

HANDBOOK FOR
PARENTS OF
STUDENT-ATHLETES

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AVONWORTH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Handbook For Parents of Student-Athletes

ATHLETIC PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

The athletic program is an integral part of the educational process of the Avonworth School District. It promotes a desire in our students and community to take part in sports either as a participant or as a spectator.

Our aim is to develop competitive student-athletes but not to lose sight of educational values such as sportsmanship, citizenship, health, and scholastic attainment. The athletic programs should also promote school morale and provide an additional source of self-esteem for our students.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To provide opportunities to learn games and improve playing skills to the best of their abilities.
2. To develop physical fitness and desirable health, hygiene, and safety habits.
3. To provide opportunities to make real friends with team members and widen circles of friends by meeting student-athletes from opposing teams.
4. To provide opportunities to observe and practice good sportsmanship.
5. To realize that athletic competition is a privilege that carries definite responsibilities with it.
6. To reap the benefits of the special type of discipline that comes from participation and competition.
7. To understand the concept of teamwork and the individual's role as a team member.

COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES

1. The community should realize that control of and responsibility for school athletics rests entirely with the school authorities.
2. School athletics should furnish a recreational opportunity for the general public as long as a community is willing to see that the program is conducted solely for the benefit of student competition and student spectators.
3. The community should judge the success of the season on the number of participants, the number of spectators, new skills acquired and good citizenship and good sportsmanship taught, rather than on the number of games won or lost.
4. The community should constantly keep in mind that an athletic contest is part of the school program and therefore is governed by the same philosophy.

SCHOOL AND STUDENT-BODY OBJECTIVES

1. Athletics should be educational.
2. Athletics should promote pride in one's school and community.
3. Proper student interest should be promoted.
4. All visiting schools should be treated as guests.
5. School policy should be consistently applied so as not to provide student-athletes with special privileges.

6. Sportsmanship, fair play, and good school citizenship should be the goals of all student-athletes.
7. Every effort should be made to provide the best coaching, facilities, and equipment possible within the economic constraints of the school district's budget.

Being a parent is often challenging. This effort and responsibility are frequently complicated by being a parent of a student-athlete. This handbook, with its guidelines and suggestions, will give you some insights into this responsibility.

There are many relationships, which are involved in being the sport-parent of a student-athlete.

The Player-Coach Relationship:

Unfortunately, through televised games and the more recent proliferation of cable TV and other social media outlets, many adults feel that they understand or perhaps know more than many coaches. Everyone becomes an expert. While this newfound expertise may heighten your appreciation of a sport, as a sport-parent, however, you are not the coach.

The player-coach relationship is perhaps the most critical relationship in athletics. Unfortunately, a sport-parent can have a pronounced effect on this very important and delicate relationship. While you may not agree with all decisions of a coach, how and when you express your feelings can have a decided effect upon your child.

If you express a negative opinion in front of your child, you need to remember that he or she will return to practice the next day and may carry with him or her your convictions. Your son or daughter will then have to interact with this coach. You, as the sport-parent, can greatly affect this delicate relationship.

Receiving technical or strategic instruction at home may interfere and conflict with the instructional process at practice sessions and games. This may ultimately impede your son or daughter's progress and affect their playing time or whether they win a starting position.

The Parent-Coach Relationship:

In your role as a sport-parent, you obviously love and are concerned about your child's welfare. You want the best for him or her. But a student-athlete can have only one coach. Allowing the coach to instruct and guide the team is crucial in many respects.

Should you have any questions or concerns, do not approach the coach immediately at the conclusion of a contest. At this time, coaches have other responsibilities and it may be an emotional time. Call and make an appointment for a later time and approach this meeting in a calm, courteous and logical manner. We refer to this as the 24-hour rule. Allow a day to pass before talking to the coach.

One of the responsibilities, which a coach has at the conclusion of a contest, is to have a brief meeting with his or her players. Student-athletes should not pause to talk to parents or friends immediately after games. These brief meetings are essential to the learning process involved in athletics.

