experience for you and your team. As such, engage in social media activities wisely. Refrain from sharing information that you feel should not be shared in public, or that might cause undue distress to any of your team members or other *FIRST* participants. This will ensure the *FIRST* community stays true to the commitment of creating environments in which team members can grow, learn, and have fun with minimal risk of injury or harm. *FIRST* reserves the right to remove any social media posts on *FIRST* platforms that are inconsistent with our values or [Code of Conduct](#).

If you engage in any *FIRST*-related communications using social media, even if you use a personal account to do so, the following rules apply:

- Social media shall not be used to make any statement that is made or purports to be made on behalf of *FIRST*, except by those who have been expressly authorized to engage in such activities.
- Use of *FIRST* logos on social media sites or in social media posts must comply with the requirements of the Policy on the Use of *FIRST* Trademarks and Copyrighted Materials (including *FIRST* and the LEGO Group Intellectual Property) available at [firstinspires.org/brand](http://firstinspires.org/brand).
- Information, documents, or data that is confidential or proprietary to *FIRST*, or any of *FIRST*'s employees, shall not be shared or disclosed.
- Photographs or videos depicting any *FIRST* event, employee, volunteer or youth participant shall not be posted or shared without express consent of the data subject and/or their parent/guardian if a minor.
- Social media shall not be used in any manner that harasses, discriminates against, retaliates against, threatens, bullies, or intimidates any *FIRST* employee, volunteer, or participant. *FIRST* has a diverse community of employees, volunteers, and students with different views and different opinions on matters, and *FIRST* expects that all participants will treat each other respectfully.

*FIRST* recognizes that many employees, volunteers, and youth participants use social media strictly on a personal basis, and *FIRST* respects your right to do so. If you use social media for personal purposes, you must not discuss or disclose any confidential or internal information regarding *FIRST*'s business operations or *FIRST*'s employees, volunteers, or students. If you choose to identify yourself as an employee or volunteer of *FIRST* (either in a post, comment or in your profile), please bear in mind that some readers may view you as a spokesperson for *FIRST*.

### **FIRST INTERNET SAFETY FOR COACHES, MENTORS, AND VOLUNTEERS**

- Expectations for in-person team meetings and activities also apply when utilizing social media and other team-based online activities. All remote meetings, including the use of virtual break out rooms, should have at least two adults present any time adults are interacting with youth online. You should also consider whether additional adult oversight may be needed to monitor team activities conducted in a virtual environment.
- Do not initiate contact with any students via any *FIRST* platforms, social media, or other electronic means unless it is about a *FIRST*-related project or activity.

- When contacting youth participants about *FIRST* or team related activities, parents, guardians, and other team coaches/mentors should be included on the communications whenever possible/practical.
- If a student communicates with you about personal matters, remember it is your role to establish and maintain appropriate boundaries. Either redirect the communication to an appropriate *FIRST* team topic or seek help from a coach or Youth Protection for help in navigating the situation.

### **FIRST YOUTH PARTICIPANT INTERNET SAFETY**

As a general overview, *FIRST* students can take the following steps to keep themselves safe when using the Internet:

- Discuss expectations of Internet use with your parents/guardians and team coaches/mentors.
- Never agree to meet someone you have met online at any place off-line, in the real world.
- Keep details of your identity private. Don't tell anyone your last name, address, what neighborhood you live in, where your parents/guardians work, or where you go to school, etc.
- Do not share personal information about your friends or other people.
- Your username and password belong to you. Do not share them with anyone but a parent/guardian.
- When communicating online or using social media, do not hide make up a false identity or impersonate another person.
- If someone sends or shows you an email or any type of message or post that makes you feel uncomfortable, including anyone, student, or adult, that you have met during *FIRST* programs or activities, trust your instincts. You are probably right to be wary. Do not respond. Tell a parent/guardian or trusted adult what happened. *FIRST* students are also encouraged to [report concerns to FIRST Youth Protection](#).
- Unless you talk to a parent/guardian about it first, never talk to anyone by phone or text if you only know that person online.
- It is recommended that minors with personal profiles for social media make those profiles private so that their personal information is not accessible by the public. In creating personal profiles, everyone should familiarize themselves with, and abide by, the terms of service of the sites where they create and maintain personal profiles.
- Do not use inappropriate language or images in email, web pages, videos, or on social networking sites.

