

# PARENT HANDBOOK



Thank you, first and foremost, for preparing and supporting your student in their academic and athletic endeavours at St Johnsbury Academy. This handbook is the Athletic Department's primary tool to share with you some important information, policies and practices that will allow you to best continue to support him or her and all our teams at the Academy. Our Athletic Department practices take reference from larger policies of both the Academy and the National Federation of State High School Associations ((NFHS) and the Vermont Principal's Association. As such, our guidelines are designed to ensure that we provide the most comprehensive, fair, and safe sporting experiences for our students. This handbook is designed as a tool for you – the parent – and we view it as a living resource. If there are parts of the handbook that are unclear or areas that you would like further information on, please let us know! We hope to make this as comprehensive and "user-friendly" as possible.

### The Three Promises

At St. Johnsbury Academy, we believe in young people, and in what is possible when they are supported in becoming the best people, best learners, and best community members and citizens they can be. We care about their character, about their ability to seek truth and be motivated to learn, and about how they will engage positively with the world, both within and beyond our community.

Guided by this deep optimism about young people, we make three promises to our students and their families:

1. To help each student become the best person possible.

We are committed to the values of respect, compassion, integrity, and responsibility. We have compassion and empathy, and we believe in loving those most who need it most.

2. To become the best learner possible.

We value expertise, creativity, and the habit of inquiry. We provide support and opportunities for students to pursue their passions and develop an abiding love for learning.

3. Become part of something bigger than themselves.

When students come to St. Johnsbury Academy, they become part of the most talented and diverse group of individuals they may ever know as friends and colleagues. They develop an intellectual and emotional connection to understanding the larger world, and to making the community a better place.

We do our best to make mutual respect and compassion for one another a daily expectation for everyone in our community. Because we know that when students feel seen and heard, believe that they belong and are cared for, and understand that they share responsibility for themselves, each other, and the wider community, they will thrive. We promise each student at St. Johnsbury

Academy that we will do our best to know you, to help you to grow, and to help you become the person and learner you need to be to face the world, in your own way, together, and make it better.

Our Athletic Philosophy:

To best support the Academy goals and to place athletics as an important co-curricular activity, we are committed to supporting the Academy's Mission and Values through the following Code and Athletic Covenants:

### Our Athletic Code

#### *Statement of Philosophy:*

Our interscholastic athletic program is an extension of our academic program; we view participation in interscholastic athletics as an honor and privilege and we demand commitment and a strong work ethic. Therefore, our student athletes should expect their involvement in athletics to be an intense educational experience. We recognize that excellence is not easily developed, but we believe that with encouragement, support, hard work, and motivation our student athletes will succeed, not only in competition, but also in life. All student athletes should recognize that involvement in interscholastic athletics, as in life, is a competitive atmosphere, where some excel, and all will benefit by being a member of a team. Student athletes should be able to say they are proud to be a part of St. Johnsbury Academy athletics.

#### *Mission:*

#### *Character*

To promote good sportsmanship and ethical conduct by modeling and fostering responsible decision-making, honesty, and respect for self, team, coaches, and opponents.

#### *Inquiry*

To provide the enthusiasm and energy to engage athletes in the pursuit of specific knowledge and skills of the sport; to set high but reasonable goals and to know and appreciate their individual talents and unique abilities.

#### *Community*

To encourage each individual athlete to understand his or her relationships, rights, and responsibilities within a team that is itself part of the larger community.

### *OUR CORE COVENANTS*

All our athletic teams are unified under the same core covenants. For students who choose to participate in athletics, the following are non-negotiable requirements of all our teams. We require students to:

1. Commit to their team, coach, and sport.

2. Compete in each of their practices and contests.

3. Conduct themselves with class at all times both on and off campus.

We urge everyone to participate. Although the work is hard, the rewards are great.

Our faculty, staff, and coaches view sport participation as an important part of student life and experience; roughly 60% of our student population participate in one of our 28 sports (and nearly 50 teams!) We pride ourselves on offering one of the most comprehensive sport programs in the state as measured not only by the number of teams that we field but also our competitive results and student experience feedback. We hope to provide opportunities to as wide and deep a cross-section of our student populations as possible.

With that said, we take great pride in our competitive results as well! To deliver safe and competitive programs, we expect student-athletes to commit to sport with the same deliberate preparation that they take to their academic preparation – the same way that ‘homework’ and exams are not optional, we require our athletes to commit to the process. Because we ask them to strive for excellence in BOTH academics and athletics, we require them to hold themselves to a high standard. In that regard, we view participation as a privilege not a right. If a student fails to hold themselves to the standard we have set, it is our opinion that perhaps their time is better spent solely on academics. This expectation holds true for all aspects of student life: academic, behavioural and dedication to their team and the Academy.