The Parent-Player:

Some sport-parents may try to live through their child's athletic efforts. Being positive and supportive is important, but adding pressure and unrealistic expectations can be extremely harmful. Allow

your son or daughter to enjoy and grow from this valuable experience. In numerous national studies, it has been determined that most student-athletes participate for enjoyment or fun. Excessive pressure or expectations can alter this most fundamental reason for playing.

When you do speak with your child after a contest don't dwell on his or her play, how many points they scored or if they started. Instead, first ask how the team did? Did your son or daughter play hard, give 100% and have a good experience?

Relationship with Officials:

There is an age-old refrain often used by irate fans, "How much are you paying the officials?" The home school does not get the officials for games. All officials are assigned by a commissioner or assigner of the particular sport and neither team has control of which officials are assigned.

Officials agree to and follow a code of ethics. They really do not care or have a vested interest in which team emerges as the victor. It is also important to understand that they are a very necessary part of a game. A contest cannot be played without them.

So, while you may not agree with all of their calls, please do not harass or taunt them. It is also important to remember that they are in charge of the contest and have complete authority to have unruly spectators removed. In many sports, a team will see the same official several times during a season. Coaches, athletic administrators and schools often work hard to establish a rapport and good working relationship, which can easily be damaged by spectators.

Spectator-Cheerleader:

Cheerleaders try to infuse spirit into the fans/spectators and to lead them in selected cheers. Taking this responsibility into your own hands is not appropriate. Fans who leave the stands to direct cheers may often cause or lead to confrontations with the opponents. Following the cheerleader's directions, therefore, is absolutely necessary at all athletic contests.

The emotion and atmosphere at athletic contests can be very exciting and the cheerleaders need to be allowed to direct and control this aspect of the event.

Avonworth School District Mission Statement for Athletics

The Avonworth School District supports the philosophy that a quality interscholastic athletic program is vital to the positive social, physical, and educational development of students. The interscholastic athletic program enhances and supports the academic mission of the school system. We are committed to promoting the proper ideals of sportsmanship, ethical conduct, and fair play at all athletic contests. We support high standards of good citizenship and propriety, along with regard for the rights of others.

Being a member of the interscholastic program is a privilege to be earned and maintained throughout the season. Each time participants step into a school or onto the practice field and anytime they participate in a game they are expected to represent themselves, family, team and school in a responsible, sportsmanlike manner.

It is our responsibility to provide challenging opportunities for our student-athletes to compete successfully at the league, district, and state levels.

At Avonworth High School and Middle School:

In addition to embracing and committing to the Avonworth School District philosophy, we will also encourage and promote:

- The belief that student-athletes should participate in multiple and not specialize in any one specific Sport.
- The concept of the broadest-based participation possible by offering all of the teams, which we can, and extending the opportunity to participate to as many students as possible.
- The premise that all teams are considered vital for our student-athletes and each is a valued part of our athletic program. No one sport is considered more important than any other.
- The approach that all teams are treated as fairly as possible.

Athletic Chain of Command

At Avonworth High School and Middle School, the following chain of command is in effect.

Principal
Athletic Director
Head Coach
Assistant/JV Coaches
Players

If there are any questions or concerns involving some aspect of our athletic program, the student-athlete should first contact the appropriate coach. If there were no resolution, he or she would then go to the head coach, etc.

Different Coaching Styles

Just as our students are exposed to a variety of teaching styles and techniques, our student-athletes are exposed to a variety of coaching styles and techniques. Consequently, the Athletic Department does not have any rules, which mandate the amount of playing time received by each player. Those decisions ultimately rest with the coaches in the program. Questions or concerns about playing time are best addressed in a player-coach or a parent-coach conference.

Expressing Concerns

When expressing an occasional concern with a coach, please refer to and use the following guidelines:

1. Never approach a coach immediately before or after a contest. This is not the proper time or place for a discussion concerning your child or the team. Remember the 24-hour rule.
2. Call the following day and make an appointment, which is convenient for both you and the coach to meet.

3. Raise your concern in a calm and civil manner. Yelling, being rude or using foul language is totally unacceptable.
4. Once you have stated your question or concern, listen to the explanation. Often a sport-parent may be blinded by emotion and this overrides logic and reason. Listening receptively may really help you to understand any explanation, which is given.

