



St. Joseph Defenders Homeschool Sports Handbook

St Joseph Defenders Mission Statement: The mission of the Defenders program is to provide homeschooled students in their Junior High and High School years a place to make connections with their peers, be physically active, and learn about teamwork and healthy competition within a Christian framework.

Handbook Goals: The purpose of this handbook is to inform families of the policies and expectation for participation in our program. Our Athletic Director and Coaches are volunteers. Participation is a privilege, not a right. It is the expectation that athletes and their parents are familiar with and in acceptance of the policies herein. Questions or concerns regarding any of these policies should be brought up *before* registering your athlete.

The purposes of these policies fall into one or more of the following categories:

- ♦ **Setting a good example & maintaining a positive reputation.** We desire to be friendly guests who our opponents look forward to competing with and who officials and referees enjoy working for.
- ♦ **Creating a safe & comfortable environment for our athletes and families.** A season of sports means a lot of time spent together in gyms, traveling, at meals, and more. We desire that all of these times would be edifying and beneficial for all involved, and clear guidelines will give that the best chance of happening.
- ♦ **Keeping things organized.** An enormous amount of work from a lot of people goes into every season of sports. Structured leadership, organized communication and an atmosphere of eager volunteerism makes this work much easier and greatly benefits our athletes.

Registration and basic info can be found at StJosephDefenders.com

If you have questions, contact our **Athletic Director, Joshua Castor:**

castor7229@gmail.com

Homeschool Definition & Eligibility:

There can be slight differences between sports in how “homeschool athlete” is defined. Parents must be able to clearly explain what % of their athlete’s education is home-schooled (at home or via a co-op) and what % is not homeschool (via a private or public school). In general, videos/online lessons that are chosen freely by the parents is considered homeschool education. Videos/online lessons via a “Learn from Home” program through a private or public school is generally not considered homeschooling. There may be instances where a private-school student qualifies based on their sport not being offered at their school. For clarity, please reach out to a coach or AD.

Practice Expectations:

- ♦ Practice is essential for improvement and growth as a player and as a team. We recognize and respect that many families choose to homeschool to preserve freedom for their schedule, but families must be willing to get players to practice consistently and on time.
- ♦ Players or parents should inform coaches as soon as possible if they will be absent from practices.
- ♦ Athletes must wear appropriate attire and footwear for their sport at practice.
- ♦ Everyone at practice must honor the requests and rules of the practice facility.
- ♦ Parents are always welcome (but not required) at practice. Friends/guests of the athlete are not. Friends/cousins/etc may not participate in practice — please do not ask.
- ♦ Parents who desire to assist in practice (regularly or on occasion) should communicate with coaches or AD in advance, not at the practice itself. Please be gracious if the coach feels they have enough help and are not in need of you.
- ♦ Athletes are expected to be on time and give their best effort in practice. Paying attention, working hard and asking good questions will give players the best opportunity to learn and get better.

Boy/Girl Interactions:

St. Joseph Defenders Homeschool Sports is not a forum for dating. Therefore, we ask that in all athletic activities (games, practices, fellowship events, tournament travel, etc), the behavior between athletes (whether or not they are dating anyone) be above reproach. The board reserves the right to make the determination of what interaction is not considered satisfactory. As a general rule, public displays of affection such as hand-holding, lap-sitting, cuddling, kissing, etc are not beneficial or necessary at athletic activities. Brief hugs are a normal and acceptable way for friends of any kind to greet each other, but please be cautious and respectful of personal boundaries. We respect that each family approaches this subject and territory differently, and thus we err on the side of caution and keeping everyone most comfortable.

Male and Female Athletes:

We believe God created man, both male and female, in His image, with each person immutably assigned by God to be either male or female from birth. As such, student-athletes are required to play with the team based on their sex at birth. Girls may only compete with girls and boys may only compete with boys based on these markers. Further, one criterion for eligibility is that a student must be willing to submit to God’s standards for gender and sexuality set out in scripture.

Coaches:

- ◆ Coaches for the St. Joseph Defenders are admirable adults of high character who love the sport they coach and desire to come alongside young athletes to help them grow to be kind, hard-working, fair, respectful and God-honoring adults.
- ◆ Coaches for the St. Joseph Defenders care about developing people more than developing athletes or winning games. They will model high character in words and actions.
- ◆ Coaches will not “yell at” or insult athletes. Coaches will raise their voice to be heard and will at times speak passionately. Coaches will never seek to embarrass athletes.
- ◆ Correction, constructive criticism and teaching are essential parts of coaching. Correction will at times happen in front of the team (i.e. “no, you went the wrong way around the screen”). Players can expect to be “singled out” for not paying attention, talking while a coach is talking, etc. Again, the purpose here is not embarrassment but development of the whole person.
- ◆ Coaches will communicate, individually and to the team, what can be done to increase the *possibility* of playing more in games.
- ◆ Coaches will never promise exactly how much a player will play. Parents with complaints or questions about playing time, practice style or game tactics should make an appointment to discuss with the coach. Do not approach them with these issues immediately after games. Please consider and compose your thoughts so everyone involved can understand.