- Do not be disrespectful by talking or posting derogatory material (images, video, etc.) via email, social networking sites, live chat, web page, or any other method.
- Refrain from cyber-bullying, harassment, or sexting.
- Refrain from accessing inappropriate information on the Internet such as (but not restricted to) sites that bypass filtering, promote hate or violence, gaming, or sites with sexually explicit or graphic, pornographic, or obscene material.
- Be careful not to plagiarize printed or electronic information; students must follow all copyright, trademark, patent, and other laws governing intellectual property.
- Be cautious about being “friends” with, or otherwise directly connected to any *FIRST* coach or mentor on any social networking site that is not used primarily for *FIRST* team projects. If a student is contacted by a *FIRST*-affiliated adult for non-*FIRST*-related purposes, the student should notify their parents, guardian, or other trusted adult.

## Team Travel Recommendations

### LOCAL TRAVEL TO TEAM ACTIVITIES

Safe transportation to and from team activities is the responsibility of the team member’s parent or guardian. Team members should only be allowed to leave a *FIRST* activity under adult supervision appropriate for their age and the circumstances as judged by a team lead coach/mentor.

### TRAVEL TO TEAM ACTIVITIES AWAY FROM HOME AND/OR OVERNIGHT

When transporting team members to and from places other than those where the team ordinarily meets, or staying overnight away from home, *FIRST* recommends following these additional safety guidelines:

- Obtain written permission for team members to take the trip from their [parent or guardian \(Form\)](#), and clearly communicate the destination, trip details, room sharing and sleeping arrangements, and contact information of the adults supervising the team and the place of lodging.
- In the event of an incident, emergency contact information for each team member’s parent or guardian should be readily accessible to the adults supervising the team.
- Team members should have appropriate ID depending on the destination. Adults and team members (depending on their ages) should each have a list of cell phone and room numbers for all individuals on the trip.
- Provisions for team members’ special needs, including accessibility, medical conditions, transgender team members, allergies (food and other allergies) and other accommodations should be made in advance of the trip, including written authorization from parents/guardians to administer any medications.
- Every driver (transporting team members other than him or herself) should be 18 or older, with a valid driver’s license, and drive a registered vehicle, with at least the minimum insurance required by the state or country in which the vehicle is registered. This also applies to hired drivers and hired vehicles. If using hired transportation, only vetted and reputable companies should be used (limit use of rideshare companies).
- Every passenger should ride in a legal seat, wearing a seat belt at all times.
- In case of an emergency or delay, the driver should have directions and a designated contact person.



Before leaving, *FIRST* recommends reviewing the following information with team members and adults who will be going on the trip:

- Remind all travelers the [Code of Conduct](#) applies during the trip.
- What to do if a team member is separated from the group.
- What behaviors you expect and what consequences exist for noncompliance.
- Every team member's privacy should be always respected, including when using the bathroom and changing clothes.
- Hotel/motel room doors should be locked when in the room, using the deadbolt and the chain or anchor.
- Do not open the door for strangers; if hotel staff claims to be at the door, call the front desk to confirm, before you unlock the door.
- Do not mention or display your room number in the presence of strangers.
- Upon arrival at the overnight accommodations, locate emergency exits.
- Keep a small flashlight on your bedside table, along with your room key, wallet, and cell phone; take these with you if you must leave the room.
- Ask hotel/motel management to contact a designated adult if any team members are seen out of their rooms after a specific time.
- Conduct a room check after "lights out" to confirm team members are in their assigned rooms.

*FIRST* recommends that at least two adults be present with team members while traveling. This practice ensures that help is available in the event of an emergency. Should the conduct of a team member or an adult traveling with the team be questioned, having a second adult present will provide clarity in assessing and reporting safety concerns or incidents.