Contacting the athletic office

It is always better to express a concern than to internalize it. A valid concern that is not addressed can lead to other problems for the student-athlete, the coach, or the team. A player-coach or a parent-coach conference is still the most appropriate way to express a concern. If for whatever reason, a student-athlete or parent feels uncomfortable about talking to the coach, it is then advisable to contact the Athletic Director. Just as the Principal will protect the identity of the person who expresses a concern about a teacher or a class, the Athletic Director will protect the identity of the person who expresses a concern about a coach or a team.

After listening to the concern, the Athletic Director will either address the concern for the purpose of correcting it; or they will explain to the caller why the coach is operating in a correct manner. If the caller does not accept the Athletic Director's explanation, the caller has the option of contacting the Principal.

Sportsmanship

Since athletics should be educational in nature, it is important that all parents demonstrate good sportsmanship and serve as role models for our athletes and students. Sportsmanship is an overt display of respect for the rules of sport and for all others – players, coaches, officials and fans (*National Federation News*, March 1995, p. 10). It also involves a commitment to fair play, ethical behavior, and integrity. This means:

1. There can be no vulgar or inappropriate language from our fans or spectators.
2. Taunting or trash talking of our opponents and their cheerleaders cannot be tolerated.
3. Spectators cannot leave the bleachers or enter onto the court or field during a contest.
4. Fans should be supportive and positive. Cheering should be done for our team and not against our Opponent.
5. We should not impede or interfere with our opponent's cheerleaders from leading their cheers.
6. In some specific sports such as basketball, we should not yell while an opponent takes a foul shot.

Responsibilities of a Student-Athlete

Most coaches would expect a student-athlete to adhere to the following guidelines:

1. The team's goals, welfare and success must come before any individual.
2. A student-athlete needs to consistently attend practice sessions. This also includes weekend and holiday periods.
3. Players must be receptive to coaching.
4. Team members are responsible for all issued uniforms and equipment.

5. As a member of a team, a student-athlete must agree to and follow the team rules. Student-athletes need to remember that they are ambassadors and represent not only themselves, but the coaching staff and the school.
6. If injured, a student-athlete must report all injuries to either the coach or, more importantly, to our Athletic Trainer.

Responsibilities of a Coach

At Avonworth High School and Middle School, a coach has the responsibility for the following:

1. The selection of the squad.
2. The determination of the style of play, including the offensive and defensive philosophy.
3. The teaching and instruction at practice sessions.
4. The determination of who starts and how long an athlete plays in a contest.
5. The decision of who plays in what position.
6. The establishing of team rules.
7. The selection of team captains.
8. The communication with student-athletes and parents with respect to when practice sessions will be held, and when the sessions will start and finish.

Eligibility Requirements for Student-Athletes

Avonworth High School and Middle Schools are members of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (P.I.A.A.), District VII of the P.I.A.A. and the Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (W.P.I.A.L.). As members, Avonworth is subject to all rules, regulations and policies of these organizations.

The purposes of these organizations are as follows:

- To organize, develop, and direct an interscholastic athletic program, which will promote, protect, and conserve the health and physical welfare of all participants.
- To formulate and maintain policies that will safeguard the educational values of Interscholastic athletics and cultivate the high ideals of good sportsmanship.
- To promote uniformity of standards in all interscholastic athletic competition.

AVONWORTH ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY

In order to be eligible for interscholastic athletics, a student must have passed at least four full-credit subjects, or the equivalent, during the previous marking period.

Additionally, there are attendance requirements that may cause a student-athlete to lose eligibility for a daily or seasonal period. In order to participate in a scheduled athletic contest, student-athletes must be in school by 10:30 am. on the day of the contest.

Any student-athlete who is absent from school during a semester for a total of 20 days or more shall not be eligible to participate in any athletic contest until he/she has been in attendance for a total of 60 school days following his/her 20th day of absence.

AVONWORTH ACADEMIC RESTRICTION

If a student receives two failing grades in a marking period, in major subjects or the equivalent of, they will be placed on Academic Restriction. Progress will be re-evaluated every three weeks. Students who have improved to the administration's satisfaction will be released from restriction and have full privileges restored.

