



Guidance for Soccer Clubs, Coaches and Organizers of Youth Training Sessions

Protecting Young Players: Preventing Immigration-Related Harassment in U.S. Soccer Environments



Produced by the Human Rights Soccer Alliance with the support of



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Introduction

Soccer, the world’s most played game, is a global language that unites individuals across continents, cultures, and backgrounds. Wherever it is played soccer holds a unique power to transcend borders, help make connections and bring about a sense of belonging. This spirit of unity brings us together, side by side, regardless of our background.

Every soccer player embarks on a journey. From the first time a ball is kicked on the street, to the moment a player steps onto a pitch, soccer is not just about the game; it is about people. It is about building relationships with teammates, coaches, and mentors, who often come from diverse backgrounds, including immigrant and refugee communities. These relationships form the backbone of the sport, helping understanding and compassion across cultures.

But the journey of every player or coach is not without its challenges. For those from immigrant or mixed-status families, the sport should be a sanctuary - an environment where they are free to grow and thrive. Yet, in recent times, the impact of heightened immigration enforcement has cast a shadow over this safe space. Families, particularly those without legal documentation, live in constant fear that their children’s pursuit of the game they love could be interrupted by the presence of immigration enforcement or discriminatory actions.

It is with this concern in mind that we offer this guidance - designed to help safeguard the rights of young players and to protect their emotional and psychological well-being. The ethos behind this document is simple: soccer should be a place where every child, regardless of immigration status, can feel safe and supported. It is an invitation for soccer organizations, clubs, and coaches to create environments of inclusion and belonging, reinforcing the values that have long been at the heart of our sport.



It is our collective responsibility to create a future where every player, from the youngest to the oldest, can step onto the field with confidence, knowing they are respected, valued, and protected.

As you read this document, we encourage you to reflect on the power of soccer to shape lives, fulfill dreams and build communities. Let’s continue to ensure that the playing field remains a space where all players can share in the joy, pride, and opportunity that come with being part of this great sport. It is our collective responsibility to create a future where every player, from the youngest to the oldest, can step onto the field with confidence, knowing they are respected, valued, and protected.

Let’s make sure we uphold the promise within our sport for every child who dreams of playing the game they love.



Background

Anti-immigrant rhetoric and messaging is creating fear among communities across the United States, impacting people in multiple areas of life. In an environment of heightened immigration enforcement, soccer clubs and coaching organizations across the United States are affected. Whether your organization is delivering soccer in community settings, in schools or through coaching programs we should all understand what we can do and act to reassure and, as far as possible, protect players at all levels and employees.

This guidance applies specifically to youth level players, coaches and other participants at your club involved in coaching sessions, matches and in their daily interactions around the club. The aim must be to ensure that players and others are protected and can participate in training and matches without fear. From elite level academies to local pay-to-play teams, to school-led activities, the ethos of our sport and those involved in leading it at all levels, should be that the playing field must remain a space of safety, inclusion, and belonging for all young people.



Ensuring the right to play should not be seen as a political provocation of any kind; it is a practical and ethical necessity in safeguarding the wellbeing of our young people playing with us.

OUR GUIDANCE

Principles of action

Create safe spaces

Know your responsibility

Understand the basic rights

Reassure and protect young people

Uphold their legal rights



These guidelines offer national-level advice for organizing secure soccer environments, responding appropriately to the presence of immigration enforcement or law enforcement officers, and protecting the rights of youth aged 12 to 21. While this guidance addresses all youth players, it gives special attention to the risks faced by non-citizens and those in mixed-status households.

We recognize that all legal issues are fact-specific. This guidance, thus, does not constitute legal advice. If you need legal advice regarding a particular situation, please seek legal counsel immediately.



1

CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR SOCCER SESSIONS

Establishing safe environments for soccer requires practical planning and a community-minded approach. The safest way to avoid contact with external agencies is to hold coaching sessions in a private space. But if, like most soccer organizations, you are using a public space, do your best to mark out protected spaces as clearly as possible and be vigilant.

Sessions should be held in community-trusted locations, such as public schools, community parks, or registered training facilities. Clubs should visibly delineate these locations as organized and protected spaces, making clear that they are youth-serving environments. For



instance, you might choose to install signs stating "Private Area - For Youth Sports Only" around the perimeter of the area where the training or game is taking place.

It is also important to install signage that identifies other non-public areas - such as storage rooms, changing areas, or internal meeting spaces - as off-limits to unauthorized visitors. Field perimeters should be clearly marked, and team staff should be positioned to monitor sideline access. If training occurs in open spaces without fences, coaches and club staff should reinforce existing protocols to question any unknown adult attempting to approach players.

