



Welcome to the Parent Handbook for the Pre-Academy Mighty Kicks Soccer Program!

We are excited to have your child join us for a season of soccer fun and skill-building. Mighty Kicks is not just another soccer program; it is an approach that is grounded in the latest research in child development.

At Mighty Kicks, we understand that young children learn best when they are engaged in developmentally appropriate activities. That is why our approach is designed to meet children where they are in their development and provide them with the tools they need to succeed on the soccer field and beyond.

Research in child development has shown that young children learn through play and exploration. When children are engaged in activities that are meaningful and relevant to them, they are more likely to stay focused and motivated. Mighty Kicks takes this research to heart and incorporates play-based learning into every aspect of our program.

In addition to play-based learning, Mighty Kicks also uses a variety of teaching strategies that are proven to be effective for young children. For example, we use positive reinforcement to encourage and motivate children to learn new skills. We also use age-appropriate equipment and activities that are designed to promote physical development and coordination.

Overall, Mighty Kicks is a program that is grounded in research and designed to meet the unique needs of young children. We believe that our approach is the best way to teach young children the fundamentals of soccer while also promoting their overall development and well-being. Thank you for choosing Mighty Kicks, and we look forward to a fun and rewarding season of soccer with your child!





## The Purpose

The Pre-Academy Program exists to provide an early soccer experience that is fun, developmentally appropriate, and teaches the fundamentals of the game of soccer to all children. The Pre-Academy is for all levels of players and teaches the foundational skills of the game while also incorporating a curriculum that teaches important life skills.

The Pre-Academy Program is provided by Mighty Kicks Southern Kentucky. To learn more about the Mighty Kicks methodology and curriculum, please visit [mightykicks.net](http://mightykicks.net).

## Overview of Play-Practice-Play

This curriculum is designed to provide soccer players with a fun and engaging introduction to soccer through US Soccer's Play-Practice-Play methodology. It focuses on individual skill development, teamwork, and learning through play and exploration. By building on fundamental skills and introducing more advanced skills and tactics, players will develop a solid foundation for future success in soccer.

The Play-Practice-Play methodology is a player-centered approach to coaching soccer that is used by U.S. Soccer at the Grassroots level. The methodology is designed to help coaches create enjoyable environments where players can develop their skills and understanding of the game.

The Play-Practice-Play methodology is based on the following principles:

- Play is the primary vehicle for learning. Players learn best by playing the game. The Play-Practice-Play methodology emphasizes the use of games and game-like activities to provide players with opportunities to develop their skills and understanding of the game.
- Practice should be purposeful and focused. The Practice phase of the Play-Practice-Play methodology is designed to provide players with opportunities to practice specific skills and concepts in a game-like environment. Coaches should use teaching actions to guide players and help them understand the purpose of the practice.
- Feedback should be positive and constructive. Feedback is an important part of the learning process. The Play-Practice-Play methodology emphasizes the use of positive and constructive feedback to help players improve their performance.

The Play-Practice-Play methodology is divided into three phases:

1. **Play:** The Play phase is the initial phase of the practice. During this phase, players engage in free play or small-sided games. The goal of the Play phase is to allow players to explore the game and develop their skills in a fun and relaxed environment.
2. **Practice:** The Practice phase is the second phase of the practice. During this phase, players engage in targeted learning activities that are designed to develop specific skills and concepts. The goal of the Practice phase is to help players learn and understand the game in a more structured environment.





3. **Play Again:** The Play Again phase is the final phase of the practice. During this phase, players return to free play or small-sided games. The goal of the Play Again phase is to allow players to apply what they have learned in the Practice phase in a game-like environment.

The Play-Practice-Play methodology is a valuable tool for coaches who want to create enjoyable and effective soccer practices. The methodology is based on sound principles of learning and development, and it has been shown to be effective in helping players improve their skills and understanding of the game.

Here are some additional benefits of the Play-Practice-Play methodology:

- It helps players develop a love of the game.
- It helps players develop a variety of skills.
- It helps players learn how to make decisions in game situations.
- It helps players learn how to work together as a team.

