



# SUPPORTING ATHLETES



A Parent Resource for  
Challenges, Wellness  
and Safety



# Supporting Athletes

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Wellness and Safety

## SECTION 1

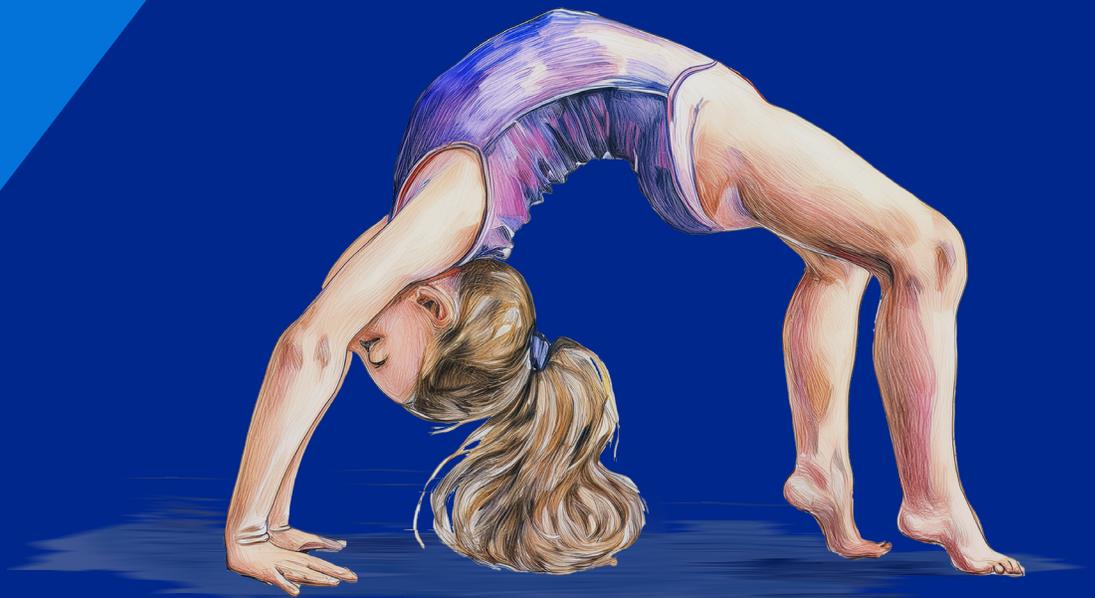
Navigating Challenges

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## Introduction

Athletics can be incredibly rewarding, but challenges are inevitable. Whether your child faces mental roadblocks, struggles with confidence, or experiences an injury, knowing how to support them through these difficulties is essential. This guide will help you navigate everyday challenges, promote athlete wellness, and understand safety measures that ensure a positive and secure environment for your child.

Of course, long-term success in sports isn't just about overcoming struggles—it's about building strong foundations. A supportive parent-coach relationship, realistic expectations, and a respectful training environment are key to an athlete's development. For insight into fostering growth, please refer to *Supporting Young Athletes: A Parent Resource for Fostering Growth, Confidence, and Success in Gymnastics*.

# SECTION 1

## NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

Gymnastics is a demanding and complex sport that involves physical and emotional challenges. As a parent, your role is to encourage your child and help them navigate the difficulties they may encounter.

Whether they're facing training struggles, fear, or setbacks, it's essential to approach these moments with empathy, patience, and understanding. By fostering resilience, helping them cope with setbacks, and creating a supportive environment, you can help your child build a lasting connection to the sport, overcome obstacles, and grow both as an athlete and an individual.

### Responding to Struggles and Setbacks

When your child struggles, offer empathy and encouragement. Validate their feelings and help them reflect on what they can learn from the experience. Reinforce the idea that setbacks are a normal part of any journey and that focusing on perseverance and effort is important. Helping your child embrace the process rather than fear failure can build resilience and a stronger connection to the sport.

### Addressing Fear in Gymnastics

Fear is a natural part of gymnastics, which demands physical skill and mental resilience. Whether it's learning a new skill, competing under pressure, or recovering from a fall, many gymnasts will experience fear at some point. Managing fear effectively requires a team effort between parents, coaches, and sometimes external professionals.

