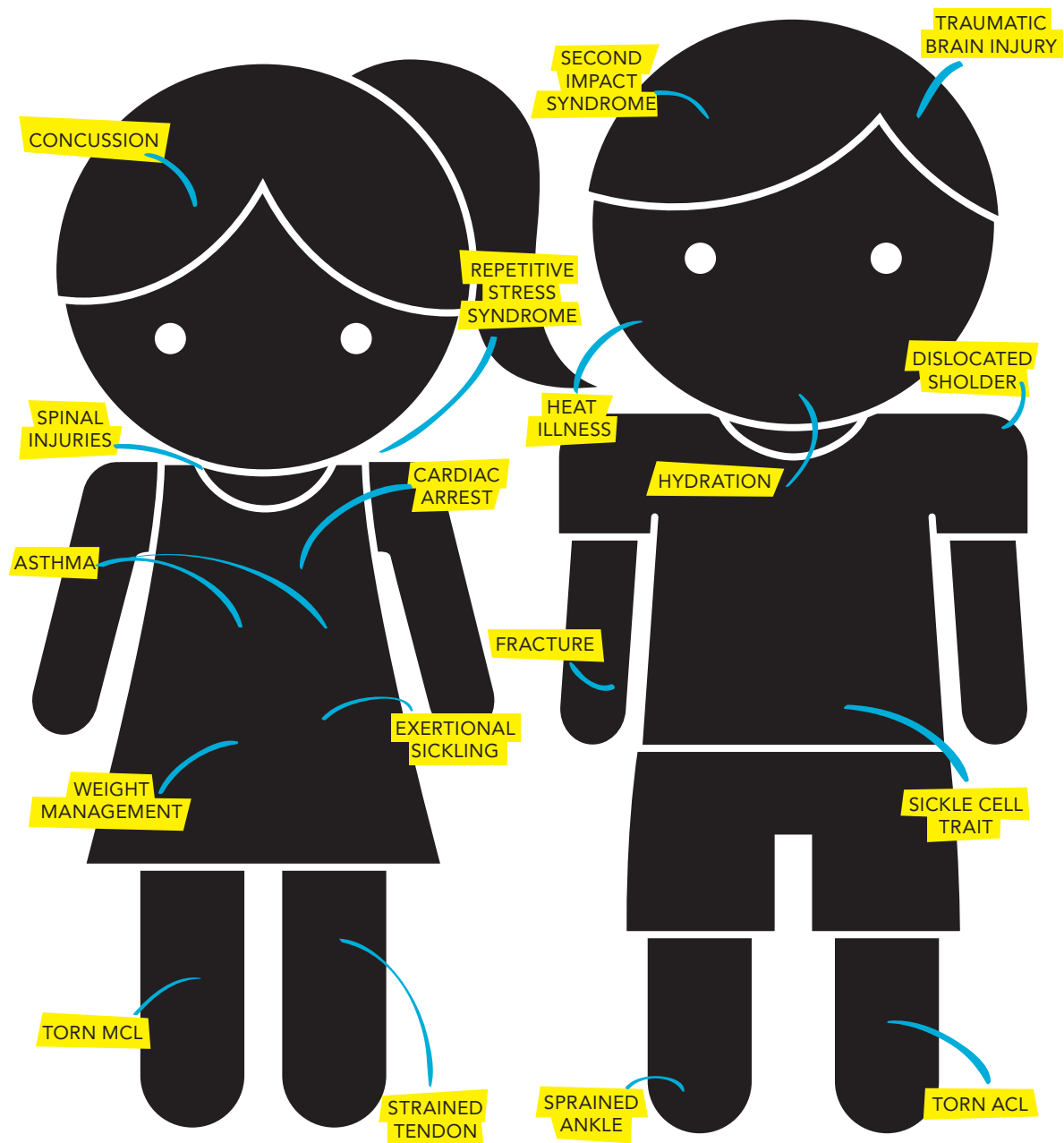


YOUTH SPORTS SAFETY

ALLIANCE



GRASSROOTS TOOLKIT



National Action Plan for Sports Safety[®]

Grassroots Toolkit

PROTECTING AMERICA'S STUDENT ATHLETES

Prepared by the National Athletic Trainers' Association

Executive Summary

The Youth Sports Safety Alliance has created this toolkit to give activists the tools to start building safe youth sports programs in their community – to make the National Action Plan for Sports Safety* a reality. In this toolkit you will find questions and ideas that will supplement your community outreach.