### **HOSTING SCHOOL OR ORGANIZATION REQUIREMENTS AND STATE REGULATIONS**

Schools and organizations participating in *FIRST* programs and the states and countries in which they operate may have guidelines and safety requirements governing youth-oriented programs such as those offered by *FIRST*. Adults working in *FIRST* programs are required to comply with the youth protection policies of the school or organization hosting the team and the requirements of the states or governments in which the team meets or travels. [Contact \*FIRST\* Youth Protection](#) if you need assistance in obtaining this information.

## **Safety at *FIRST* Events**

### **ENTITIES/INDIVIDUALS CONDUCTING EVENTS**

The organization or individual(s) conducting an event is/are responsible for youth protection throughout the event and are required to comply with the safety rules of the hosting organization and facility. The party conducting the event is also required to be fully familiar with the [Code of Conduct](#) and Youth Protection Requirements. The Code of Conduct will be most effective if it is reviewed and discussed in advance allowing those responsible for managing the event to resolve any concerns well before the event. Consideration should be given to including event security personnel in this review to ensure their understanding of *FIRST* standards of conduct, as well as expectations of them should any youth protection concerns arise.

### **SAFETY SERVICES/FACILITIES**

Care must be taken to provide adequate emergency and security personnel based on the size and nature of the event, including EMTs, security guards, and traffic control. Every event will have different circumstances. The party conducting the event, in consultation with the manager of the facility and various service providers, are responsible for determining what is "adequate."

The number and ages of participants and spectators as well as the nature of the activities taking place will be primary considerations. Emergency and security service providers are required to:

- Be available throughout the entire event.
- Be fully trained and capable of effectively responding to medical and non-medical emergencies.
- Be aware of the special security and safety concerns at events with youth participating on teams and as spectators.
- Be aware of the potential risk presented by on-site service providers, vendors, event staff, event sponsors (or their designees/staff, and spectators. It is not always feasible to screen or train these individuals, and security personnel should bear this in mind.
- Remain on site until all teams and spectators have left the venue.

Facilities are required to be duly licensed to hold such events and the event activities must stay within the legally specified parameters for numbers of participants and event elements (e.g., machine shops).

Those providing services for the event or performing at an event (e.g., food services, childcare services, etc.) are

required to be qualified to do so and show that they are properly licensed. *FIRST* recommends that outside service providers have an insurance certificate, identifying the party conducting the event as an additional named insured.

## EVENT VOLUNTEERS

The behavior of adults and students working at an event should be, and should appear to be, well within the bounds of appropriate conduct.

Event Volunteers in the US and Canada who are 18 years of age or older are required to obtain Youth Protection Clearance. For the purposes of this requirement, “Event Volunteers” are defined as the individuals who are assigned specific roles by the event’s Volunteer Coordinator and will be interacting routinely with youth participants. More information about these roles can be found on the [FIRST Event Volunteer Page](#).

Since background screening is not available for minors, minor volunteers working onsite at events must be supervised by screened adults. It is the responsibility of the parents or guardians of the minor child, prior to the event, to ensure that their child possesses the maturity, character, and good judgment needed to be a *FIRST* volunteer.

Individuals who are exhibiting, providing entertainment, working with food vendors, or attending an event as a spectator are not required to obtain Youth Protection Clearance.

Volunteers whose service has been declined by *FIRST*

will appear as “Do Not Assign” in the *FIRST* Volunteer Management System. Should they apply for an event, the volunteer management system will not allow them to be assigned. The reason *FIRST* has refused the individual’s volunteer services will not be disclosed. Event Volunteer Coordinators are required to decline the services of such individuals in any capacity. *FIRST* requires that anyone with access to this information will keep the identity of these persons confidential.

The training and screening of coaches, mentors, and other adults who accompany *FIRST* teams to an event are the responsibility of that team’s lead coaches/mentors and the local Program Delivery Partner. The party conducting the event and the event’s Volunteer Coordinator are not responsible for confirming that lead coaches/mentors and other adults accompanying teams to an event have obtained Youth Protection Clearance, unless these individuals are fulfilling more than incidental event duties apart from oversight of their own team.

