

# **Freestyle Trampoline Parents Guide**

*Prepared By:*

**FREESTYLE TRAMPOLINE ASSOCIATION**

## **What Is Freestyle Trampoline?**

Freestyle Trampoline is a derivative of the classical Olympic Trampoline stream. It was born on social media from the Extreme Flippers Youtube Channel. They were actually a group of skiers and snowboarders from Europe who jumped on a garden trampoline in the early 2000s and began making videos of their funny antics in their backyard.

This gradually grew into bigger skills and eventually, by 2010, “Flippers” as they call themselves, started posting regular videos of their training and the new skills they had accomplished. Think of it like a training log on social media where other Flippers around the world could comment showing support, sharing tips and overall lifting the self-esteem of the account holder.

By 2015, a small group of dedicated athletes who were self-taught, or had some minimal gymnastics training, began taking their training on their backyard trampolines more seriously and manufacturers within the garden tramp community took notice and in turn began producing better and more sophisticated garden trampolines. This new group of young flippers called themselves GTrampers (for Garden Trampoline). With a few popular social media posts of fun and wacky stunts on their #gtramps, a new community was born and the concept took off around the world, expanding to the United States, Russia; then Australia and New Zealand.

Over the last few years trampoline park brands took notice of these posts, sponsoring some of the athletes by providing a training facility in exchange for social media shoutouts and tags. This spread awareness throughout the growing trampoline park industry. This was a substantial benefit because it helped take some of the younger kids out of their backyards and into a new community with some supervision. Over the last few years we have seen some the parks begin to embrace this new community and begin to provide better trampolines, throw mats and more educated staff that can keep an eye on the kids. This was a tremendous step forward for the sport.

Since early 2012 more brands are getting behind the gramp community, who we now call ‘Freestyle’ trampolinists. The videos have so much attention many of these young flippers and gtrampers are now considered ‘influencers’ (over 100,000 followers on Instagram or YouTube). This has sparked a rise out of the community and many kids are now turning away from traditional trampoline and turning to Freestyle instead. But why?

The new generation is more focused on their personal path rather than the path set out for them by their elders. In the FTA’s theory story, “*Coaching Creatures*” we discuss how a leading factor is the advancement in technology that is at the fingertips of the youth. Years ago there were less options and kids for the most part went into more traditional sports. Now, with social media, kids all over the world can connect with one another, share their stories instantaneously with the touch of a button and explore new options and cultures on their own. They also have greater access to information than ever before, so they can literally learn on-line if they wish to.

With this new technology, the Flippers are taking training and their sport in their own hands, building a better platform from their abstractions, where they are not told what flips to do or not do. Research analytics have noted that formal sports participation is decreasing across the board for all sports and live ticket sales for sporting events is on the decline, forcing many brands to go online to reach their audience.

Due to this “*Do It Yourself*” attitude some people have claimed that this form of acrobatics is *dangerous* and needs to be stopped or prevented. This is where the FTA has been created to help guide the new generation. We are here to help educate and guide this young community on the safety aspect of their

sport while also providing them with a value trade in the form of events or a platform for them to show off their skills and embrace a new philosophy.

### **What is the Freestyle Trampoline Association ~ FTA?**

The FTA's mission is to help build a platform for the flipping trampoline community in their image, not in the FTA's image ~ '**For the athletes, by the athletes.**' The FTA is more of a consultant and guidance councillor to the new generation of athletes who have taken trampoline into their own hands. Most of them pride themselves on being 'self-taught' and the FTA is there simply to give them the option to seek educational tools and offer advice when they ask for it. Our events are a way to show them not to just be the 'crazy' kid going for insane stunts if they want a future for their sport. We teach them that brands who wish to get behind them want more of a good show than just big skills. Those skills can of course be built up over time, step-by-step, in a safe way that is ultimately a faster progression in the long term. But if we don't provide them with that value trade, why would they listen? They Wouldn't and that is why many try traditional acrobatic and purposefully turn away because they would rather go it alone. We do not want them to be alone as it is more dangerous but the reasons for not wanting to do traditional acrobatics is very clear through the biological and psychological research outlined in Coaching Creatures and just simply by asking the athletes what they want.