One person can make a difference. Look inside for:

- Considerations in creating an effective grassroots program
- Ideas for the types of individuals and organizations that may join you
- Resources for the types of information you will want to gather about your community or school sports programs
- Ways to gather strong support in the community

The Alliance is here to help. Allow us to be a continued resource for you. Find support from the national, state or local chapters of the Alliance members.

Questions? Contact info@youthsportssafetyalliance.org

*For a complete copy of the National Action Plan see: <http://www.youthsportssafetyalliance.org>



Laura Friend's Story

A beautiful girl loved by her friends, my daughter Sarah died of sudden cardiac arrest on July 14, 2004, three weeks short of her 13th birthday. She collapsed climbing the stairs of a water coaster and was not resuscitated.

Sarah's passing made clear the need for proper training of personnel in schools and other public places in order to recognize and respond to emergencies. In the case of SCA, when the heart goes into ventricular fibrillation, the only remedy is an AED.

I wrote the governor a personal letter, telling Sarah's story. His education advisor replied and said to call if he could help; I called. The result was passage of SB 7 three years after Sarah's death, requiring at least one AED in each Texas public school.

What did I learn during the process?

- *Anyone can achieve change, even without experience. It takes sweat equity (time and will). I drove to Austin every week for six months to nurture the bill.*
- *Plan ahead: determine the key objectives going in – it's a give and take process.*
- *Expand the support base: I invited both another parent who'd lost a child and a school representative to the first meeting.*
- *Be specific: Use numbers along with real life stories. Find other advocates with personal experience.*
- *Tell them what other states are doing: Where does your state fit in?*
- *Talk to everyone: I talked to anyone who would listen, even asking an out-of-state lawyer for help. The governor's office connected us with a legislator who advised as to whom we needed to see. You never know who can help.*

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN?

The National Action Plan for Sports Safety was created to bring to light the benefits and potential risks to which student athletes may be exposed while playing sports. There is an inherent danger that participation may result in catastrophic or fatal injuries and illnesses. Maintaining the most basic emergency care policies is not enough to protect student athletes: a multiplicity of actions is needed. Plans must be made to prevent, manage and follow up on injuries.

The Plan focuses on four major areas that are linked to catastrophic or fatal injuries and illnesses, cardiac events, neurologic injuries, environmental/exertional conditions, and dietary/substance-induced conditions. Through the focus of these areas the Plan has listed recommendations and other pertinent information that may help minimize and eliminate risks in secondary school athletics.

The Youth Sports Safety Alliance has created this toolkit to give constituents the tools to start building safe youth sports in their community – to make the Plan a reality.

What is the Goal?

First things first: what is the specific problem that you want to address? For example, your goal may be to supply an AED or other equipment to the school. The types of injuries and conditions that occur in youth sports generally fall into four categories: cardiac events; neurologic injuries; environmental and exertional conditions; and dietary/substance-induced conditions. Some solutions or strategies may apply to all four; others to one or more. Therefore, be specific. A scattershot approach may be difficult, require more resources and be more difficult to explain. As you achieve the first goal, you can always tackle another. For example, Laura Friend knew she wanted to place AEDs in areas where children played.

Answer the questions below before going forward:

1. What (exactly) is the problem?
2. What (exactly) would solve the problem? Why THAT solution over some other?
3. How will you measure success? Compromise is part of the process; you may not reach the exact goal – at first.
4. Will you concentrate on one school, the area school system or the whole state? Public and private schools? League and community sports? What grades? What sports?



