

Vergennes Swim Team

Safe Sport Policies

General Considerations:

VST board members, coaches, swimmers and parents/guardians all share responsibility for ensuring the safety of the swimmers on our team. Each of us is empowered to question our processes and report anything that has the potential to endanger a swimmer. The VST board and our coaches support an open, transparent culture where we can speak openly and often about the safety of our swimmers. Our team will follow these general guidelines designed to keep everyone safe and supported in their swimming endeavors:

1. Whenever a good-faith report of possible misconduct is made, the board will immediately investigate the issue, take appropriate action to keep our swimmers safe and ensure that no retaliation occurs for the person making the report.
2. All swimming practices will be open to observation by parents.
3. An open and observable environment should be maintained for all interactions between adults and swimmers. Private or one-on-one situations should be avoided unless they are open and observable. Common sense should be used to move a meeting to an open and observable location if the meeting inadvertently begins in private.
4. Coaches should not invite a swimmer to their home without the permission of the athlete's parents or legal guardian.
5. Communications between adults and swimmers should not include any topic or language that is sexual or inappropriate in nature.
6. Adults should respect the privacy of swimmers in situations such as changing of clothes, showering, etc. Adults should protect their own privacy in similar situations.
7. Relationships of a peer-to-peer nature with any swimmers should be avoided. For example, coaches should avoid sharing their own personal problems with athletes.
8. Coaches and other adults should avoid horseplay and roughhousing with swimmers.
9. When a coach touches an athlete as part of instruction, the coach should do so in direct view of others and inform the swimmer of what he/she is doing prior to the initial contact. Touching swimmers should be within the boundaries of what is considered normal instruction.
10. Appropriate interactions between adults and swimmers include high fives, fist bumps, side-to-side hugs and handshakes.
11. Coaches should not initiate contact with or accept supervisory responsibility for swimmers outside VST programs and activities without parent/guardian permission.
12. VST will maintain a culture where no single person attains a level of authority or control that causes others to be hesitant to question that person's behavior.
13. We will report all suspected cases of abuse or neglect of children to the Vermont Department of Children and Families and/or law enforcement and fully cooperate with any investigations that arise from such reports.

Rest Room and Locker Room Monitoring Policy:

Swimmers are expected to change into or out of their swimsuits either at home or inside a locker room, rest room or private changing area. Deck changes, regardless of the swimmer's age, are not allowed.

If a swimmer must leave the deck to use the rest room during practice, coaches will make a reasonable effort to ensure that the swimmer returns in a timely manner. Coaches are not responsible for monitoring swimmers in these areas during a competition.

Occasionally, a locker room, rest room or changing room will need to be monitored to check in on swimmers or address behavioral issues in these rooms. When monitoring is necessary, it must be done by a pair of adults of the same gender as the one assigned to that room. This policy does not prohibit a parent/guardian from entering a locker room, rest room or changing room for the sole purpose of helping their own child.

Any device capable of recording video, pictures or audio (including cell phones) must not be used while inside a locker room, rest room or changing area. If the owner of the device needs to use the device, he or she should leave the room and return to a public space before using the device. This policy extends to all occupants inside a locker room, rest room or changing area.

Photography and Videography Policy

The Vergennes Swim Team will not use images or recordings of a swimmer in our electronic or printed materials, social media posts or website if the swimmer or their parents request to be excluded from such uses.

Many of our events take place at public venues where the Vergennes Swim Team cannot reasonably or legally limit photography. While we cannot limit all photography, we will diligently protect the privacy and well-being of our swimmers by supporting policies that prohibit inappropriate photography and videography at our practices or events.

All photography and videography at our events shall be designed to celebrate our team and athletes in a sporting context, therefore;

- No photography or videography will be allowed from any location behind the blocks;
- Swimmers may not be photographed or recorded while climbing out of the pool or in any vulnerable position that would not represent the swimmer in an appropriate sporting context;
- Photography of a swimmer with a torn or displaced suit is prohibited as is any image that could be construed as sexualizing or which violates the swimmer's privacy or harms the swimmer's well-being.

If any person violates this policy, VST coaches or board members will take appropriate action including: reminding people of our policy, asking them to leave a venue or calling law enforcement for serious violations.

Bullying

Bullying is a severe or repeated communication or physical act or gesture, directed at another person that has the effect of:

- a. causing physical or emotional harm to the other person or their property;
- b. placing the other person in reasonable fear of harm to himself/herself or of damage to his/her property;
- c. creating a hostile environment for the other person at any VST activity;
- d. infringing on the rights of the other swimmer at any VST activity; or
- e. materially and substantially disrupting the training process or the orderly operation of any VST practices, workouts and other team events.