P.I.A.A. ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY

In order to be eligible for interscholastic athletics, a pupil must have passed at least four (4) full-credit subjects, or the equivalent, during the previous week or grading period, except as provided in Article IX, Section 5.

Article IX, Section 5: Use of Final Credit At The End Of The School Year.

At the end of the school year, the student's final credits in his/her credits for the last grading period shall be used to determine his/her eligibility for the next grading period.

In cases where a student's work in any preceding grading period does not meet the standards provided above, said student shall be ineligible to participate in interscholastic athletics for at least fifteen (15) school days of the next grading period where the school has four (4) grading periods per school year, or for at least ten (10) school days of the next grading period where the school has six (6) grading periods per school year, beginning on the first day report cards are issued, except as provided in Section 5.

P.I.A.A. ELIGIBILITY

Prior to participation in any interscholastic competition, it is required that PIAA Certificate of Eligibility forms are completed and delivered to all opponents. These forms must be filled out by the coaches, and must include the names of the student-athlete, date of birth, place of birth, date of enrollment for the current school year, number of seasons of competition, number of semesters of attendance beyond the eighth grade and for wrestling only, the certified minimum weight class. A copy of the appropriate form is included in the Appendix of this manual. The above information must be submitted to the Athletic Secretary for typing two weeks prior to the start of the regular season.

N.C.A.A. CLEARINGHOUSE

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), an organization founded in 1906 that has established rules on eligibility, recruiting, and financial aid, regulates college sports. The NCAA has three membership divisions – Division I, II and III. Institutions are members of one or another division according to the size and scope of their athletic programs and whether they provide athletic scholarships.

If a high school student-athlete is planning to enroll in college as a freshman upon graduating from high school and they wish to participate in Division I or Division II sports, the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse must certify them.

The Clearinghouse will analyze the student-athlete's academic information and determine if they meet the N.C.A.A.'s initial-eligibility requirements.

The certification process for student-athletes planning to enroll as college freshmen begin August 1st of the academic high school year. Clearinghouse forms are available in the high school guidance office.

Participation on an Athletic Team

It is important to understand that participation on an athletic team at Avonworth High School and Middle School is a privilege and not a right. Being on and maintaining one's membership on the team means accepting all the responsibilities of a student-athlete. However, unlike recreation or intramural teams, equal or guaranteed playing time does not exist. In an effort to win, a coach will use players best suited to the conditions or demands of the contest at that time.

Physical Education Class Participation

It is important to also understand that all student-athletes are expected to actively participate in all required Physical Education classes even when "in season" during their particular sport. Physical Education is an important and required course for graduation. Students who participate in interscholastic athletes should not expect "special" treatment from teachers to be excused from Physical Education classes even on the day of competition. Physical Education teachers will use prudent judgment with student-athletes on determining their participation level in class on the day of competition.

Cutting the Team

While our ultimate goal is to promote the greatest athletic participation possible at Avonworth HS, it may be necessary in some sports to cut a squad. This may occur due to limitations of our facilities, regulations specific to some sports, travel restrictions, and other factors.

Every coach has the responsibility and authority for selecting his or her team. The criterion for selecting the team is developed by the coach. A copy of the written criteria is then distributed to our student-athletes prior to the tryouts and to our parents at our pre-season meetings.

It is also important to remember that there are no guarantees. Players from the previous year's JV team, for example, do not automatically make either the JV or varsity squad the following year. Having been a member of a team during the previous year or even being a senior does not ensure that a student-athlete will make the squad.

Parents should expect that every candidate is treated fairly and given every consideration. Coaches are sensitive to feelings of disappointment, will handle the task as positively as possible, and be available to answer student-athletes' questions.

While we understand that being cut is disappointing for many student-athletes and even for their parents, we unfortunately cannot keep everyone. Anyone cut from a team is welcome to try out again next season or to try another sport. When parents and student-athletes understand and support the coach's decision, this difficult process becomes a less painful experience for all.