**All of this information is available on the FTA website and on social media :**

[www.FreestyleTrampolineAssociation.com](http://www.FreestyleTrampolineAssociation.com)

**@FreestyleTrampoline\_Official** on Instagram and

**@FreestyleTrampolineAssociation** via Facebook.

The FTA began in 2017, based on popular demand from the athletes who are building this new Freestyle sport on their own. The FTA has created an App called the GRT Network that will provide beginner level skills as well as safety information free of charge. For a nominal monthly subscription fee the FTA will provide higher level skill progression tutorials for the more serious athlete who may be attempting to take their training to the next level. The GRT Network App is full of both traditional and freestyle tutorials and educational content from our network of clients and supporters from across the globe. Any acrobatic athlete can utilize these videos to learn step-by-step, from the Circus Arts to Olympic Trampoline to Parkour, Gramp and even students in Psychology or Exercise Science studies. The App is just one of the many ways the FTA is trying to help this community and sport have a handle on knowledge and safety concepts related to training and development of their sport.

The FTA did not create the sport of trampoline, nor do we believe the way some young athletes learn is really the safest method. This is based on statistical analysis provided by our partners in the traditional trampoline industry. The FTA sees a need to attempt to educate these athletes by at least offering them another option that again, has a fair value trade, while teaching them the reality of the road they are going down.

The FTA has done a great deal of research to understand how to inspire the new generation to learn and develop their training mechanisms that will lead to the most successful behaviour patterns. The works of great behaviouralists and psychologists such as **B.F Skinner, John Watson** and **Jean Piaget** have all contributed to help form the FTA's stance on how to help inspire the youth to be safer, rather than simply tell them to change their behaviours. Many traditional forms of education and behaviour control are coercive and are therefore less effective which can be clearly seen now a days.

The FTA is taking another approach to help guide these new athletes in the right direction that will allow them to at least be knowledgeable about the decisions they are making. The FTA's perspective is to create a series of small local feeder system style events, to larger National events, in order to show them in a live environment that their training matters when they gather to meet other flippers from around the world.

The FTA is always looking for new safety measures and new ways to approach the athletes that will educate them and encourage them in a manner that they will actually understand. We hope they will take their training seriously and implement safety precautions at all times, whether at home or at their local trampoline park. The FTA understands that these Flippers may encourage other young athletes to try the skills they have built up over years of training and experience. We are not encouraging the Flippers to do anything they were not previously doing but we do want to ensure the originators of the sport that we are inspiring, mentoring and helping to pass on their knowledge to the next generation of young flippers and gtramp athletes.

In this way, we continually look to companies who will support those athletes and mentor them, passing on their knowledge. The FTA, as a consultant, will continue to find ways to inspire the youth in a positive, safe and fun manner. The research shows that this is the safest and most successful path to build a proper platform for the growth of *their* way of flipping. The FTA is always looking for new ideas and ways of passing on this education so if you have ideas we are always open to suggestions.

Here are some ways we are offering a value trade for the sport:

- \* **Live Events.** The live events the FTA creates for the Freestyle community encourages safety because athletes who attend are in essence doing “mock meets” (meetups) with each other. This puts them into a higher pressure situation, which statistically reduces their confidence, which in turn reduces their ego, thereby reducing the difficulty of the skills being attempted. The athletes realize if they are injured at the event it will be publicized on social media to their peers, which has shown to reduce the number of competitors. Of course, no solution is perfect and there is the small number of athletes who get a boost of endorphins by trying to showoff to their idols and this could increase injury risks. We have seen this online, long before the FTA became involved; however, in reality the events offer more benefits than harm by bringing unsupervised athletes together, inspiring them to learn some level of safety. We constantly remind them that they do not “need” to win and they are quite thankful for that message. Researchers have noted that traditional acrobatics has been known to increase risk to athletes by pressuring them to *“go for gold.”* We do the precise opposite by focusing on the community aspect and having them work together to “put on a show for the brands who sponsor their events” In this way they are team working together to increase their opportunities to have fun events.
- \* **GRT Network App.** The FTA, in association with Greg Roe Trampoline (GRT), created an video based educational App that will house many tutorials and educational safety videos to help provide each athlete with a ‘pocket coach’ who can help keep them on a step-by-step path. The beginner skills and safety based videos will be offered free of charge and the higher skill development videos will be a nominal fee for all athletes across the world simply to keep the app online and able to help the greater population of acrobats.
- \* **Throw Mat Safety.** The FTA demands that throw mats are available at all events and for the big skills throw mats MUST BE USED. At first, many athletes resisted the FTA’s requests to use throw mats but over time they have learned to utilize them at all events when going for the bigger skills, or at least having the on stand-by. At every event we insist on a ‘mat thrower’ just in case, at the ready.
- \* **Coaching.** The FTA connects and speaks to brands and brings athletes who show the motivation to coach to their clinics and has the athletes learn what it means to be a coach and to appreciate the safety elements of their sport in a new light by taking the safety in their hands in a controlled environment.
- \* **‘Freestyle Freddy’ Mascot.** The FTA has created a fun, quirky, educational mascot that was launched February 16, 2019 on Instagram as part of the **Freestyle Frenzy Supertramp Battle Series** in Europe. This new account follows the life of ‘Freddy’ - a cute and quirky orange stuffed animal dog, with a mischievous side, who wishes to become part of the#GRTCrew. He will be training step-by-step with Greg Roe and also with the members of the GRTCrew, to show the younger generation how to learn

