

USL Best Practices for Coach to Player Socialization

Club members that hold a position of authority must be aware that they have tremendous influence and power over their players. By having such influence, it inherently creates a power imbalance. A coach's goal should be to create a judgment free environment where expectations external to the game of soccer do not exist. It is imperative that coaches set clear socialization boundaries with their players.

Each player should expect to be treated with the utmost respect, and his or her welfare should be considered in decisions by the club at all times. A player should respect the boundaries set forth by this document and others within the team ecosystem. A healthy coach – player relationship is at the core of all athletic endeavors. In order to maintain a healthy, positive, respectful external relationship between a coach and the player, the following guidelines have been established by the USL as best practices for socialization.

Guidelines for Alcohol Consumption

The importance of drinking responsibly helps to mitigate risk management. The impaired judgment that comes from alcohol consumption can loosen inhibitions and result in inappropriate behavior.

Coaches and players shall observe all laws regarding use and/or possession of alcohol and tobacco while at any league, club, team event.

Remember moderation is the key. Alcohol consumption at any club or team function to include sporting venues, team travel and team functions should not get to an intoxicated or impaired level.

Guidelines for Interpersonal Interactions

Team building away from the pitch is an important component of team cohesion. Under these circumstances it is important for no one-on-one interactions between any coach and any player to happen outside of the appropriate team settings.

Meeting one-on-one is strickled prohibited outside of club venues and team events.

No Player/coach should engage in any conduct that could be reasonably construed as romantic or sexual, including, but not limited to verbal statements, physical interactions, and social media.

Pursuing or maintaining a romantic relationship where a power imbalance exists is strictly prohibited.

Definitions

A. **“Position of Authority”** applies to the term “coach” and includes Team head coaches and assistant coaches. A Head Coach has the responsibility and authority to determine, among other things, player recruitment, selection, evaluation, and retention; playing time for individual players; substitutions; player positions; offensive and defensive strategy and tactics; player development; practice formats and goals; physical and mental fitness and conditioning of players; determining benching, trades and waivers for players; Team administration, travel, and logistics for players and related employees; and selection, supervision, and evaluation of assistant coaches, technical staff and volunteers. Assistant Coaches, position coaches and other ancillary staff, i.e., athletic trainers, nutritionist, strength & conditioning, will be considered positions of authority as it pertains to socialization best practices.

B. **“Power Imbalance”** means that one person has supervisory, evaluative, financial or other authority over another, based on the totality of the circumstances, including but not limited to: the nature and extent of the supervisory, evaluative, financial or other authority over the person; the actual relationship between the parties; the parties’ respective roles; the nature and duration of the relationship; and the age of the parties involved.