Every three minutes a child is seen in an emergency department for a sports-related concussion.¹

Get the Facts

Gather information. (Look at the Statistics Sheet.)

1. Identify the stakeholders. (Who cares about the issue? Who will be with you? Who will be against you?)
 - Do you know what “they” think about what you want to do?
 - Is anyone else working on this or a similar goal?
2. What will make this goal a reality? Will it take a district policy or a state law? Are one-time or ongoing financial resources needed?
3. What’s the current situation?
 - What policies, plans and laws are currently in place? Do they conflict with your solution?
 - How many student athletes are in the school/district/state?
 - Have there been catastrophic or fatal injuries in the past five years?
 - Are all student athletes currently required to have pre-participation examinations (PPE)?
 - Does your state high school activity association have recommended policies or guidelines for athletic injuries and conditions?
 - Do the schools have automated external defibrillators? Are they functional and easily accessible? Is someone assigned in each school to maintain them? Are there full-time athletic trainers or other medical personnel available when sports are practiced or played?
 - Do the schools have venue-specific Emergency Action Plans for the sports programs? Are they regularly rehearsed with local emergency personnel?
 - Do the schools have procedures in place for varying environmental conditions?
 - Do schools have protocols to regularly fit and maintain athletic equipment such as helmets?
 - Do schools set aside places to care for injured athletes, including a place for private discussions and confidential records?



Sports injuries accounted for 20% of all injury-related emergency department visits for children ages 6-19.¹

To get this information, contact:

- District superintendent
- State High School Activities Association
- School athletic trainer, school nurse or team physician
- School athletic director
- School personnel and volunteers, e.g., coach, principal, PTA and booster clubs
- Local emergency personnel or hospital Emergency Department
- Medical personnel (sports medicine physicians, athletic trainers, school nurses and pediatricians)
- Groups advocating athlete safety

What Factors Affect Your Goals?

Grassroots activism is unique to the time, location and issue. What works in a big city may not work in a rural area. A good idea to help one group may not help all. In other words, there is no cookie-cutter plan. It's best to consider as many ideas as possible; think about the following:

1. Existing athlete safety laws such as a concussion act (statewide law);
2. Distribution of medical providers, especially physician shortage areas;
3. The financial situation of the state and school districts (money to buy new equipment or hire personnel); and
4. Previous attempts to incorporate safety measures may impact your efforts.

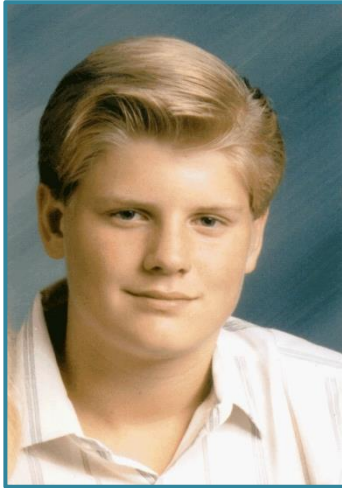
Garner Support

Form a coalition! Do not underestimate the power of a group or the willingness of people to participate in something they care about. Coalitions can comprise many types of individuals – it's simply a group that wants to effect political or social change. In this case, the coalition may be trying to effect both political and social change in the community, state and even the nation. Below are some suggested steps to take:

1. Talk with community leaders, such as the PTA, Booster Club and other parents.
2. Convene a “town hall” meeting:
 - Invite all parents: don't forget parents of cheerleaders, marching band, swim club, etc. or those whose kids are in community and league sports
 - Invite school medical personnel and administrators
 - Team physician
 - Principal
 - Athletic trainer
 - School nurse
 - Athletic director
 - Coach
 - Create an agenda that will keep the discussion on track
 - Be specific about the issue(s) and your proposed solution
 - Discuss the facts you have gathered
 - Ask for volunteers (sounds obvious, but people need to be asked)
 - If appropriate, discuss potential solutions while remaining open to other ideas



31 high school football players died of heat stroke complications between 1995-2009.²



Rhonda Fincher's Story

Rhonda Fincher's son, Kendrick went to his first day of football practice on August 7, 1995 and died 18 days later from multi-system organ failure due to heat stroke.