### **How Mighty Kicks Develops Players**

The Mighty Kicks soccer program is a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching young children the fundamentals of soccer. This program is designed to use research on the ways young children learn to create an environment that is both fun and effective for developing soccer skills. Here are some benefits of the Mighty Kicks soccer program:

1. **Developmentally appropriate:** The program is designed to be developmentally appropriate for young children, taking into account their physical, cognitive, and social-emotional needs. The activities and games are designed to be fun and engaging, while also promoting the development of soccer skills.
2. **Play-based learning:** The program uses a play-based approach to learning, which is an effective way for young children to learn. Children learn best through play and exploration, and the Mighty Kicks program provides opportunities for children to play and explore while also learning soccer skills.
3. **Fundamental skills development:** The program focuses on developing fundamental soccer skills, such as dribbling, passing, shooting, and defending. These skills are important for the development of a solid foundation in soccer, and the program uses fun and engaging activities to teach these skills.
4. **Positive reinforcement:** The program uses positive reinforcement to encourage children to develop their skills and build confidence. Children are praised for their efforts and encouraged to continue practicing and improving.
5. **Social-emotional development:** The program promotes social-emotional development by encouraging children to work together, communicate, and develop positive relationships with their teammates. These skills are important for success in soccer and in life.
6. **Professional coaching:** The program is led by professional coaches who are trained to work with young children. They use age-appropriate methods and techniques to teach





soccer skills and provide a safe and supportive environment for children to learn and grow.

Overall, the Mighty Kicks soccer program provides a developmentally appropriate, fun, and engaging way for young children to learn the fundamentals of soccer. It is grounded in research on the ways young children learn and provides opportunities for children to develop fundamental skills while also promoting social-emotional development and confidence.

### **Pre-Academy/Mighty Kicks Coach Expectations**

1. Attend all scheduled practices and games.
2. Be on time and prepared for all practices and games.
3. Follow the prescribed curriculum and lesson plans provided by the Director of the program.
4. Provide a safe and positive environment for all players.
5. Encourage and promote good sportsmanship among players and parents.
6. Communicate effectively with players and parents regarding schedules, expectations, and other important information.
7. Attend all necessary meetings and training sessions.
8. Notify the Director of the program in advance if unable to attend a scheduled practice or game.
9. Dress appropriately for practices and games.
10. Maintain a professional and respectful attitude at all times while representing the Mighty Kicks program.

### **Coaching Format**

The Mighty Kicks program uses a unique coaching format to ensure a consistent and effective experience for all players. The program is led by the Director, who uses a PA system to provide instruction and lead activities during the session. Volunteer coaches are then assigned to work with individual teams and follow the prescribed curriculum provided by the Director.

To ensure that the curriculum is being implemented effectively, members of the professional coaching staff are on hand during the session to support volunteer coaches. They can provide additional guidance, demonstrate drills, and help with any issues that arise.

This coaching format allows for a consistent experience across all teams in the program, regardless of the experience level of the volunteer coach. It also ensures that all players are receiving high-quality instruction that is in line with the program's curriculum.

Parents can feel confident that their child is receiving excellent coaching and instruction during Mighty Kicks sessions, thanks to the program's unique coaching format.





Coaches in the program are expected to follow the schedule as outlined by the Director of the program. This schedule includes the dates, times, and locations of practices and games. Coaches should not add or remove practices or games without first obtaining written permission from the Director.

This policy is in place to ensure that all teams receive equal opportunities for practices and games, and to avoid confusion or conflicts between teams. Any changes to the schedule must be communicated clearly to all parents and players in advance. These changes may only come through the Director of the program.

If a coach needs to request a change to the schedule, they should contact the Director as soon as possible to discuss the situation and determine the best course of action. Coaches should not make any changes to the schedule without permission.

### **Usage of Staff Coaches**

The Pre-Academy Program relies on a team of professional staff coaches and trained volunteers to implement our program each season. With more than 500 participants per season, it is no small task to organize and prepare all coaches to implement our program. Staff coaches work in tandem with volunteer coaches to ensure that all players have access to high quality instruction and support.

Every team in Pre-Academy will have one parent volunteer as a head coach and one parent volunteer as an assistant coach. Each volunteer is trained using in-house training led by the Pre-Academy Director. All volunteer coaches must undergo a background check and complete Risk Management training where they learn proper protocol to follow in keeping players safe.