Signage may also serve as a deterrent to unauthorized questioning or interference. Posters or placards indicating that the field is a protected space, with private activities taking place, and that no unauthorized questioning will be tolerated, can create both a psychological and physical boundary.

2

THE ROLE OF COACHES AND COACHING ORGANIZATIONS

Coaches are the frontline protectors of youth in soccer. It is crucial that every coach, assistant, and volunteer is trained in how to respond to the presence of immigration enforcement or law enforcement officials.

Coaches should never answer questions about a player's background or immigration status. They must also refrain from making legal judgments themselves - such as assessing whether a document presented by an officer is valid - and instead should immediately escalate the matter to a senior official, such as a Club Director or Managing Director.



The first responsibility of a coach or volunteer is to remain calm, respectful, and protective of the youth in their care.

In addition, coaches should not advise players to lie, flee, or conceal themselves, and coaches should not physically interpose themselves between players and immigration authorities. Any such action may carry legal consequences, including allegations of obstruction or of harboring individuals.

The most effective response is to request proper documentation - a signed judicial warrant is a requirement for entry to private spaces. You are entitled to refuse access to non-public spaces without such documentation. You should ensure that any interaction with a player is conducted in the presence of a legal guardian or representative.

Coaching organizations should take a proactive approach to staff training. This includes role-play drills simulating enforcement encounters, distribution of 'Know Your Rights' materials to families and players, and ensuring each coaching session or match has a clear point of contact in case of emergency.



3

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CLUBS AND LEAGUES

The responsibility to uphold safe environments must not fall solely on individual coaches. Clubs, program and league leaders must implement and enforce comprehensive protocols across all affiliated clubs. This includes mandating policies for field access control, legal response readiness, and enforcement de-escalation.

Leagues should provide templates for protocols, contact lists for immigration legal services, and up-to-date information about players' rights under current federal and state laws. They should also establish a direct line of support for clubs that encounter enforcement activity.

In moments of tension, leadership also has a symbolic role. Publicly affirming the rights and dignity of young people, regardless of immigration status, can help shift public narratives and reduce fear. By doing so, leagues can position themselves as defenders of youth development and stewards of inclusive sport.



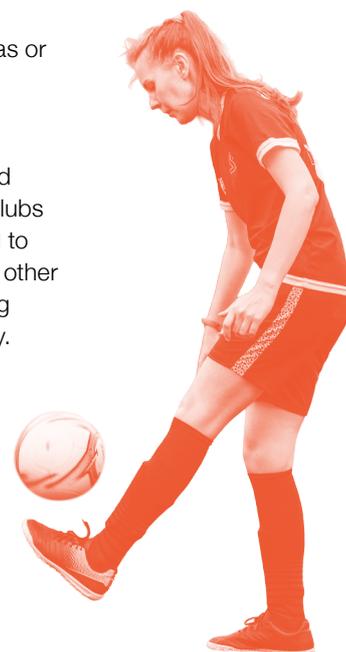
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UNDERSTAND AND UPHOLD YOUNG ATHLETES' RIGHTS

All young people in the United States, regardless of immigration status, are protected by constitutional rights. These include the right to due process, the right to equal protection under the law, and the right to remain silent in the face of questioning. These protections apply whether a young person is at home, in school, or on the soccer field.

No one is required to show identification unless under lawful detention with reasonable suspicion. If a warrant is presented, staff must check whether it is signed by a judge, whether it is specific in scope (e.g., limited to certain areas or documents), and whether it is still valid.

Clubs should never voluntarily provide documents or personal information about players unless a valid subpoena is presented and reviewed by legal counsel. Even then, clubs must assess whether they are legally bound to comply and whether doing so would violate other protective laws - particularly those governing youth data and refugee status confidentiality.



If approached by law enforcement or immigration agents, youth and staff alike may decline to answer questions unless a lawyer is present.

5

HOW TO RESPOND TO ON-SITE ENCOUNTERS WITH IMMIGRATION OR LAW ENFORCEMENT

If immigration or law enforcement agents arrive at a practice, match, or other event, coaches and staff must act with clear, unified purpose.