safely and while still having fun. He is meant to inspire and also allow young athletes to connect with something they can relate to. Freestyle Freddy will address not just safe training progressions but also issues prevalent within the community, such as bullying, anxiety and depression. He will add a light side that gives kids a funny side to their sport and a reason to smile and laugh every day, whatever the challenges are they face. Freddy will also have a mischievous side (*what trouble he gets into when Greg & Trish are away*) as well as 'Fun Facts' about each city he visits along his travels. Of course he will try to connect with the athletes and be present to train with them at each event. **#FreestyleFreddy @FreestyleFreddy\_Official**. By disguising the information in a fun creative way retention has been shown to increase, compared to traditional methods used by coaches who still operate fundamentally on the negative reinforcement principal.

- \* **New Competitive Model.** The FTA uses a different competitive strategy to entice athletes to actually reduce their difficulty. We focus more on the creative elements that make each individual stand out. Traditional acrobatics focuses on execution, but by increasing value for creativity instead of difficulty, we accomplish much of the same behavioural pattern. It has been proposed by some traditional acrobatic researchers that by focusing less on large skills and by creating a 33% division in scoring categories between the three elements - **Difficulty, Execution & Creativity** - the FTA will insure less injuries over time. Since it has never been formally done before, events of this kind are difficult to verify. However, we have researched and spoken to many traditional, government backed researchers and safety professionals who have backed this claim in order to be assured its implementation is based on reported recommendations.
- \* **Conditioning Programs.** The FTA has created free access to strength and conditioning programs for all athletes that can easily be downloaded. Strength and conditioning has a direct correlation to the injury rates of athletes and therefore it should be taken seriously. Athletes who do not build up their core strength and specific trampoline body elements such as ankles, neck, shoulders and quads are at an increased risk.
- \* **Parent Involvement.** The FTA includes parents in the development process of their children. Since the athletes are taking their skills in their own hands the FTA is effectively unable to give direct guidance on a daily basis. The FTA has created this document to inform and advise parents of the risks that face their children in this sport and to show them there is a way to help keep them safe. The GRT Network App is something the parents should also familiarize themselves with to help with this process. The FTA also brings in parent volunteers to their events, to help coordinate activities. In this way, we can work directly with the families to further develop a mutually beneficial relationship, so the athletes and the parents are closer to the sport. Please message us to see how you can become more involved.
- \* **Putting on a Show.** The FTA often downplays the importance of competition and simply educates the athletes that it can be more about a 'show' for the sponsors and brands that ultimately pay to publicize and further their sport. If the Freestyle athletes want their sport and their community to grow they need to satisfy the sponsors that they can provide a value. In this way, the FTA hosts '*competitions*' that tells the competitors they need to be aware they are here to show off their sport and make sure they don't perpetuate the 'crazy' or dangerous aspect of it. We teach them it should be secondary to the community aspect of the events that the FTA creates. We don't focus on medals or winning, we focus on community and fun and allow athletes to show off what they have learned as a way to build confidence, but we never pressure them. Success at competitions is secondary and while traditionalists may still focus primarily on success, research has shown this aids in unnecessarily increasing risk within the sport.
- \* **Event Rules.** With each event the FTA hosts we have a short meeting with the athletes and review the rules and the reason they are there in the first place. We remind them they are *demonstrating* the validity of their belief system, not competing in a blood thirsty competition for gold medals. Competitions have been shown to increase risk and this has been noted in many traditional acrobatic research journals. The athletes are told they will have to tell the judges the skill they are about to attempt. If the judges do not feel it is something within their skill range, they will ask the athlete to 'set' the skill. This means they will have to show a builder (*lead up to the skill, usually one flip or rotation less*). The judges will then determine if they feel it is safe for the athlete to attempt that skill or combo. If they determine it is not safe the athlete must choose a different skill. If they refuse to listen to the judges or

