

YOUTH PROTECTION GUIDELINES

A GUIDE FOR SCIENCE OLYMPIAD STAKEHOLDERS

Youth safety is a top priority for Science Olympiad. These guidelines serve to create a safe environment for all youth involved in Science Olympiad. All adults involved in Science Olympiad - volunteers, coaches, state leaders, staff and parents - should be familiar with these guidelines and are responsible for reporting and addressing instances where they feel that these guidelines have been violated.

Refer to your [state chapter](#) for more detailed information about youth protection guidance at Science Olympiad events.

Where Science Olympiad Takes Place

Science Olympiad activities typically take place in two main venues: at school and at tournament sites. Some team activities might take place in the remote or virtual learning space, due to local COVID-19 restrictions.

Science Olympiad at School

Team meetings and practices are supervised by a school staff member (coach), typically a teacher, and may be occasionally assisted by parent or community volunteers. The school staff member ensures that students are following safety procedures and school rules, students have completed necessary permission slips and school forms, and all volunteers adhere to school volunteer guidelines and policies (ex. background checks, etc.).

*For homeschool teams, an adult is chosen to lead and manage the team by the students' parents. That adult is responsible for ensuring student safety.

Science Olympiad Tournament Sites

Invitational, Regional, State and National tournaments typically take place on college campuses, but may be run at district schools, or in the case of mini SO (in the 20/21 season), at home. Teams are accompanied by school staff members, parents or other adult chaperones, who are responsible for ensuring that all students and adults check in at registration and that students are safe as they navigate the event.

Science Olympiad in the Virtual or Remote Space

Some teams may decide to conduct team activities (ex. meetings, study sessions, etc.) online or outside of the school. Some tournaments might also be run virtually (ex. Satellite SO or mini SO). School policy should guide how these sessions are organized, managed, and executed (e.g., the appropriate platform or venue to be used, what permission slips are required). If Virtual Mentors are included in any online interactions, *a minimum of two adults must always be present simultaneously*.

Inclusive, Safe and Equitable Community

All youth deserve to be in a safe and supportive environment. Science Olympiad believes that it is the responsibility of the adults who care for them to ensure this environment is maintained and protected, including:

- Equitable treatment of all youth, regardless of sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, nationality, status or culture;



- Respectful treatment from adults and other youth that excludes bullying, intimidation, or verbal or physical assault or abuse;
- Healthy interactions with adults and other youth that exclude references to sexual activity or violence, derogatory language, the consumption of drugs or alcohol, or other potentially harmful risk-taking behaviors.
- All volunteers are required to become familiar with the Science Olympiad [Volunteer Code of Conduct](#)

Protecting Youth from Predators

Research shows that predators often use afterschool activities to engage with youth and build relationships with them (also called grooming). All adults (parents, teachers/coaches, school staff and volunteers) involved in Science Olympiad should be aware and alert whenever youth and adults are interacting and should ensure that the following practices are being observed at all times and in all venues:

- A youth should never be alone with an adult in any context (in-person or online), particularly where they cannot be immediately observed by others and/or interrupted by others.
- All volunteers should complete the Science Olympiad online training and become familiar with all relevant policies and practices. Volunteers must also abide by the school and/or state requirements for engaging with youth (e.g., background checks, references, etc.).
- All adults should be familiar with the Social Media Guidelines and avoid one-on-one interactions with youth using any technology, including, but not limited to: social media platforms, email, or text messages that don't include other adults. Adults should not share their contact information with youth. Some exceptions may apply to qualified school staff members that have been approved to communicate with youth directly.
- Adults and volunteers who engage with youth as mentors or tutors in the virtual or remote space are required to be familiar with the Science Olympiad Virtual Mentoring Guidelines. While school policy should guide all interactions between any type of Science Olympiad mentors, Science Olympiad requires an adult mentor should never be alone with a youth when there is not another school staff member present. If you are a volunteer, please talk to the team coach before engaging with Science Olympiad youth in a virtual or remote setting.
- All adults and youth must check in at tournaments and other events and receive a designated wristband and/or name tag that clearly indicates their role at the event.
- No Science Olympiad volunteers or employees should ever be under the influence of drugs or alcohol when youth are present (including post-tournament activities) and/or when that adult is responsible for the youth.

Mandated Reporters

Mandated reporters are legally required to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the relevant authorities. Staff who are responsible for youth are mandated reporters, and in some states, volunteers who serve youth are also considered mandated reporters. These laws are in place to prevent children from being abused and to end any possible abuse or neglect at the earliest possible stage. For more information about mandated reporters and laws by state, visit: [Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect \(childwelfare.gov\)](#).

Who to Contact

- If you witness or suspect violations of the above expectations, speak immediately to the adult representative who is in charge (e.g., Team coach, tournament director, state director). If you don't know who that is, contact the Science Olympiad National Office. If you believe a youth is in immediate danger, contact local authorities (e.g., call 911, the police, or youth protection services).
- If you run a tournament or a state chapter and would like assistance in creating your own Youth Protection policies, reach out to the Science Olympiad National Office.