Every team will also have access to one of our Pre-Academy Staff Coaches. These coaches hold a minimum of the US Soccer “D” License which requires the completion of many hours of coaching instruction and testing. Pre-Academy Staff Coaches will be assigned to work with a “pod” of teams who will follow the Pre-Academy Staff Coach for their practice sessions. This Staff Coach will serve as the “Lead” Coach for practice sessions with the volunteer coaches assisting the implementation of the curriculum. On “game days”, the volunteer coaches will lead their teams during the game. This model provides opportunities for coaching development for all coaches in the program and ensures that all of our players have access to the same curriculum and teaching across the program.

If you are interested in serving as a volunteer head or assistant coach, please reach out to Zach Salchli at [zsalchli@skysoccer.org](mailto:zsalchli@skysoccer.org). If you hold a minimum of a US Soccer “D” License and would like to join the Pre-Academy Staff, please also reach out to Coach Zach at the above email address.





## Coach Communication Policy

At Mighty Kicks, we understand the importance of clear and consistent communication between coaches, parents, and players. That's why we utilize the GotSport app to communicate with parents and keep everyone up-to-date on schedules, practices, and games.

Our policy for communicating with parents includes the following expectations for coaches:

- Coaches are required to regularly check the app and respond to messages from parents in a timely manner.
- Coaches are expected to communicate any changes to the schedule or cancellations as soon as possible, and only with the permission of the Director of the program.
- Coaches are encouraged to provide positive feedback to parents and players through the app, highlighting areas of success and growth.
- By keeping communication frequent and transparent, we can ensure that parents are engaged in their child's soccer experience and feel supported by the coach and program. It also allows for any potential issues to be addressed in a timely manner, keeping everyone informed and up-to-date.

## Practice Plans

The Mighty Kicks soccer program utilizes a structured practice format consisting of Deliberate Play, Deliberate Practice, and Play phases for each lesson. During the Deliberate Play phase, players engage in fun and engaging games that focus on developing foundational soccer skills. The Deliberate Practice phase allows players to practice specific skills and techniques through repetition and targeted instruction from coaches. Finally, during the Play phase, players are given the opportunity to apply the skills they have learned in game-like situations. This structured approach allows players to develop soccer skills in a fun and engaging way, while also providing opportunities for deliberate practice and application in real game situations.

## Parent Expectations (Fall 2024 Updated)

In order to create a positive and enjoyable experience for all participants, it is important for parents to adhere to certain behavior expectations during the soccer season. These expectations include:

1. **Respect for all participants:** All parents are expected to demonstrate respect for all participants, including players, coaches, and other parents. This includes refraining from using foul language or engaging in confrontational or aggressive behavior.





2. Encouragement of positive attitudes: Parents are encouraged to foster a positive and supportive environment for all players. This includes encouraging players to try their best, celebrating successes, and providing constructive feedback when needed.
3. Attendance and punctuality: Parents are expected to ensure that their child attends all practices and games, and arrives on time. If a child is unable to attend, parents are expected to communicate with the coach in advance.
4. Safety and equipment: Parents are responsible for ensuring that their child is properly equipped for practices and games, including appropriate clothing and equipment such as shin guards. Parents are also expected to follow safety guidelines set by the coach or program, and to report any safety concerns or injuries to the coach. All children in the U4, U5, and U6 divisions must wear shin guards to any practice or game. Children without shin guards will not be allowed to participate. The only children not required to wear shin guards are those participating in the Parent Participation Program (U3).
5. Communication with the coach: Parents are encouraged to communicate regularly with the coach and to ask questions or express concerns as needed. This includes informing the coach of any relevant medical or behavioral issues that may affect their child's participation.
6. Parents must remain OFF the field during practices and games. Only parents participating in the Parent Program (U3) may be on the field. Anyone on the field with players must have completed SafeSport and have a background check on file with the club.
7. Parents must sit in the fescue grass area and stay off the bermuda grass during practices. Parents may not sit in between fields during practice. This is to ensure that the Director and Staff Coaches can move between fields and so that the field is safe for all participants.

By adhering to these behavior expectations, parents can help create a positive and supportive environment for all players, and ensure a fun and enjoyable soccer season for all involved.