Regardless of whether an adult has obtained Youth Protection Clearance, *FIRST* recommends that adults volunteering at an event be instructed not to place themselves in a situation where they will be alone with one or more children under 18 (other than their own children) and out of sight of other adults. Having at least two adults within sight when a child is present will ensure that help will be available in the event of an emergency and may provide clarity in assessing and reporting safety concerns or questionable incidents.



## FUNDAMENTAL SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR FIRST EVENTS

Coaches/Mentors are responsible for ensuring that team members follow the following safety guidelines at all events:

- Follow all safety rules set by the school/organization/facility hosting the event. Before teams arrive, survey the facility, and remedy any safety hazards. Safety measures related to the game that are mandated by FIRST Program management must be adhered to.
- Allow only appropriate interactions between individuals. Practice *Gracious Professionalism* and foster *Coopertition*<sup>®</sup> among team members, always adhering to the [Code of Conduct](#). The use of offensive language, gestures, or behavior that is inappropriate for the ages of team members or spectators should not be tolerated. All participants should be able to effectively manage the inevitable stress of competing in an event and not resort to angry outbursts or intimidating behavior.
- Do not allow violent, hostile, or potentially harmful behavior. Do not tolerate physical or verbal abuse, bullying, hazing, or confrontational behavior by anyone, including lead coaches/mentors, and parents or guardians. If anyone at the event behaves in a manner that might be harmful, security personnel should guide the individual to a separate space, if possible, and their parent or guardian, a child protection agency, or the police, should be called, as appropriate.
- Do not allow the use of controlled substances. Do not allow the use or presence of illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco, or other controlled substances. Exceptions may be made for alcohol served to adults of legal drinking age at receptions and celebratory meals when controls are in place to prevent illegal use.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Establish procedures in advance for emergencies related to weather, fire, lost youth or adults, and security.
- Ensure safety when traveling to and from events. Oversight of team members' transportation to and from events is the responsibility of the team's lead coaches/mentors. Team members under 18 should only be allowed to leave an event with the approval of their lead coach/mentor or their parent or guardian, and under appropriate supervision.
- Ensure that all members of the team, including coaches/mentors and parents and guardians, are aware of and comply with any public health guidelines or requirements related to communicable conditions that are set by the venue, event organizer, or local authorities.
- Keep team members safe while working with tools, robots, machinery, and materials. In advance of the event, confirm that qualified adults or volunteers are assigned to oversee the use of tools, machinery, and materials by the teams, as well as the loading in and out of robots and other gear from vehicles outside the facility.

# Guidelines for Parents/Guardians

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 every youth's experience with *FIRST* a safe one. These Guidelines for Parents/Guardians provide you with important information to help us do this.