### How Parents Can Help:

- 1. Respect the Coach's Decisions and Work Together** – Coaches have the experience to recognize, assess, and address fear in athletes. They may adjust training methods, modify routines, or implement drills designed to rebuild confidence safely. If you seek outside support, such as a sports psychologist, to help with fear or anxiety, it's important to communicate with the coach. Keeping them informed ensures a cohesive approach that supports your child's progress without conflicting strategies. Working with the coach—not independently of them—ensures your child receives consistent, reinforced guidance.
- 2. Recognize That Fear Happens** – Fear is not a sign of weakness or failure; it's a natural response to challenges. Normalizing fear for your child helps them feel less isolated and more empowered to work through it. Encouraging open conversations about fear can also help them develop healthy coping strategies.
- 3. Understand That Progress Is Not Linear** – Skill development in gymnastics is rarely a straight path forward. A gymnast may perform a skill confidently one day and struggle with it the next. Regression can be tied to physical growth, increased risk awareness, or past experiences. Patience, encouragement, and a supportive training environment are key to helping your child regain confidence at their own pace.

By respecting the coach's expertise and working collaboratively, you help create a supportive environment where your child feels safe to navigate fear, build confidence, and continue their gymnastics journey with resilience.

### **When to Seek Professional Help:**

If your child's fear seems overwhelming or persistent, it may indicate a deeper issue, such as anxiety. In these cases, consulting a pediatrician or therapist can provide valuable support. A professional can help your child develop strategies to manage their emotions and regain confidence.

Parents can help their children navigate fear and setbacks by fostering patience and understanding during these periods, reinforcing resilience and a positive mindset toward the sport.

### **What to Do If Your Child Wants to Quit**

If your child desires to quit, exploring their reasons without judgment is essential. Encourage open conversations about why they feel this way—whether it's burnout, stress, or a lack of interest. Sometimes, a break from the sport or a change in their approach to training might reignite their passion. If they decide that quitting is the best option for their well-being, support their decision while reinforcing the importance of making thoughtful choices. Remind them that their value extends far beyond sports achievements.

### **Avoiding Bribery and Punishments Based on Performance**

It's natural to want to motivate your child, but



using rewards or punishments based on their performance—such as bribing them for good results or taking away privileges when they struggle—can create unhealthy pressure. This approach can cause them to associate their self-worth with success, which may lead to anxiety and resentment toward the sport.

Instead, focus on effort, improvement, and enjoyment. Praise their hard work and resilience, regardless of the outcome. Remind them that learning from mistakes and facing challenges is part of their growth. Celebrate their dedication to gymnastics, emphasizing that success comes from consistent effort, not immediate results.

## SECTION 2

# ATHLETE WELLNESS & INJURY PREVENTION

Gymnastics is a physically demanding sport that requires strength, flexibility, and coordination, making injury prevention a top priority for both athletes and coaches.

Parents play a critical role in supporting their child's physical safety by staying informed about common injuries in gymnastics—such as sprains, strains, and fractures—and understanding the safety measures coaches implement to mitigate these risks, such as spotting techniques, proper skill progressions, and appropriate safety equipment.

Scheduling regular check-ups with a pediatrician is one of the most effective ways to ensure your child's long-term health and safety. These visits are essential for assessing physical development, addressing any concerns related to growth or overuse, and identifying risk factors for injury. If your child is returning to training after an injury, a doctor's note is critical to inform the coach about their readiness and any necessary restrictions to prevent re-injury.

Communication between parents, coaches, and medical professionals is key to managing an athlete's health and well-being. Parents of athletes with specific medical conditions—such as asthma, or a history of injuries, should work closely with coaches to ensure the training plan accommodates their needs.

Keeping coaches informed about changes in the athlete's health, such as new injuries or illnesses, allows for necessary adjustments to training routines, intensity levels, or recovery protocols.

When parents, coaches, and healthcare providers collaborate effectively, they create an environment where physical safety and injury prevention are prioritized. This teamwork allows young athletes to thrive in their gymnastics journey while minimizing the risk of harm.

### Emotional and Mental Well-being

In addition to physical safety, gymnastics presents emotional and mental pressures, particularly in competitive environments. Parents can support their child by fostering a positive and balanced atmosphere:

- **Encourage Resilience:** Help your child embrace challenges and learn from setbacks.
- **Maintain Realistic Expectations:** Balance ambition with the athlete's emotional and physical capacity.
- **Promote Open Conversations:** Create a safe space to discuss feelings, stresses, and mental health.

By addressing both physical and emotional well-being, parents can help their child build confidence, strength, and a lifelong love for gymnastics.

# SECTION 3

## ABUSE PREVENTION & PROTECTION POLICIES

### U.S. Center for SafeSport and USA Gymnastics Safe and Response Policy

[The U.S. Center for SafeSport](#) is an independent non-for-profit that is authorized by the U.S. Congress to help prevent emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and misconduct across the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic movement.