## **Required Equipment**

The Pre-Academy soccer program requires some basic equipment to ensure the safety and enjoyment of the players. Here is a list of essential equipment:

1. Shin guards: Shin guards are a must-have item for any soccer player. They help protect the shins from injuries caused by accidental kicks or collisions. Shin guards are not required for the 2 Year Old Parent Participation Program, but they are **required for all other age groups**.
2. Cleats: Soccer cleats provide better traction on the field and are recommended for players of all ages. It is important to ensure that the cleats fit properly and are comfortable for the child to wear. Cleats are not required for the 2 Year Old Parent Participation Program.
3. Size 3 soccer ball: A size 3 soccer ball is required for children of this age.
4. Water bottle: Staying hydrated is important during any physical activity, and soccer is no exception. Make sure your child brings a water bottle to practice and games.

In addition to these items, it is also recommended that players wear comfortable clothing appropriate for physical activity, such as shorts and a t-shirt. All participants will receive a Pre-Academy t-shirt that should be worn on Game Days. There is no required clothing for Practice Days.

## **Team Formation and Volunteer Coach Support**

The team formation process for a recreational program is done randomly. The program staff use a randomized process to assign children to teams to ensure a balance of skill levels and ages. This is done to create a fair and positive playing environment for all participants.

Once teams are formed, each team will be assigned a volunteer coach. The volunteer coach will receive direction and support from the Director of the program, including access to a prescribed curriculum and lesson plan for each practice. The curriculum is designed to provide a fun and engaging learning experience that introduces children to the basics of soccer while also promoting positive values like teamwork, sportsmanship, and fair play.

It is important to note that volunteer coaches are not necessarily experienced soccer players or coaches, but rather parents or community members who are willing to give



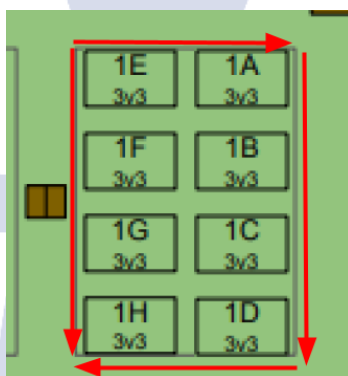




their time and energy to support the program. As such, it is important for parents to be supportive of their child's coach and offer assistance whenever possible.

During practices, parents are asked to remain off the field to allow the children to focus and participate fully in the activities. This also helps to ensure a safe and organized environment for the children to learn and play. Parents are encouraged to cheer on their child and their team from a designated spectator area.

On practice nights, all parents and spectators are asked to stay on the outside of the larger Field 1. This field is divided into 9 smaller fields. Parents and spectators are asked to stay on the outside of the larger field which is where the grassline changes. This allows the full field to be utilized by coaches and players and keeps players safer. Please see the diagram below. This applies to TUESDAY night practices only. Parents should sit in the area colored RED:



On Game Days, parents are asked to sit opposite of the team bench area. Parents should only be on one side of the field with the teams being across from them. When possible, parents and spectators should sit back on the fescue grass area. All spectators must be at least 3 yards away from the sideline at all times.

**What to do if your child is struggling to participate:**

Participating in soccer activities can be a great way for children to learn new skills, develop their physical abilities, and have fun with friends. However, some children may struggle with participation for various reasons, such as feeling nervous or lacking confidence. As a parent, it can be difficult to know how to help your child overcome these challenges and fully participate in soccer activities. Here are some tips to help you support your child in these situations.





1. Encourage your child: Encouragement and positive reinforcement can go a long way in boosting your child's confidence and motivation. Remind your child that it's okay to make mistakes and that everyone has to start somewhere. Praise your child for their efforts and progress, rather than just their achievements.
2. Observe your child: Watch your child during soccer activities to try and identify the specific challenges they may be facing. Are they struggling with a particular skill, or are they feeling overwhelmed by the activity as a whole? This information can help you to provide targeted support and encouragement.
3. Talk to the coach: If your child is struggling with participation, it may be helpful to talk to the coach. They may be able to provide additional guidance and support to help your child feel more comfortable and confident. Additionally, the coach may be able to modify the activity to better suit your child's needs and abilities.
4. Practice at home: Practicing soccer skills at home can be a great way to build your child's confidence and improve their abilities. Keep it fun and light-hearted, and encourage your child to experiment and try new things.

Remember, every child is different, and some may need more time or support to feel comfortable participating in soccer activities. As a parent, your role is to provide encouragement, support, and understanding as your child navigates these challenges. With patience and persistence, your child can overcome their struggles and find joy in soccer activities.





