

This is an executive summary. You can find the complete *NSCA Strength and Conditioning Professional Standards and Guidelines*, including Appendices, online at <https://www.nasca.com/professional-standards>.



NSCA Strength and Conditioning Professional Standards and Guidelines Executive Summary

The Strength and Conditioning profession involves the combined competencies of sport/exercise science, administration, management, teaching, and coaching. Practitioners must also comply with various laws and regulations while responding to instances of potential injury, and related claims and suits. This creates remarkable challenges, and requires substantial experience, expertise and other resources to effectively address them, especially in multi-sport (e.g., collegiate and scholastic) settings.

Ample resources are available in some of these settings but in many others, however, they are not. Budgets, equipment, facilities and staff are often limited (or lacking altogether), with a resulting mismatch between the participants' demand for safe and effective programs and services, and the institution's provision of them. It is important for Strength and Conditioning practitioners and their employers to understand that this standard of care is a shared duty; the institution and individual are thus jointly responsible for fulfilling it. Collectively, these issues are the driving forces behind this project.

The purpose of the *NSCA Strength and Conditioning Professional Standards and Guidelines* document is to help identify areas of liability exposure, increase safety and decrease the likelihood of injuries that might lead to legal claims and suits, and ultimately improve the standard of care being offered. This document is intended to be neither rigid nor static, and will be updated periodically to reflect the industry's best practices. It is hoped that Strength and Conditioning practitioners and the institutions employing them will mutually benefit from applying this information, and in turn significantly enhance the quality of services and programs provided to their participants.

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1. Pre-participation Screening & Clearance

Standard 1.1

Strength and Conditioning professionals can only work with participants who have undergone health care provider screening and clearance prior to participation, in accordance with instructions specified by the AAFP-AAP-ACSM-AMSSM-AOSSM-AOASM Pre-participation Physical Evaluation Task Force, the AHA and ACSM, as well as relevant governing bodies and/or their constituent members (e.g., NCAA/NAIA for collegiate athletes; state legislatures, or individual state high school athletic associations/districts for scholastic athletes). In the collegiate athletics environment, the Athletic Training staff is involved in this process in accordance with NATA guidelines. In recreational activity programs, Strength and Conditioning professionals must require participants to undergo pre-participation screening and clearance in accordance with AHA and ACSM recommendations. For children, the clearance decision must include a determination or certification that the child has reached a level of maturity allowing participation in such activities as addressed in the “Participation in Strength and Conditioning Activities by Children” standards statement (refer to guideline 8).

Guideline 1.1

Strength and Conditioning professionals should cooperate and communicate with each of a training participant's health care providers, and provide service in the participant's best interest according to instructions specified by such providers.

2. Personnel Qualifications

Guideline 2.1

The Strength and Conditioning practitioner should acquire a minimum of a bachelor's or master's degree from an accredited college or university (verification by transcript or degree copy) in one or more of the topics comprising the “Scientific Foundations” domain identified in the Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® (CSCS®) Examination Content Description (see [Appendix A](#)), or in a related subject area. An ongoing effort should also be made to acquire knowledge and skills in the other content areas.

Guideline 2.2

The Strength and Conditioning practitioner should achieve and maintain professional certification(s) with continuing education requirements and a code of ethics, such as the CSCS credential offered through the NSCA (see [Appendix B](#)). Depending on the practitioner's scope of activities, responsibilities, and knowledge requirements, related certifications offered by other governing bodies may also be appropriate.

Guideline 2.3

The productivity of a Strength and Conditioning staff member, as well as learning and skill development of individual members, should be enhanced by aligning a performance team comprised of qualified practitioners with interdependent expertise and shared leadership roles (see [Appendix C](#)). Once the team is assembled, respective activities and responsibilities from the domains identified in the Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) Examination Content Description (see [Appendix A](#)), as well as appropriate liaison assignments, should be delegated according to each member's particular expertise.

3. Program Supervision & Instruction

Standard 3.1

Strength and conditioning programs must provide adequate and appropriate supervision by well-qualified and trained personnel, especially during peak usage times. In order to ensure maximum health, safety, and instruction, Strength and Conditioning professionals must be physically and mentally present during strength and conditioning activities, have a clear view of the entire facility (or at least the zone being supervised by each practitioner) and the participants in it, be physically close enough to the participants under their supervision to be able to see and clearly communicate with them, and have quick access to those in need of spotting or assistance.

Standard 3.2

In conjunction with appropriate safety equipment (e.g., power racks), attentive spotting must be provided for participants performing activities where free weights are supported on the trunk or moved over the head/face.