Rhonda is now the co-founder and executive director of the organization, Kendrick Fincher Hydration for Life, based in Rogers, Arkansas. The organization began in 1996 with a mission to promote proper hydration and prevent heat illness through education and supporting activities. The organization's values are: children should have adequate access to water throughout the school day to maintain proper hydration; athletes should have frequent water/sports drink breaks; athletes should be able to get a drink at any time during practices; coaches should be trained in heat illness prevention and emergency procedures; and, parents should understand their child's hydration needs and encourage proper hydration.

Kendrick Fincher Hydration for Life works with schools and athletic teams to educate parents, coaches and athletes on proper hydration and heat illness prevention. Fincher is the author of the book "Good Night Kendrick, I Love You: A Mother's Journal Through Grief." She is also a contributing writer to various publications.

What did I learn during the process?

- *Heat illness prevention is a team effort between coaches, parents and athletes. All three must work together to prevent heat illness; education needs to start in elementary school.*
- *The process of educating the public on the importance of our mission takes time and repetition. It is an ongoing process and there are always new opportunities.*
- *Be persistent and work with existing organizations where possible.*
- *Advocacy is time consuming and maintaining a nonprofit requires fundraising so you can continue to advocate.*

Create a Unique Strategy

Now that you have set the wheels in motion, you will want to carefully formulate your strategy. Each community is unique, and your strategy should fit the situation.

1. Form a core leadership group or steering committee; this inner circle will be the decision makers, and tasks can be delegated among them and other volunteers
2. Take into account all the information you've gathered; formulate a strategy. For example, Rhonda Fincher decided to educate on a specific issue.
 - Focus on the goals you want to achieve and make sure the strategy is specific:
 - To whom do you want to market your ideas?
 - What type of support do you need?
 - Examine threats/obstacles
 - Assess the financial requirements
 - Gather more research, if needed
 - Based on input from the leaders, you may need to narrow the focus
3. Present the proposed goal to the entire group for support
4. Create your plan using any or all tactics, such as:
 - A rally will bring the community in. Utilizing local leaders, speak about the issue and circulate a petition. This should be a time for like-minded individuals to gather and show support. Prepare a press release to stir up media interest. Invite public officials to draw attention. Students will be especially valuable in filling up a gym or a hall and making lots of noise!
 - Organize a fundraiser. Say with some specificity how you will use the money (advocacy tools such as flyers, banners, buttons or newspaper ads; purchase safety equipment such as AEDs or ice baths; fund the cost of medical team members, etc.)
 - Potential events:
 - School carnival
 - Dinner with the Mayor – a themed party: sports, holiday, masquerade, etc.
 - Get donations and sponsor an auction at an event that's already organized and scheduled
 - Parents vs. kids or kids vs. coaches tournament or kickball game
 - Poker tournament
 - Auction a specific type of chore for kids to do around the neighborhood – get the kids involved
 - Chili or pancake supper – make (or eat) the most pancakes to break the current world record



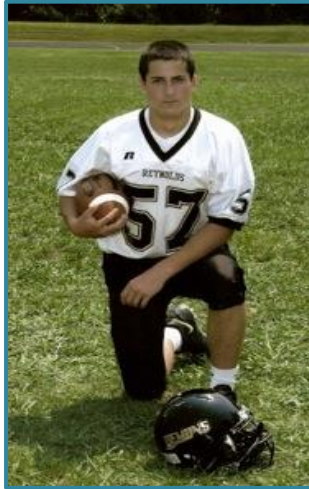
Sudden cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death in exercising young athletes.³