## **Game Rules for 5U and 6U**

As the soccer season begins, we want to ensure that everyone understands the rules of the game. Here are the basic rules of soccer for a game at this age group:

1. Field size: The field is smaller than a full-sized soccer field and typically measures approximately 20 yards by 30 yards.
2. Number of players: Each team has 4 players on the field at a time, with no goalkeeper. Teams are not permitted to place one player in front of the goal area. All players must be encouraged to be actively engaged in play.
3. Duration of the game: The game consists of four 8-minute quarters, with a 2-minute break between each quarter.
4. Ball size: Size 3 soccer balls are used for all games.
5. Kick-off: The game starts with a kick-off at the center of the field. The opposing team must be at least 5 yards away from the ball until it is kicked. If there is a circle painted on the field, players must be outside of that circle until the ball is kicked.
6. Scoring: Goals are scored when the ball crosses the opponent's goal line between the goalposts and under the crossbar.
7. No offside: There is no offside rule at this age level.
8. Kick-ins: When the ball goes out of bounds, a kick-in is used to put the ball back into play.
9. Goal kicks: When the ball goes out of bounds over the goal line after being last touched by the attacking team, a goal kick is awarded to the defending team. The ball is placed on the ground on the goal line and kicked back into play. The opposing team must go to the halfway line until the ball is put into play.
10. Corner kicks: When the ball goes out of bounds over the goal line after being last touched by the defending team, a corner kick is awarded to the attacking team. The ball is placed on the ground at the corner nearest the goal the team is attacking. The opposing team must be at least 5 yards from the ball until it is kicked.
11. Fouls: At this age level, there are no formal fouls, but coaches will remind players to play fairly and not push, trip, or kick other players.
12. One coach from each team is permitted to be on the field to support the players. Coaches are not to touch the ball except to keep the ball in play when needed to keep the game flowing.





The game rules for 4U are the same as above except that this age group will play 3v3 and will not play for a set amount of time as they begin learning how to play the game. The 4U age group will start with 1v1 games and progress into learning how to play the game over the course of the season.

We hope that these rules provide you with a better understanding of the soccer game. As always, our top priority is to ensure that all players have fun, learn new skills, and enjoy the game of soccer.

### **Parent Sideline Policy for Soccer Games**

At Mighty Kicks, we believe that parents play an essential role in their child's development and learning process. However, during games, we have implemented a parent sideline policy to ensure the safety and fair play of all players.

All parents must remain at least 3 yards off the sideline during the game. This policy ensures that players have enough space to play, and coaches can communicate with players and provide instructions without interference. During practice sessions, parents should sit in the fescue grass area to provide plenty of space for participants and coaches. Parents are not permitted to be in between fields during practice nights.

Parents are also required to stay on the opposite side of the team's bench area during games. This policy ensures that players can hear their coach's instructions without any interference or distractions.

Additionally, parents are not allowed to enter the field during the game, except in the case of an emergency. If a player gets injured or requires medical attention, a parent or guardian can enter the field with the coach's permission.

By adhering to these policies, we can create a safe and supportive environment for all players, coaches, and parents. Thank you for your cooperation in helping us create a positive and rewarding experience for everyone involved in the Mighty Kicks program.





## **Ways You Can Help This Season**

As a parent, you play a critical role in supporting your child's soccer team. Here are some ways you can help:

1. Attend games and practices: Your child will feel more supported and encouraged if they see you at their games and practices. You can also get to know the coach and other parents on the team.
2. Encourage good sportsmanship: Teach your child to be respectful of their teammates, opponents, and referees. Applaud good plays by both teams, and avoid shouting negative comments from the sidelines.
3. Help with team snacks: Coordinate with other parents to bring healthy snacks for the team to enjoy after games or practices. This can also be a great way to get to know other parents on the team.
4. Practice with your child: Help your child improve their skills by practicing with them at home or at the park. This can also be a fun way to spend time together.
5. Be supportive, not critical: Remember that your child is still learning and developing their skills. Instead of criticizing their mistakes, offer positive feedback and encouragement.
6. Follow team rules: Make sure you and your child understand and follow the program's rules and guidelines, including equipment requirements, punctuality, and behavior expectations.

By supporting your child's soccer team, you can help them develop their skills, build confidence, and learn important life lessons about teamwork, perseverance, and sportsmanship.