As part of this process, we require student-athletes to sign a “commitment” form at the beginning of EVERY season. This form affirms their willingness to abide by team rules, standards, and expectations. We strongly encourage you to discuss that commitment with your student so that all of us understand what is being asked of our athletes.

It is worth highlighting a few of the major practices that are universal across all our sport teams:

- We strive to put teams that are well-prepared on all the fields of play. This helps to ensure safety but also respects the value and importance of being competitive in sports. Winning isn’t ‘everything’, but all our contests do keep score and we want our athletes to appreciate the relationship and causal effect of attention to preparation and results.
- To create the most effective daily training environment, our roster sizes in some sports are limited. In some cases, this requires coaches to make difficult decisions on team composition. Not all students who try out for all sports are guaranteed a spot on the team. Coaches make every effort to make fair, evidence-based decisions and try to do it early in the season. These are not always easy decisions and sometimes result in disappointment. We ask for your support in explaining this process to your student and your understanding should your child not have the pre-season results they hoped for.
- We have extensive ‘junior varsity’ programs in many of our sports and view these as developmental opportunities for players to grow on to the varsity roster. At the “JV” level, our coaches are committed to giving as many players as possible an opportunity to compete to aid in their development and experience. However, at the varsity level, please understand that playing decisions are made by the coach primarily on their judgement of what is best for the team from a competitive perspective. Playing time is not ‘guaranteed’.

- Attendance at training sessions and competition is not optional! When committing to a team, the expectation is that both athletes and parents understand that sacrifices of time must be made. Facilities often require us to stagger practice times so teams will occasionally train at times other than immediately after school – it is an unavoidable reality of our space and/or the influence of weather. Our teams will practice during school holidays in most cases. In many cases, we will have competition scheduled during times when other students will have planned vacations or family trips or when a student may need a break; these are not acceptable reasons to miss training or competition. Rules apply equally to all team members. Parents: we ask that you plan accordingly and if in doubt, please contact your student’s coach for specific information on training and competition times. Our teams typically do NOT train on Sunday, but exceptions are made in the event of a Monday contest, so please be aware of that as well.
- Student-athletes are expected to travel to AND FROM away contests with the team. Exceptions can be made to this rule but ONLY if arrangements are made in advance. Coaches do not have the ability to make decisions to release athletes to parents after games. In addition, please understand that some coaches use the ride back to campus to debrief with their team – the coach’s input is always considered in entertaining requests for exception to this travel rule. In addition, please assume that the team or players are not “released” to talk to you at length until the coach has granted them leave after any post-game debrief.
- We hold all students at the Academy to high standards of behaviour and athletics is not an exception. We require athletes to show respect to their teammates, their coaches, the game itself and the school they represent. We hold parents to the same expectations with regards to respect for others and for the game. School policy and rules on bullying, substance use, dress code and general standards of behaviour are strongly enforced by the Athletic Department. In addition, the VPA also has rules on uniform and jewellery that we are required to enforce.
- As parents, you will sometimes have concerns about your daughter or son and hear things that you would like to clarify. We strongly encourage you to contact the Athletic Department if there are ever immediate concerns about your child’s safety or health – such contact can be made to either the coach or Athletic Director. In case about the specific technical elements of your child’s sport or game tactics, we ask you to abide by a few general guidelines:
  - Communication in the moments following a game is never advisable. We ask you to allow a period of reflection and either have your athlete (or you) contact the coach later (e.g., the next day).
  - We strongly encourage you to empower your athlete to raise questions themselves first. As a general practice, we would prefer the process to be athlete-initiated to coach first, parent follow-up with coach if not resolved and involving Athletic administration if needed.

To encourage our students to pursue lifelong sporting participation, we would like to support athletes and parents in the college selection process if possible. We will be hosting webinars on the college selection process for sports and will make the recordings available for those unable to attend. These will help explain the roles that athletes, parents and coaches can play in the process.

Finally, I would like to personally welcome you to the St Johnsbury Academy Athletic family! It will take all of us – you, the coaches, and the administrators to ensure that your child has the best possible experience that we can provide. For that reason, I look forward to getting to know all of you and am always available to support. Thank you for all the hard work so far in raising your student and for entrusting them to our care as part of our teams!

Additional Resources:

**St Johnsbury Athletics Statement on Safeguarding** (found on our website)

**United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee Quality Parenting Framework:**

Parents and student-athletes are strongly encouraged to read through the USOPC toolkit and framework. Families will find it valuable to engage with the questions and activities outlined.

<https://www.usopc.org/quality-parenting-framework>