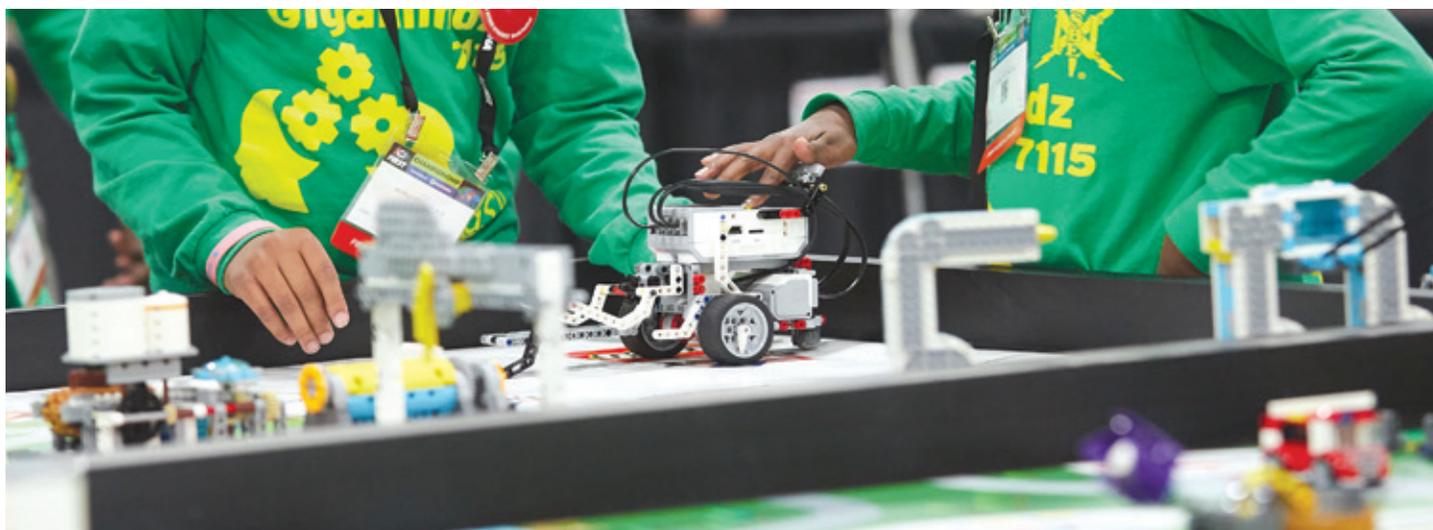
## Get Involved

Parental/guardian 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, 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, who know the provisions of the *FIRST* Youth Protection Program, oversee a team's activities.
- Everyone working with a team or participating on a team understands and can discuss the [Code of Conduct](#) in age-appropriate terms.
- Everyone working with a team understands acceptable boundaries and behaviors, as well as the actions necessary to address inappropriate behaviors.
- Parents and guardians are aware of, and to the extent possible, involved in their child's team's activities.
- Team activities should be open to team members' parents and guardians whenever possible.

## 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 their 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 [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.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 of Conduct and discuss it with your child in age-appropriate terms. Emphasize their responsibility to tell you about things anyone does or says that don't seem right, even if they are 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 their 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 their 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, they 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 does not feel right.

Talking with your child lets them 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.

## **GUIDELINES FOR YOUR CHILD'S ONLINE 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 them 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 platforms concerning the *FIRST* program, their careers, and their educational aspirations. The following exchanges between an adult and child are specifically cited as violations of the [Code of Conduct](#):

"... 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 their 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. Please see our [Internet and Social Media Safety Policy](#) for more detailed protocols.

## **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 [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.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 them to a place where the two of you can talk without interruptions or distractions.

**DO** reassure your child that they are not to blame for what happened, and that you appreciate being told about the incident and will help to make sure that it will not 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 *FIRST* Youth Protection.

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

**DON'T** criticize your child or tell your child they misunderstood what happened.

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

**DON'T** attempt to investigate or confront the suspected offender, even if you know the person well.

*FIRST* Youth Protection 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. *FIRST* Youth Protection will become involved, if necessary, to ensure safety threats or violations of the [Code of Conduct](#) are promptly and effectively resolved. With your help, we can provide your child with a safe, enjoyable, and inspiring experience.

# Appendix

## Additional Resources

### IN THE UNITED STATES

#### [National Children's Advocacy Center](#)

(Provides Contacts for each State)

210 Pratt Avenue

Huntsville, AL 35801

Phone (258) 533-5437

Fax (258) 534-6883

#### [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#)

123 North Enola Drive

Enola, PA 17025

Phone (877) 739-3895 or (717) 909-0710

Fax (717) 909-0714

#### [Prevent Child Abuse America](#)

200 South Michigan Avenue, 17<sup>th</sup> Floor

Chicago, IL 60604-2404

Phone (312) 663-3520

Fax (312) 939-8962

#### [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#)

699 Prince Street

Alexandria, VA 22314-3175

Phone (800) 843-5678

Fax (703) 274-2200

### IN CANADA

#### [Provincial and territorial child protection legislation and policy – 2018](#)

## Forms for Parents

All *FIRST* Youth Protection forms can be downloaded for your convenience under "Resources" on the [Youth Protection page](#) of the *FIRST* website including:

- Notification of Parents/Guardians
- Parent/Guardian Consent – Team Travel

## Youth Protection Program Contact Information

### **REPORT A CONCERN**

#### ***FIRST* Youth Protection**

200 Bedford Street

Manchester, NH 03101

(603) 206-2050

[safetyfirst@firstinspires.org](mailto:safetyfirst@firstinspires.org)



**FIRST® Youth Protection Program**

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