USA Gymnastics along with all National Governing Bodies are required both as a member of the Olympic movement, and in accordance of the [Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017](#) to develop, implement, enforce and ensure the adherence amongst USA Gymnastics members the strict policies set forth by the U.S. Center for SafeSport to protect and prevent athletes from abuse.

[USA Gymnastics Safety and Response Policy](#) defines our organization's framework to ensure the protection of our members. All USA Gymnastics Member Clubs and Individual members are bound by the U.S. Center for SafeSport and USA Gymnastics Safety and Response Policies.

A key component of the USA Gymnastics Safety and Response policy is the **one-on-one policy**, which states that no adult, such as a coach should ever be alone with an athlete. This policy is designed to maintain transparency, uphold accountability, and prevent situations that could lead to misconduct or misinterpretations of

behavior. It covers several critical areas, including:

- Bathrooms and locker rooms
- Time spent outside of the gym, such as private homes or off-site meetings
- Travel arrangements
- Gift-giving
- Electronic communication

The one-on-one policy acknowledges the inherent power dynamics in the coach-athlete relationship and aims to eliminate opportunities for inappropriate behavior. By prohibiting unsupervised one-on-one interactions and limiting engagement outside of the club setting, this policy fosters a safe environment where athletes can train with confidence and without concerns about personal safety.

Adhering to [USAG Safety and Response policies](#) not only demonstrates a club's commitment to athlete welfare but also reinforces a culture of **respect, integrity, and accountability**. It sends a clear message that the well-being of athletes is the highest priority, and that any violation of these policies will not be tolerated.

By understanding and supporting policies set forth by U.S. Center for SafeSport, USA Gymnastics and your Member Club, parents can play a crucial role in fostering a secure and positive environment for gymnasts, allowing them to focus on their training while knowing their well-being is protected.

[Click here](#) to review the entire USA Gymnastics Safety and Response Policy.

## Reporting Misconduct

All USA Gymnastics Member Clubs and Individual members are bound by U.S. Center for SafeSport and USA Gymnastics Safety and Response Policies and are required to report any suspicions or allegations of misconduct promptly, ensuring swift and thorough action is taken to maintain a supportive and safe environment for all members.

If you, as a parent, witness or are aware of bullying, harassment, sexual or physical abuse, or any form of misconduct, it's crucial that you take immediate action. If you suspect sexual or physical abuse has occurred the first step is to contact local law enforcement.

[Click here](#) for specific reporting procedures to the

U.S. Center for SafeSport and USA Gymnastics.

In addition to making required reports, parents should also work with their child's club to address concerns so the club can take immediate action when appropriate. Every club should have clear procedures for handling misconduct or policy violations. Familiarizing yourself with these procedures and asking questions about the reporting process helps ensure accountability and responsiveness at every level.

By fostering a culture of transparency and accountability, and utilizing the proper channels to report misconduct, everyone can contribute to creating a safer and more supportive environment for young athletes.

## Conclusion

Supporting your child's gymnastics journey means more than celebrating successes—it also involves guiding them through challenges and prioritizing their well-being. By recognizing and addressing struggles, promoting both mental and physical wellness, and understanding key safety measures, you help ensure they have a positive, healthy experience in the sport.

No athlete's path is without obstacles, but with the right support system—including coaches, gym staff, and you as their parent—your child can develop resilience, confidence, and a lifelong love for gymnastics. If you're looking for ways to further strengthen your athlete's foundation and build a strong partnership with their coach, refer to *Guide 1: Supporting Your Athlete's Growth*.

## Additional Resources

### Abuse Prevention Policies and Resources:

- [USA Gymnastics Safe and Response](#)
- [U.S. Center for SafeSport](#)
- [Make a Report](#)
- [USA Gymnastics Permanently Ineligible & Ineligible Members and Participants](#)
- [USA Gymnastics Suspended & Restricted Persons](#)
- [U.S. Center for SafeSport Centralized Disciplinary Database](#)
- [U.S. Center for SafeSport Parent and Guardian's Handbook for Safer Sport](#)
- [U.S. Center for SafeSport Training Catalog](#)
- [Parent Guide to Cyberbullying](#)

### Educational Resources

- [Parent and Coach Self-Assessment](#)
- [Parents: Supporting Socioemotional Development of Your Athlete During Meet Season](#)
- [Positive Coaching Alliance Development Zone Parent Resources](#)
- [Health and Wellness Resources](#)

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