blatantly disregard the rules they will be asked to stop. If they again refuse, they will be removed from the competition. The FTA creates a demand for this rule to be adhered to by reminding the athletes and parents repeatedly that they are showing the world their value and if they want to be acknowledged they need to accept the rules. In this way we are simply just trying to help them build their sport, not simply follow our rules which increases retention due to a lowered coercion factor. This being said, we also always make sure we ask the community what rules they feel are appropriate and fair for this value trade. Before we launch any new series we always consult the athletes first, taking into account all their considerations. It doesn't mean the brands will follow all of them, but we always listen and try to look for the safest option.

- \* **Athlete Organized Events.** The FTA inspires athletes who we work with closely to organize their own events because, after all, it is their sport. The FTA is nothing more than a ticket sales manager and safety/development/marketing consultant for the Flipping community. Athletes who wish to host an event and are over 16 years of age are educated in a mentorship program. Expenses are paid by the brands who we can bring in, as well as a portion of the ticket sales the athletes acquire with their own social media promotion. It is the goal of the FTA to eventually hand-off these aspects of the FTA to the athletes, once they have learned how to handle their sport on their own. The FTA is not here to tell athletes what to do, but gently inspire them and remind them of what *not* to do.
- \* **Waivers.** The FTA has ensured all athletes or their parents and / or guardians sign a Release of Liability Waiver prior to entering every event. This acknowledges both parents and the athletes understand the safety rules and risks of their chosen sport. The FTA does not condone jumping without an educated coach present but knows that the athletes may choose to this approach.

### **Conclusion:**

The FTA is not here to tell athletes within the new Freestyle Trampoline community what they *should do*. We are simply observing what they *already do* and provide them with educational and marketing advice to help them build their sport the way they wish to as safe as possible. The FTA repeatedly reminds everyone involved that their future is in their hands. All we can do is help guide them, not solve all the issues that might come along the way, or prevent every injury.

One of the founders of the FTA, Greg Roe, has suffered several injuries over his 20+ year career and knows all too well the dangers of the sport, better than most. These experiences have made him appreciate the severity of the situation and made him more aware to how to best help young athletes to not repeat the same mistakes. **He has partnered with acrobats, sports enthusiasts and some of the founding members of the sport of trampoline, to inspire the youth to learn from the errors of others; effectively creating a new offshoot of the sport that is more inclusive and less conformist.**

### **What Can You Do as a Parent to Help Keep Your Child Safe?**

Here are a few things you can do to help to reduce the risk of injury for your child:

- \* Strongly encourage them to adopt the FTA conditioning program available online.
- \* Strongly encourage them to adopt the FTA step-by-step program available online.
- \* Watch their training at home and at the park and ask questions and be involved with their development. Do not tell them how to train, simply ask questions and offer guidance in any form. Offer videotaping sessions, holding the mat, throwing the mat under them when they go for tricks. Take the time to become involved with their passion. You are better off working with them, rather than against them.