Expectations of Athletes:

- ◆ Athletes will be deferential to parent's expectations and demonstrate a positive cooperative spirit with the program, leadership, coaches, and officials.
- ◆ Athletes will be courteous and respectful to parents, coaches, opponents, fans, and officials. Athletes should display appreciation for good performance/play regardless of the team. Athletes need to demonstrate good self-control and look to set a Christian example "in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity." [I Tim 4:12]
- ◆ Athletes will abide by coaching decisions on playing time and competitive strategy.
- ◆ Athletes agree with and will try to be consistent with Ephesians 5:3-4 whereby there is the admonition to not even have a hint of sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking which are all out of place and improper for God's holy people. Detrimental behavior will have potential consequences up to dismissal. On the flip side, godliness is encouraged, defending the Gospel of Christ is to be applauded, and loving God and others is something to be commended.
- ◆ Athletes should not wear jewelry during practices or games. Pre-existing tattoos must be covered, and Athletes may not get new tattoos at any point during the season of their sport.
- ◆ Practice clothing should not reveal undergarments or midriff. Shirts and shorts/sweatpants must always be worn. Sleeveless shirts should not be cut/designed to be lower down the side of the torso than a sports jersey.
- ◆ Boys' hair should not be more than 6" in length. Boys and girls should not dye their hair unnatural colors. Both boys and girls should style/conform their hair in a way that keeps it out of their eyes while playing. *Please note that “hard” items such as bobby pins are not allowed for sports competition. Headbands must be soft and circular – no “ninja tying” allowed (due to potential risk of head injury).*
- ◆ Athletes must read and sign the Covenant of Expectations & Community.

Expectations of Parents:

- ◆ Parents are the primary decision maker for their children's participation and should limit or withdraw as behavior warrants. Parents recognize coaches may have a differing opinion than the parent and will abide by limitations or exclusions from participation based on coach's observed negative behavior. Parents may appeal to the board if necessary.
- ◆ Parents understand the program is competitive and will utilize the players best suited to win games. Parents do not have a say in how many minutes of play become available to their children.
- ◆ Cooperation will be sought in filling various duties, primarily for home games, whereby parents are asked to voluntarily take up various tasks of running a scoreboard, timing, concessions, clean-up, assisting others with travel, etc.
- ◆ Parents recognize they are the decision-makers in regard to medical fitness for their children's participation and are assumed to have a comprehensive understanding of the rigors associated with training and exertion necessary to practice and play. Playing with injury or illness is a decision in which any of the following may decline participation: parent, player, coach.
- ◆ Every child who participates in the St. Joseph Defenders sports program is required to have insurance protection for medical and hospital expenses resulting from accidental bodily injuries. The St. Joseph Defenders sports program does not provide insurance. Ineligibility will result if an athlete does not have proof of insurance.
- ◆ Never be involved in negative cheering. Booing officials or opponents or yelling negative chants (such as "You can't do that!") sets a bad example and is counter to what we believe and want our reputation to be. Other examples of negative cheering include chanting "Air Ball" when the other team misses a shot or screaming to try to disrupt an opponent who is on the free throw line.
- ◆ Be an example and a guard. Set the standard high for behavior. Do not be afraid to speak in love to those whose behavior might undermine our program's reputation. Be watchful and attentive at all games, practices and events. The best protection against bullying, vandalism, and dangers of any kind is attentive adults. As laid out in the Defenders Covenant, encourage your athlete throughout the year to speak up when they witness or hear about things happening within the program that should not be happening.
- ◆ Do not criticize officials. Badgering officials works against our teams and comes at the price of our testimony and reputation. There is never a time at any contest where a parent/guardian is afforded an opportunity to say anything to an official other than, "Thank you." Without these men and women and their willingness to officiate, there would be no game. Additionally, remember that these are high school competitions: officials will not change their minds based on your opinions and they will not be swayed/intimidated by a hostile crowd. The only affect criticism from the stands can have is making the situation *worse* for our team.
- ◆ Encourage from the stands, do not coach from the stands. We greatly value the parent-child relationship and we completely understand that parents who enjoy a sport will want to contribute to the development of their athlete and we do not discourage that. But during games and practices, leave coaching to the coaches.
- ◆ Parents have read the handbook and will promote the program's vision and expectations to their children. They will agree to abide with the Defenders Covenant and require their athlete to sign it.