Guideline 3.1

Strength and conditioning activities should be planned, and the requisite number of qualified staff (refer to guideline 2) should be available such that recommended guidelines for minimum average floor space allowance per participant (100 ft²), minimum professional-to-participant ratios (1:10 or lower junior high school, 1:15 or lower high school, 1:20 or lower college), and number of participants per barbell or training station are achieved during peak usage times. Younger participants, novices, special populations or participants engaged in complex-movement strength and conditioning activities should be provided with greater supervision (e.g., 1:12 instead of 1:20; refer to guideline 8). Strength and Conditioning practitioners and their employers should work together toward a long-term goal of matching the professional-to-participant ratio in the Strength and Conditioning facility to each sport's respective coach-to-athlete ratio (refer to [Appendix F](#)).

4. Facility & Equipment Set-up, Inspection, Maintenance, Repair & Signage

Standard 4.1

Exercise devices, machines and equipment, including free weights, must be assembled, set up and placed in activity areas in full accordance with manufacturer's instructions, tolerances and recommendations, and with accompanying safety signage, instruction placards, notices and warnings posted or placed according to ASTM standards so as to be noticed by users prior to use. In the absence of such information, professionals must complete these tasks in accordance with authoritative information available from other sources.

Standard 4.2

Prior to being put into service, all exercise devices, machines and free weights must be thoroughly inspected and tested by Strength and Conditioning professionals to ensure they are working and performing properly, and as intended by the manufacturer.

Standard 4.3

Exercise machines, equipment and free weights must be inspected and maintained at intervals specified by manufacturers. In the absence of such specifications, these items must be regularly inspected and maintained according to a schedule determined by the Strength and Conditioning practitioner based on their knowledge and experience.

Standard 4.4

Exercise devices, machines, equipment and free weights which are in need of repair, as determined by regular inspection or as reported by users, must be immediately removed from use until serviced and repaired, and be re-inspected and tested to ensure they are working properly before being returned to service. If such devices are involved in incidents of injury, legal advisors or risk managers must be consulted for advice prior to service/repair or destruction.

Guideline 4.1

Strength and Conditioning professionals and their employers should ensure that facilities are appropriate for strength and conditioning activities. Factors to be reviewed and approved prior to activity include, but are not limited to, floor surface, lighting, room temperature and air exchange.

Guideline 4.2

Manufacturer-provided user's manuals, warranties and operating guides should be preserved and followed (refer to guideline 6).

Guideline 4.3

All equipment, including free weights, should be cleaned and/or disinfected as recommended by the manufacturer and/or OSHA. Users should be directed to wipe down skin-contact surfaces after each use.

5. Emergency Planning & Response

Standard 5.1

Strength and Conditioning professionals must be trained and certified in current guidelines for cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) established by AHA/ILCOR. Training in universal precautions for preventing disease transmission established by the CDC and OSHA is required if personnel are not immediately available to properly respond to exposure to blood or other potentially infectious materials. First Aid training/certification is also necessary if Sports Medicine personnel (e.g., MD or ATC) are not immediately available during strength and conditioning activities. New staff engaged in strength and conditioning activities must comply with this standard within six (6) months of employment.

Standard 5.2

Strength and Conditioning professionals must develop a written, venue-specific emergency response plan to deal with incidents such as injuries, lightning strikes, and reasonably foreseeable untoward events within each facility. The plan must be posted at strategic areas within each facility, and practiced at least quarterly. The emergency response plan must be initially evaluated (e.g., by facility risk managers, legal advisors, medical providers and/or off-premise emergency response agencies) and modified as necessary at regular intervals. As part of the plan, a readily accessible and working telephone must be immediately available to summon on-premise and/or off-premise emergency response resources.

Guideline 5.1

The components of a written and posted emergency response plan should include: access to a physician and/or emergency medical facility when warranted; communication and transportation between the venue and the medical facility; appropriate and necessary emergency care equipment on-site that is quickly accessible; and a thorough understanding of the personnel and procedures associated with the plan by all individuals (refer to [Appendix G](#)).

6. Records & Record Keeping

Guideline 6.1

In conjunction with written policies and procedures, Strength and Conditioning professionals should develop and maintain various records including: manufacturer-provided user's manuals, warranties and operating guides; equipment selection, purchase, installation, set-up, inspection, cleaning, maintenance and repair records; personnel credentials; professional standards and guidelines; safety policies and procedures, including a written emergency response plan (refer to standard 5); training logs, progress entries and/or activity instruction/supervision notes; injury/incident reports, pre-participation medical clearance, and return to participation clearance documents. All records should be kept as securely as possible, with limited access by anyone not on staff. Examples of securing records include locked filing cabinets, and password-protected computers and computer files. In settings where participants are not otherwise required to sign protective legal documents (e.g., informed consent, agreement to participate, waiver; refer to [Appendix H](#)) covering all athletically related activities, the Strength and Conditioning professional should have such legal documents prepared by an appropriate professional, for participants under his/her supervision. These records should be preserved and maintained for a period of time determined by the institution where the facility is housed or professional legal advice and consultation.