- \* Download the **GRT Network App** for online education to help keep your child up-to-date with professional, informed, current educational protocols from around the world.
- \* Volunteer at an event to keep a watchful eye on your child and to show him or her that you are taking genuine interest in their hobby.
- \* Encourage your child to train at a trampoline park as often as possible and speak with the owner or manager to ensure they understand what this sport is about and what your child is hoping to accomplish. Request a meeting to discuss sponsorship from the park to help your child develop and allow the park to add increased visibility through social media, as they follow their progress and journey.
- \* Organize small meet ups at your home with other local Flippers where you can keep an eye on them in a controlled environment - many parents will charge each child attending a \$25 - 50 hosting fee, depending on the duration of the meetup, to cover food expenses and minor costs.
- \* Call the FTA and ask questions. Our door is always open. Many of those who are involved in the FTA have families that they want to help keep safe. Talking to other parents also helps to understand what your child wants out of the sport/community.
- \* Have your child attend regular trampoline or gymnastics classes within a structured program. Most kids would rather jump Freestyle, understandably, but when they are very young it is a great benefit to have them learn the foundations of trampoline and how to build up skills step-by-step. You should gently remind them that technique and proper foundations are necessary for their safety and skill development even just once a week.
- \* Have your child follow the rules of the manufacturer to the best of your capabilities. Flippers will take the spring pads and nets off the garden trampolines but we recommend that you, as the parent, advise them to keep the nets on. As a consultant, the FTA can advise them, but parents will tend to have the ability to keep a closer eye on the daily activities of their child.
- \* Do your own research on safety and read all of the educational materials available from the FTA to learn the safe way to progress and how to best reach your child in a supportive and positive manner. Parents who team up with their children will be in more control of their development than those who try to coercively control what is happening. That is why the Freestyle Flippers are not in traditional acrobatic gyms in the first place. Talk to your child about this document and show them you support their endeavours but you have their safety in mind and their best interests at heart. If they ask to attend an event please feel free to reach out to us and ask questions. If we all work together, they can have a long career in the sport.

### **Addressing Anxiety and Depression:**

It has recently been brought to light that many of the Freestyle (GTramp) community suffer from anxiety, bullying or depression. The FTA is fundamentally trying to help the Flippers create a platform to give them a belief system that creates a supportive community they can feel a part of.

Many psychological disorders stem from lack of belonging to a group that holds common views with the individual. As anxiety and depression seem to be on the rise in young teens, this is something we feel needs to be addressed. The Freestyle Trampoline community is a belief system that tries to build the self-esteem of the young athletes by educating them, inspiring them and empowering them to learn what the world is really about and ultimately what they are capable of.

It is about building your career, not waiting for someone to hand it to you. The FTA is helping build these athletes, but only has a small influence over their behaviour. As a parent of a Flipper you should realize that your child may not feel like they fit in, or have a place in their school, so they may use the Freestyle Trampoline community as their belief system that gives meaning to their lives. In an increasingly segregated world, where abstractions run rampant, children find it hard to know where they belong. They are desperately looking for a place to call home. Much research has been done on human belief

systems and belonging to a belief system has been shown to be a huge component to a happy and successful life. Team up with your child to bring success to life, instead of just dictating what they should believe in. **Projecting your opinions on the athletes will not create the desired behaviour pattern.**

### **Conclusion:**

The FTA is basically a group of like-minded individuals organized for a joint purpose; a consultancy or marketing entity that contains experts in many different fields in one form or another. Our aim and goal is nothing more than to educate the Flipping community on the safest ways to do their sport, while offering them a **fair value trade** at the same time in order to gain their attention. We have not created their sport, we have embraced it instead.

Injuries will always be a part of sports; ANY sport. Small injuries such as twisted ankles, sprains and stress fractures will still occur, no matter what advice the FTA provides. However, major injuries such as paralysis can be reduced but not 100% of the time. Nobody should assume they are above the statistics and take their child's safety lightly. The FTA is not able to prevent all injuries but we hope to increase education that will lead to overall safer techniques in the future.

The Traditional Olympic stream has given up in many ways on the Freestyle (gtramp) community because they feel the athletes do not represent the best interests of the sport the way they know it. The FTA does not agree with this stand point and want to help the Flippers remain as safe as possible despite how they want to modify the sport in the future. The FTA will continue to help build the sport of Freestyle Trampoline as a way to show the proper training protocols for athletes who choose to flip in their own unique way.

No reasonable person can guarantee a guaranteed safe solution, so understand you are participating in this sport and the FTA events under your own volition, knowing the risks. However, we will continue to educate you and your child with the most up-to-date available literature.

Thank you for downloading this handbook and taking the time to read it. We will regularly encourage parents to read this and further documents and discuss it with their child, so you can fully understand this sport and the FTA's role within the industry.

Respectfully,

*The FTA Team*