They should:

Remain calm and respectful

Ask to see identification, badge numbers, and a warrant

Decline access to non-public areas without appropriate documentation

Request that any questioning of minors be delayed until a guardian is present

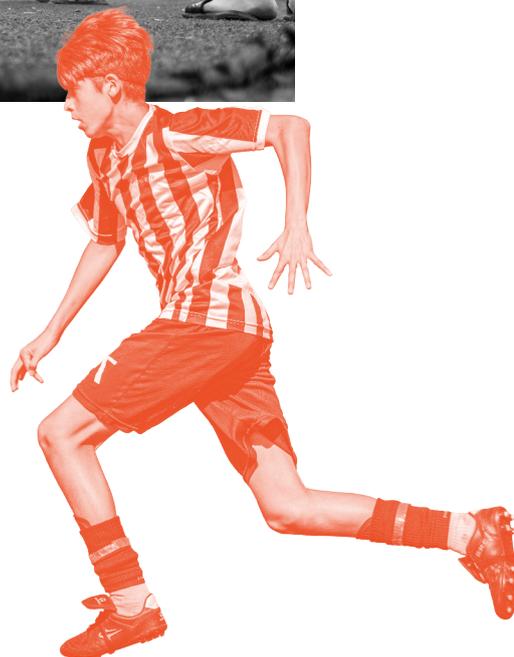
Contact the designated club official or legal contact immediately

Record the encounter: noting names, times, and any documents presented



Staff should never obstruct officers but also never facilitate contact between immigration agents and players without the protections of due process. They may ask officers to wait in public areas while legal review occurs. If permitted by law, staff may observe any arrests or detentions from a respectful distance, film and take note of where players are taken.

All such encounters must be documented in detail, and players' families must be notified immediately.



6

NAVIGATING VEHICLE STOPS

Youth teams often travel by bus or car, creating additional exposure to enforcement risks.

When transporting players, staff should carry a letter from the club stating the destination, purpose, and nature of the trip. They should never volunteer information about players' immigration status, but must remain polite and cooperative.

Players should be pre-briefed on their rights: to remain silent, to not consent to searches, and to request a lawyer. Non-citizens with valid status should carry their documents, but may still decline to answer questions outside of the specific legal interaction.

If stopped, staff should:

Provide their own ID and answer general questions (e.g., name, destination)

Decline consent for any vehicle or bag search unless a warrant or probable cause is provided

Refrain from making statements about any player

Record badge numbers and ask the reason for the stop

Ask: "Am I free to go?" and document any denial of that request

Contact their supervisor immediately after the stop

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WHAT TO DO IF A PLAYER IS DETAINED

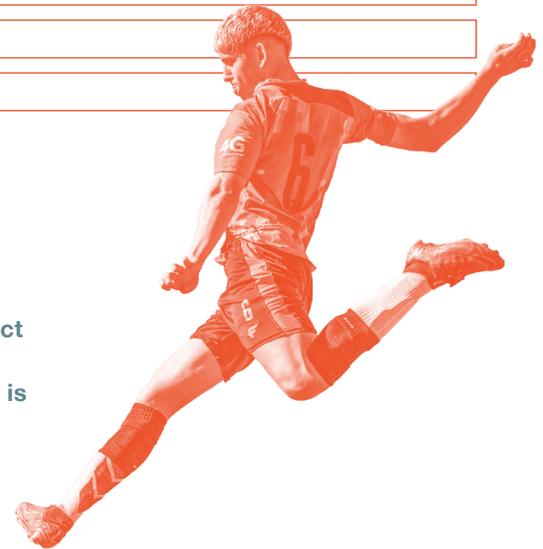
If a young player is taken into custody, the first obligation of staff is to protect their welfare and legal rights. Staff must contact the player's parent or guardian immediately, as well as the club's legal representative. If the youth is a non-citizen, the appropriate consulate should also be contacted.

Staff should request the name of the officer, location of detention, and the stated reason. While they may not interfere with the detention, they should insist on transparency and accountability. The player's family may then initiate a legal response, which the club may assist through connections to trusted immigration attorneys.



It is your primary duty to uphold the protection of your young participants

It is vital to also attend to the emotional and psychological needs of the player and their peers. Clubs should offer support from mental health professionals or social workers, ensuring that fear does not become embedded in players' experiences of sport.





PUBLIC LEADERSHIP AND THE ROLE OF CLUBS

Soccer organizations must not shy away from public leadership. Declaring your facilities a safe space, affirming a zero-tolerance policy for discriminatory enforcement, and standing with vulnerable players are actions that send powerful messages to families, communities, and authorities alike.

Public statements should be unambiguous: welcoming all youth, affirming their rights, and pledging to protect their dignity on and off the field. This is not a provocation against immigration authorities—it is a reaffirmation of American values of equality, safety, and due process.

Protecting young players is not a political act. It is the minimum standard of care owed to those who entrust us with their dreams.