### **Policy: All parents must stay off the field during practices**

Rationale: It is essential for parents to understand that coaches are responsible for their child's development and learning during practices. Therefore, it is important that parents allow coaches to manage practices effectively by staying off the field. This policy helps ensure player safety, provide an optimal learning environment, and promote a positive team culture. Here are the reasons why:

1. Player safety: During practices, players are learning and practicing new skills that require them to move around the field. If parents are on the field, there is a risk of players colliding with them, leading to injuries. By staying off the field, parents can help create a safe environment for players to learn and develop.





2. Optimal learning environment: Coaches need players' full attention during practice to be able to effectively teach and reinforce new skills. If parents are on the field, players may get distracted, leading to a less productive practice. By staying off the field, parents can help create an environment where players can focus on learning and improving.
3. Positive team culture: When parents stay off the field during practices, it sends a clear message to players that coaches are in charge and are there to help them improve. This helps promote a positive team culture where players respect coaches and trust in their guidance.

By adhering to this policy, parents can help create a safe and positive environment for their child's soccer team during practices. Parents are encouraged to watch from a distance and can speak with coaches after practice if they have any questions or concerns.

### **Policy: Parent Communication for Absences**

To establish a clear policy for parents to communicate with their child's coach if their child is going to be absent from a game or practice in the Pre-Academy Program.

Parents are expected to communicate with their child's coach if their child is going to be absent from a game or practice. This communication should be done as soon as possible to allow the coach to plan accordingly for the game or practice.

Procedure:

1. Parents should inform the coach of their child's absence via email or using the app established by the organization. The coach's contact information and preferred form of contact will be available on the app.
2. When communicating the absence, parents should provide the following information:
  - Name of the child
  - Date of the absence
  - Reason for the absence (if applicable)
  - Contact information in case of emergency
3. If the absence is due to an illness, parents should follow the guidelines of the Pre-Academy Program regarding the return to play policy.





4. If a child misses multiple games or practices without explanation, the coach or program director may reach out to the parents to discuss the child's participation in the program.

#### Rationale:

Communicating absences helps coaches to plan their practices and games accordingly. It also ensures that the child's safety is taken into consideration, and that the coach knows who to contact in case of an emergency.

### **Parent Behavior at Games Policy**

At all times, parents are expected to act in a respectful and appropriate manner while attending their child's soccer games. Any behavior deemed inappropriate, disruptive or unsafe by the coaches or program director will not be tolerated. Examples of inappropriate behavior include, but are not limited to, using profanity, verbally attacking coaches, players, or officials, and being excessively loud or disruptive.

If a parent is observed engaging in inappropriate behavior during a game, the coach or program director will approach the parent and ask them to stop. If the behavior continues, the coach or program director may ask the parent to leave the game. If the parent refuses to leave or the behavior is particularly egregious, the coach or program director may involve law enforcement.

Parents who observe inappropriate behavior from other parents during games are encouraged to report it to the coach or program director immediately. Reports should include a detailed description of the behavior and the names of any witnesses. The coach or program director will then take appropriate action to address the situation.

### **Policy for Communicating Problems at the Soccer Field**

At our soccer program, we aim to create a positive and safe environment for all participants. We encourage parents, coaches, and players to communicate any issues that may arise during practices or games. To ensure that problems are addressed promptly, we have implemented the following policy:

Reporting Procedure:





1. If a problem arises at the soccer field, parents, coaches, or players are encouraged to report it immediately to the Director. The Director can be contacted in person, via email, or phone. Contact information for the Director is available on the SKY Soccer website.

#### Types of Problems:

2. Problems that should be reported include any inappropriate behavior by coaches, players, or parents, unsafe playing conditions, or any other concerns related to the program. Examples of inappropriate behavior include verbal or physical abuse, harassment, discrimination, or any other behavior that violates our program's code of conduct.

#### Confidentiality:

3. All reports will be treated confidentially, and the identity of the person reporting the problem will be kept confidential if requested. The Director will investigate the issue and take appropriate action to address the problem.

#### Resolution:

4. Once a problem has been reported, the Director will investigate the issue and take appropriate action. Depending on the nature and severity of the problem, actions may include reprimands, suspension, or removal from the program. The Director will communicate the resolution to the person who reported the problem and any affected parties.

By following this policy, we hope to ensure that all participants in our program have a safe and enjoyable experience.