7. Equal Opportunity & Access

Standard 7.1

Strength and Conditioning professionals and their employers must provide facilities, training, programs, services and related opportunities in accordance with all laws, regulations and requirements mandating equal opportunity, access and non-discrimination. Such federal, state and possibly local laws and regulations apply to most organizations, institutions and professionals. Discrimination or unequal treatment based upon according to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity and expression, political affiliation, age, disability, veteran status, genetic information or sexual orientation or other such legal classifications is generally prohibited.

Guideline 7.1

If a Strength and Conditioning professional witnesses any discriminatory or unequal treatment of individuals while performing duties in the scope of employment, the illegal conduct must be immediately reported to a supervisor, compliance department and/or the general counsel for the employment entity. In order to protect the interests of the Strength and Conditioning professional, it is also recommended to consult with a private legal counsel when the foregoing situation is encountered.

8. Participation in Strength & Conditioning Activities by Children

Guideline 8.1

Children under seven (7) years of age should not be permitted to engage in strength and conditioning activities with free weights or exercise devices/machines in facilities designed for use by adults and adolescents, and should be denied access to such training areas. Other forms of strength and conditioning activities may be beneficial for such children, and should be recommended according to the established guidelines, and with a greater degree of instruction and supervision than that supplied to adolescents and adults. Children participating in such activities should be cleared as specified in the NSCA's "Standard for Pre-participation Screening and Clearance" (refer to standard 1).

Guideline 8.2

Children between seven (7) and fourteen (14) years of age who have reached a level of physical, emotional, and intellectual maturity allowing participation in specified strength and conditioning activities, as determined and certified by their medical care provider (or by the Strength and Conditioning professional acting in concert with a child's medical care provider), and after clearance for participation as specified in the NSCA's "{Standard for Pre-participation Screening and Clearance" (refer to standard 1), should be individually assessed by the Strength and Conditioning professional in conjunction with the child's parent(s)/guardian(s)/custodian(s) to determine if such children may engage in such activities in areas containing free weights and exercise devices/machines generally used by adults and older children. If so permitted, such activities should be developed and implemented according to established guidelines, and with a greater degree of instruction and supervision than that supplied to adolescents and adults.

Guideline 8.3

Children fourteen (14) years of age and older who, according to the Strength and Conditioning practitioner's professional judgment, have reached a level of physical, emotional, and intellectual maturity allowing them to engage in specified Strength and Conditioning activities (provided they have been granted parental consent and been cleared for participation as specified in the NSCA's "Standard for Pre-participation Screening and Clearance"; refer to standard 1), may engage in such activities in areas

containing free weights and exercise devices/machines generally used by adults, and with a greater degree of instruction and supervision than that supplied to adult populations while training.

9. Supplements, Ergogenic Aids & Drugs

Standard 9.1

Strength and Conditioning professionals must not prescribe, recommend or provide drugs, controlled substances or supplements that are illegal, prohibited, or harmful to participants for any purpose including enhancing athletic performance, conditioning or physique. Only those substances that are lawful (via third party testing) and have been scientifically proven to be beneficial, or at least not harmful, may be recommended to participants by Strength and Conditioning professionals, and only to individuals age 18 or above and not in an individualized manner.

Notice

This document is intended to provide relevant practice parameters for Strength and Conditioning professionals to utilize when carrying out their responsibilities in providing services to athletes or other participants. The standards and guidelines presented here are based on published scientific studies, pertinent statements from other associations, analysis of claims and litigation, and a consensus of expert views. However, this information is not a substitute for individualized judgment or independent professional advice.

Neither the NSCA nor the contributors to this project assume any duty owed to third parties by those reading, interpreting or implementing this information. When rendering services to third parties, these standards and guidelines cannot be adopted for use with all participants without exercising independent judgment and decision-making based on the Strength and Conditioning professional's individual training, education and experience. Furthermore, Strength and Conditioning practitioners must stay abreast of new developments in the profession so that these standards and guidelines may evolve to meet particular service needs.

Neither the NSCA nor the contributors to this project, by reason of authorship or publication of this document, shall be deemed to be engaged in practice of any branch of professional discipline (e.g., medicine, physical therapy, law) reserved for those licensed under state law. Strength and Conditioning practitioners utilizing this information are encouraged to seek and obtain such advice, if needed or desired, from those licensed professionals.

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