

# MEDICAL

## **I forgot to ask the doctor for written medical orders. Can I just tell the coach what the doctor said?**

For the safety of your child, we highly recommend that you obtain written medical orders. For risk management reasons, coaches and club owners should not accept verbal instructions from the parent as official physician orders. Often parents misunderstand the physician's orders or miss key parts of their instructions. Until written orders are obtained, coaches should always follow the most restrictive interpretation of what the parent tells them.

## **It doesn't seem like the coach is following the doctor's orders. What should I do?**

Start by talking to the coach or club owner (follow the club's policy for communication) to see if their interpretation of the orders is different than yours and discuss a plan for going forward. If you still disagree with the coach's interpretation, ask the physician or other medical professional caring for your child to provide more detailed instructions for the coach. If you provide a written release for the medical professional to speak to the coach about your child, this can also be helpful to clarify any orders.

## **I don't understand the medical orders. What should I do?**

Always use the most conservative interpretation of the medical orders until you can get clarification. Write down your questions and ask the athlete's parent to follow up with the medical professional requesting written answers to your questions.

## **What should I do if I disagree with the doctor's restrictions?**

Ask the athlete's parents to provide permission to speak with the medical professional. Ask the medical professional to explain why the restrictions are in place and ask any questions that you have. If the medical professional agrees to loosen or change some restrictions, ask for those changes in writing and don't change the restrictions until you get them in writing. Never ask the athlete to do anything that the medical professional has not approved.

## **Injury Protocol**

### **How do I know if I should stop practice for an athlete or ask that the parent take their child to see a physician?**

Signs and symptoms that generally indicate that practice should be stopped for the day include, but are not limited to:

- Difficulty bearing weight/limping
- Moderate to severe pain (pain rating of 5 or higher on a scale of 1-10 is a good rule of thumb)
- Numbness or tingling
- Deformity of a body part indicating a likely joint dislocation or fracture
- Bleeding that doesn't stop within a few minutes
- Deep or large cut
- Swelling
- Large area of bruising
- Loss of motion in a joint (can't fully bend or straighten the joint)
- Change in level of consciousness (confusion, disorientation, irritability, irrational behavior, fainting, unresponsive)
- Vomiting
- Fever (Temp > 100.4)
- Dizziness, light-headedness
- Chest pain, shortness of breath

A suspected concussion event would also be a reason to stop a gymnast from practicing. Please refer to USA Gymnastics [Sports Concussion Guidelines](#) for more information regarding concussions.

Use your best judgement. Coaches should always err on the side of athlete safety. When in doubt, sit them out. Our goal is to keep athletes safe first and foremost.

Parents should be notified immediately if any of these things occur.

### **I saw an athlete hit their head when they fell but I'm not sure if they have a concussion. What should I do?**

Unless you are a qualified medical professional who can perform a full "sideline" concussion assessment, you should always err on the side of caution and immediately stop practice for any athlete who is suspected of having a concussion. The athlete's parent should be notified immediately, and the athlete should be monitored until a parent arrives.

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**I've been coaching a long time and know a lot about gymnastics injuries and how to progress an athlete back from an injury. Do I need to rely on written medical orders?**

Every injury and every child are different and best practices in medicine are constantly changing with the research. What was recommended 5 years ago may now be known to be harmful. As a coach, you **MUST** rely on written medical orders to safely progress an athlete back from injury until the physician clears them for full participation. Once they have been cleared, your experience is key in progressing them back slowly and safely.

It is against Safe Sport policy for a coach to ignore written orders from a physician or other medical practitioner.

**An athlete on my team always seems to be "injured" and I'm pretty sure they're faking it. How should this be handled?**

Regardless of what you suspect, you should **ALWAYS** honor the athlete's voice and never assume they are faking it. Children's brains (and even adult brains) often translate emotional distress into physical pain as physical pain is something that even infants understand whereas children and teens often don't have the vocabulary to express emotional distress. In other words, the pain may be **REAL** to them, despite the lack of any physical injury.

An athlete may also report that they are injured if they are afraid of a skill or mentally or physically exhausted and don't feel they can safely continue. Always meet the athlete where they are in that moment and do not force or cajole them into doing something they don't want to do. No amount of pressure from a coach will make an athlete feel more supported or more connected to their coach. Providing an athlete support for where they are in that moment of time is the main goal.

Any injury that lasts more than 1-2 weeks or seems to come and go repeatedly should be assessed by a medical professional. If a medical professional does not feel that there is a physical injury, counseling with a mental health professional may help the athlete understand their feelings and help them be able to find words to express what they are feeling which can make physical pain that is a result of emotional distress or trauma go away.

**What is my role as a coach when an athlete is injured and can't train like the rest of the team?**

Your biggest job during this time is to help the athlete continue to feel like a part of the team and not feel more isolated than they already feel due to being injured. If the athlete is able to participate in some training, make sure they do as much as they can with the rest of their team. Provide the athlete with a small amount of beneficial conditioning that is within doctor's orders (or let them do their PT exercises) and then let the athlete come back to join their team and help out in any way they can. This is a great opportunity as a coach to connect further with the athlete and teach the injured athlete how to help coach or "judge". Maybe the athlete can help move mats or set equipment with supervision.

If the athlete cannot be at practice at all, make sure to maintain communication with them until they can return. Have the team send cards or videos, schedule a 5 minute team video chat once a week just to say hi and let the athlete know you miss them, make sure they are included in team emails or ask teammates to go check in on them regularly either in person or virtually, When a gymnast loses their "team", their sport and often their social circle due to an injury, it is very isolating and keeping those connections is crucial for the athlete's mental health.

## Massages

**I'm a coach and a licensed massage therapist, can I offer massages in the gym to athletes?**

As a coach, you are in a position of power and authority over your athlete. As such, the athlete may not be willing to tell you when care you are providing is uncomfortable or painful. As a licensed healthcare provider, this is never a position that you want to be in. It is against Safe Sport policy for a coach to offer massage services to their athletes either in or outside of the gym.