St. Joseph Defenders Homeschool Sports Covenant of Expectations & Community

Players must understand and agree to the following policies and expectations by signing the Covenant Agreement sheet.

Parents/guardians are asked to sign to affirm understanding and agreement.

Purpose of this Covenant:

The St. Joseph Defenders Homeschool Sports program exists to provide competitive sports in a Christian environment. The purpose of this Covenant is to make clear the goals, expectations and boundaries for players, and to ensure that players understand and are in agreement to abide by these policies. The desired outcome of this Covenant is to provide the best opportunity for a safe, enriching and encouraging Christian community that will be a benefit to all who are a part of it.

Affirmation of Parental Authority:

The St. Joseph Defenders Homeschool Sports program supports all parents/guardians as the primary decision makers for their children's participation. Parents may limit or withdraw their child's participation due to behavior, academic performance, or health. If coaches observe health/injury issues or behavior that they believe threaten the well-being of players or goes against the letter or spirit of this Covenant, they will discuss this directly with parents.

Foundations of Community:

The St. Joseph Defenders Homeschool Sports program is not intended to supersede, interfere with, or replace a player's participation and involvement in a local church, spiritual mentorship, Christian service, or other ministry opportunities. However, since so many hours are dedicated to the team during the season, this program desires to provide a Christ-like community. The expectations laid out here are anchored by the belief that a healthy Christian community is built on the following:

Forgiveness (*Ephesians 4:32*)

Grace (*John 1:16*)

Honesty & Integrity (*Proverbs 11:3, 1st Peter 3:16*)

Justice (*Amos 5:24*)

Discipline & Accountability (*Hebrews 12:11, Romans 14:12*)

Reporting Issues:

First and foremost, players must agree to properly handle situations as they arise. If players witness or experience an expectation being broken, or witness or experience a situation not covered here that makes them uncomfortable, concerned, feel in danger or that others are endangered, they must agree to do one or both of the following:

A) Report the issue to a coach, **who will always and immediately inform the involved parents.**

B) Report the issue to a parent, **who will report to coaches at their discretion.**

Specific Expectations:

- ♦ I will treat coaches, teammates, opponents, referees and fans with respect and kindness, even if they do not return that behavior.
- ♦ I will take joy and find fulfillment in my team achieving our sports goals of playing tough, smart and together. I understand that achieving these goals may mean I get less playing time and/or shoot less often than I prefer. I also understand that these goals supersede winning every individual game.
- ♦ While I understand that while I participate in a physical contact sport, I will never use any part of my body to intentionally cause discomfort or pain, express frustration, prove a point to a referee, or retaliate for any action.
- ♦ I will not participate in gossip. I will not simply talk *about* the people I have issues with to those who can't do anything about it. When I have complaints, I will talk to someone who can do something about it (parents or coaches).
- ♦ I will assume and hope for the best in others and their actions. I will defer to the instruction of coaches, take joy in the success of my teammates, affirm good play by opponents, acknowledge that referees will do their best in a difficult role, and will not begrudge opposing fans enjoying cheering their team.
- ♦ I will never participate in physical or verbal bullying and will tell an adult if I experience or witness such behavior.
- ♦ I will not mock, belittle or chastise anyone and will tell an adult if I experience or witness such behavior.
- ♦ I will do my best to be consistent with the teachings on behavior in Ephesians 5:3-4: not even a hint of sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, or crude joking.
- ♦ I will strive to make my words and actions *admirable*, not simply *defensible*.
- ♦ I understand that these expectations are not limited to practices and games. I understand that my behavior, attitude and attentiveness will be a factor in determining if I play in games, practice, or remain a part of the team.

Please keep this sheet and refer to it as necessary. After reading this, please return a signed and dated copy (signed by athlete and at least one parent) of the acknowledgement form.

Parents or players who have concerns with anything contained here are welcome to reach out to the Athletic Director or coaches directly at any time. Returning the signed Covenant will be presumed as affirmation and/or acceptance of the guidelines described here.



St. Joseph Defenders
Homeschool Sports Handbook & Covenant
Acknowledgement Form

By signing below, the athlete and parents/guardians acknowledge receipt of and familiarity with the Handbook and Covenant and agree to abide by the specific expectations laid out while participating with the St. Joseph Defenders.

Name of Athlete: _____

Signature of Athlete: _____

Date: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____