Student-Athletes changing teams

Whether by being cut, by quitting or by being dismissed, a student-athlete's membership on a team can be altered. While we at Avonworth High School and Middle School want to promote participation, we also want to safeguard fairness and an ethical approach with regard to all coaches and teams. In order to achieve all of the above objectives, the following guidelines will be used:

1. Any player cut from a squad during tryouts is free to immediately try out or join another team.
2. Any player quitting a team must get the approval of the original coach before joining a second team. All obligations such as returning uniforms and equipment must also be completed prior to joining a second team.
3. Any player dismissed from a squad must get the approval of the original coach and from the athletic director before joining another team.
4. The athletic director will mediate all problems when a student-athlete changes teams and will have the final decision.
5. No coach should attempt to recruit student-athletes from another Avonworth team for his/her program. This would include any player who had been a member of a squad during the previous season. This prohibition of recruiting should and would extend through the off-season.
6. During the off-season, a student-athlete can participate in weight-training, conditioning and similar activities with other teams without undue pressure from a coach to change teams.

The Purpose of a JV Team

JV teams exist to provide those student-athletes unable to participate on the varsity squad an opportunity to develop skills and gain experience. While the student-athlete's age, size, or skill level may be the limiting factor in not making the varsity team, participation on a JV team may enhance the student-athlete's potential to make the varsity squad in the future.

A caution, however, must also be given. Being a member of a JV team does not guarantee that a student-athlete will automatically move up the following year to the varsity squad. The student-athletes best suited for varsity competition will make the squad each year.

Striving to win is important in athletics; however, compiling a great record or winning a championship should not be the primary objective of a JV team. The development of student-athletes should be the ultimate purpose of a JV squad while at the same time acknowledging the value of winning, learning, and enjoying being a member of a team.

Practice Sessions and Games

Practice sessions are normally closed to spectators and there is a very sound reason for this. These sessions are the equivalent of a teacher's classroom and there is real, quality instruction taking place. Interruptions and interference to a student-athlete's concentration and focus in practice cannot be allowed any more than a disruption would be tolerated in an academic setting. Education in any setting cannot be compromised.

At Avonworth High School and Middle School, practice sessions:

1. May last two hours.
2. May start and end at different times due to the schedule of the coach or of our facilities. Check with the coach for the specific times.
3. Will not be held when school is dismissed early due to inclement weather.
4. Will not be held when school is not in session due to inclement weather.

5. May be held on Saturdays and over holiday periods.

Spectators at games, however, are very much encouraged. Positive and nurturing support of teams and student-athletes can be very helpful to performance in athletic contests.

Transportation

Transportation for all athletic contests, scrimmages and when necessary, practices will be arranged by the Athletic Director. Departure times will be scheduled and published for coaches, players, custodians, faculty and administration.

Student-athletes **MUST** use school-provided transportation to all athletic contests and scrimmages unless prior arrangements have been made with the administration. In addition, student-athletes who are transported by school-provided transportation to events **MUST** return by school-provided transportation unless the head coach receives parental permission personally. Only a legal parent or guardian may transport student-athletes. This however, should only occur in emergency circumstances.

Hazing

In athletic settings, some may view hazing as a harmless rite of initiation or an important activity for team bonding. However, it is actually a form of harassment and represents an Avonworth Disciplinary Code offense. A more complete explanation of harassment can be found in the Avonworth Student Handbook.

Hazing, therefore, cannot and will not be condoned or permitted in the athletic program at Avonworth. This means on the fields or courts, in the locker rooms, on the bus, or at any other activity in which student-athletes represent Avonworth High School or Middle School.