Just 1 in 10 U.S. student athletes who suffer from SCA survive.⁴

- Bake sales, during games, holidays and at other fundraiser events (like poker night)
- 5. Place attention-grabbing ads in local newspapers – while this is easier to do in a smaller community, it’s a great way to reach a large audience if it’s economically feasible – or, use public relations efforts that take more time and energy but may be even more effective:
 - Ask a reporter to write an article about the issue. Suggest an interesting angle, such as the personal story of an injured athlete.
 - Go to the local broadcast news programs such as morning shows. Again, personalize the issue with a real life example.
- 6. Hold a write-in, where community members write to legislators or community leaders to urge change
- 7. Ask family/friends/coalition members to wear pins or post signs of support
- 8. Create a petition advocating more safety equipment or awareness – collect signatures to grab attention of local officials and school decision makers
- 9. Create a “Supporters” list – even those who don’t have time or resources to help can lend support – typical groups and individuals that might offer support and will influence others include:
 - Parent teacher association and School board members
 - Superintendents and principals
 - Mayor, City Council or county supervisors
 - Athletic trainers
 - Booster Clubs and other parent groups
 - Local and corporate business owners
 - Lions Club/Rotary
 - High School Activities Association and student groups
 - Local and statewide newspaper reporters and editors
 - Medical societies (emergency medicine, orthopedics, family practice and pediatric specialists)
 - Local hospitals: directors of emergency departments, chief of staff, director of nursing, hospital administrators
 - EMTs and ambulance companies
 - Pharmacists
 - Insurance companies
 - Bloggers



Players with one or more previous injuries have 2-3 times greater risk of re-injury compared to those without previous injury.⁵



Lisa Gfeller's Story

Matthew Alan Gfeller grew up a huge football fan, specifically cheering for the Oklahoma Sooners. He and his brother began playing football with the Pop Warner League. In high school he achieved his goal to make the RJ Reynolds Varsity squad as a sophomore and to start as a linebacker.

On August 22, 2008, Matthew suffered a severe helmet-to-helmet collision during his first varsity football game. It was in the fourth quarter of the game when he was playing right inside linebacker. Tragically, the accident caused a fatal traumatic brain injury. He never regained consciousness and died two days later on August 24, 2008.

The Matthew Alan Gfeller Foundation was established to positively impact the lives of other young people in Matthew's memory. The foundation supports the positive role athletics can play, but wants kids to "play it safe" and believe that head injuries can be minimized through better equipment, training, diagnosis and treatment. The foundation's community service and fundraising efforts focus on the prevention, treatment and research of sports related traumatic brain injuries. In 2010, the Matthew Alan Gfeller Sports Related Traumatic Brain Injury Research Center opened on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

What did I learn during the process?

- *Parents need to be a benevolent change agent, people respond well to positive attitudes and specific projects.*
- *Educating yourself on topics such as signs and symptoms of injuries; team culture; and equipment ratings and safety is vital to pursuing your cause.*

Take time to focus on your family and adjusting to the new family dynamic before embarking on an active healing mission. For example, an entire year went by before we sat down for the first time with Dr. Guskiewicz and his team at UNC to discuss the founding of the research center there in Matt's name.

The Word is Out

The single most important element of any campaign for change is perseverance. Once begun, you must continue to move forward. As you go, you obtain or enhance credibility and become a force to be reckoned with. If you give up at the first obstacle, it becomes difficult if not impossible later to regain lost momentum.

1. Continue to advocate for change
2. Create a message and stick to it – make the issue personal to policymakers and their constituents – tell local stories and the effects on the child and the family
3. Make your functions annual events to keep safety first and foremost in the minds of policymakers when they are budgeting or otherwise making decisions affecting school sports

Keep Up the Good Work

Change takes time. Don't get discouraged if you don't see results right away. Continue to grow your efforts and monitor resources for current information.

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