Whenever a board member, coach, swimmer or other individual observes or learns that bullying may be happening, the details should be reported to a responsible coach/adult who will immediately stop the incident, protect the safety of the people involved and report the incident to the VST board.

The VST board will promptly investigate the incident and determine an appropriate course of action. The VST board will respond in a way that:

- Supports athletes who were bullied or witnessed the bullying
- Addresses the behavior of the person who initiated the bullying behavior
- Ensures that the bullying does not continue through education, additional monitoring or by removing the person who initiated the bullying from the team.

Travel Policy

Parents and Guardians are responsible for arranging travel to and from team events, practices and swim meets.

Occasionally, VST coaches may be called upon to supervise and/or drive swimmers to and from events planned by our team. When such travel is necessary, the VST board will review and approve this travel only if the following criteria are met:

- At least two coaches/adults must be present in a vehicle transporting swimmers
- All activities planned by VST shall be designed to ensure that an adult is never alone with a swimmer in a private setting (unless the adult is the parent or guardian of the swimmer).
- In a group setting, it is appropriate for one adult to supervise the group only if the event is at a public space open to observation by other adults.
- Ideally the gender of the coaches/adults supervising swimmers should match the gender mix of the swimmers (for example, female swimmers can be supervised by two female coaches, but if male swimmers are also present, ideally one of the coaches will be male).
- Whenever a hotel stay is necessary, swimmers will be matched in rooms with other swimmers of the same gender and approximate age. Under certain circumstances, an

exception to this rule may be allowed with the approval of the VST Board and the parents of swimmers affected by the exception.

- If it is necessary to perform room checks during an overnight stay, the checks shall be conducted by two coaches/adults.
- Parent or guardian permission must be obtained for each swimmer before they participate in travel with the team.
- Coaches/adults shall have the authority to set reasonable curfews and other rules during the trip.
- All swimmers and coaches/adults will represent our team in a courteous and professional manner while traveling.

Electronic Communications

VST board members and coaches regularly use electronic communications to relay important team information to swimmers and their families or to answer questions from swimmers and their families. These messages include email, text messages and possibly messages through social media.

With respect to electronic communications, a simple test that can be used in most cases is whether the electronic communication with swimmers is **Transparent, Accessible and Professional**.

Transparent: All electronic communication between coaches and athletes should be transparent. Communication should not only be clear and direct, but also free of hidden meanings, innuendo and expectations.

Accessible: All electronic communication between coaches and athletes should be considered a matter of record and part of the team's records. Whenever possible, we will include another coach or parent in the communication or use an email address that is accessible to other coaches or board members so that there is no question regarding accessibility.

Professional: All electronic communication between a coach and an athlete should be conducted professionally as a representative of the team. This includes word choices, tone, grammar, and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a staff member.

If the communication meets all three of the **T.A.P.** criteria, then it is likely the method of communication with swimmers is appropriate.

Whenever VST board members or coaches communicate with swimmers and their families, the following policies will be followed:

- All communications will be clear and directly related to team business.
- Any communication with an athlete should not contain or relate to any of the following:
 - encouraging drug or alcohol use;
 - sexually oriented conversation; sexually explicit language; sexual activity

- the adult's personal life, social activities, relationship or family issues, or personal problems; and
- inappropriate or sexually explicit pictures or videos
- Athletes and coaches may communicate between the hours of 7am and 9pm. Group messages to the team may be made outside these hours (for example, when sending meet results in the evening). Whenever possible, electronic communication between a coach/board member and a swimmer should be done using a team email account or include another adult as a recipient of the message.

Relationships between adults and swimmers

Coaches and swimmers often form strong and lifelong bonds that can have a tremendous impact on the growth and personal development of the swimmer. When youth feel connected to adults in their community, they often make better choices, succeed in academics and feel supported during difficult times in their lives. We want to encourage coaches to be mentors and positive role models for our swimmers, but these relationships must always:

- Exist in an appropriate context
- Comply with our athlete safety policies
- Be transparent and open to observation by other adults
- Serve the needs of the swimmer, not the coach

Therefore, any dating, romantic or sexual relationship or contact between VST board members or coaches and swimmers is strictly prohibited and grounds for immediate dismissal from the board, termination of employment and possible legal action.

We acknowledge that our coaching staff are sometimes close in age to our older swimmers and that, in a different context, such relationships would be normal for both individuals. However, in a coaching context, these relationships are not acceptable. Coaches (even when close in age to swimmers) are in a position of authority and responsibility for their swimmers and must maintain professional boundaries despite their age.