Pennsylvania Hazing Law

[P.S.] 5352. Definitions

The following words and phrases when used in this act shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

“HAZING.” Any action or situation which recklessly or intentionally endangers the mental or physical health or safety of a student or which willfully destroys or removes public or private property for the purpose of initiation or admission into or affiliation with, or as a condition for continued membership in, any organization operating under the sanction of or recognized as an organization by an institution of higher education. The term shall include, but not be limited to, any brutality of a physical nature, such as whipping, beating, branding, forced calisthenics, exposure to the elements, forced consumption of any food, liquor, drug or other substance, or any other forced physical activity which could adversely affect the physical health and safety of the individual, and shall include any activity which would subject the individual to extreme mental stress such as sleep deprivation, forced exclusion from social contact, forced conduct which could result in extreme embarrassment, or any other forced activity which could adversely affect the mental health or dignity of the individual, or any willful destruction or removal of public or private property. For purposes of this definition, any activity as described in this definition upon which the initiation or admission into or affiliation with or continued membership in an organization is directly or indirectly

conditioned shall be presumed to be “forced” activity, the willingness of an individual to participate in such activity notwithstanding.

Risks of Athletic Participation (Assumption of Risk)

In spite of protective equipment, and the supervision and sound instruction by our coaches, there are some risks associated when someone participates in athletics. Injuries in some of our activities can and do occur. In extremely rare cases, death could also result. All student-athletes and parents need to be aware and understand this possibility. At Avonworth School District, we will do all that we can to ensure a safe and healthy environment for our student-athletes.

Sports Booster Clubs

Avonworth’s Sports Booster Clubs exists to support all teams and the entire athletic program. Booster Clubs should have three primary goals: to raise funds to assist the athletic programs, to increase school spirit and to encourage and promote good sportsmanship.

The Booster Club is not a vehicle to remove coaches, advance vested interests or to alter Athletic Department policy. It is a service and support organization, which works in harmony with Avonworth High School and Middle School and its athletic program.

All parents are encouraged to join a Booster Club and become an active member. Most Booster Clubs hold monthly meetings throughout the year.

SPORTSMANSHIP EXPECTATIONS

Acceptable Behavior

- Applause during introduction of players, coaches and officials.
- Players shaking hands with opponents who foul out while both sets of fans recognize the player's performance with applause.
- Accept all decisions of officials.
- Cheerleaders lead fans in positive school yells in a positive manner.
- Handshakes between participants and coaches at the end of the contest, regardless of outcome.
- Treat competition as a game, not a war.
- Coaches/players search out and congratulate opposing participants or coaches.
- Applause at the end of the contest for performances of all participants.
- Everyone showing concern for injured players, regardless of team.
- Encourage only sportsmanlike conduct.

Unacceptable Behavior

- Yelling or waving arms during an opponent's free-throw attempt.
- Disrespectful or derogatory yells, chants, songs, or gestures.
- Booming or heckling an official's decision.
- Criticizing officials in any way; displays of temper with an official's call.
- Yells that antagonize opponents.
- Refusing to shake hands or give recognition for good performances.

- Blaming loss of game on official, coaches, or participants.
- Taunting or name-calling to distract an opponent.
- Use of profanity or displays of anger that draw attention away from the game.
- Doing their own yells/chants instead of following the lead of all cheerleaders.

SPORTSMANSHIP

Do's and Don'ts:

1. Cheer **for** your team.
2. But don't yell at your opponents.
3. Do not use vulgar or profane language.
4. Yelling at officials **cannot** be tolerated.
5. Do not yell at or distract a player shooting foul shots.
6. Taunting and trash talking directed at players, coaches and fans are not permitted.
7. Remain in the bleachers during the contest.
8. Do not interfere with our opponent's cheerleaders and their attempt to lead cheers.
9. Do not kick the bleachers ...
Not only does this display poor sportsmanship,
but this also damages the structure.
10. As a parent, please set a positive example for our students and student-athletes.

If you see or hear something, which is inappropriate, please help us by saying something to the offending individual.

Remember, that purchasing a ticket provides you with the opportunity and privilege to watch a contest; it is not a license to verbally assault others or to be obnoxious.

WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION SCHOOLS RESERVE THE RIGHT TO EJECT ANY SPECTATORS WHOSE CONDUCT IS DETRIMENTAL TO GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP. MISBEHAVIOR AT SPORTING EVENTS MAY LEAD TO PROSECUTION OR SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY ACTION.

Please feel free to call with comments concerning this handbook. Hopefully, you have found it useful. You might also want to take ten minutes and share this information with your son or daughter. Have a great season!

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