

Expectations for Interacting with Youth 2015

Purpose: This document provides guidance for University of Minnesota employees, students and volunteers when they interact with youth, based on the Safety of Minors Regents and [Administrative](#) policies. The policies contain the formal obligations, including requirements for background checks and training.

Mandatory Reporting

While working with vulnerable populations, such as minors (children under the age of 18), all University of Minnesota employees, students and volunteers are required to report all suspected physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect of minors to county child protection or the local police within 24 hours. The policy applies to all minors on University premises and in University sponsored programs, including enrolled and PSEO students.

Adult Behavior

An adult should remain in visible contact with youth at all times, with the exception of private use of bathroom and dressing room facilities. Follow your program leader's directions regarding supervision of students and appropriate ratios of adults to children. Stay with the participants during demonstrations or other guest instructor-led activities unless directed otherwise by the program leader.

Avoid being alone with a minor. However, when one-on-one interactions are necessary (such as for discipline, mentoring or instruction), ensure another adult is within view.

Use appropriate language and model honorable behavior, such as respect, integrity, honesty and excellence. Show respect for children in how you talk with them, including never talking about a child in front of other children or reprimanding a child in front of others. Address the youth by name and speak to them at their level.

Always provide children with clear instructions, expectations and boundaries in advance of starting an activity. Praise them for listening and for positive behavior, follow up and remind them of expectations when needed.

Profanity or sexualized language or jokes is inappropriate around youth. Violating state law (e.g. providing minors with alcohol or illegal drugs) is forbidden. Consuming alcohol while responsible for minors is not appropriate.

Physical Contact

Take particular care when touching youth. Most people understand the difference between appropriate touching, like a handshake or pat on the back, and touching that is sexual or disrespectful. Consider how any physical contact may be perceived by others. Never touch a youth in a place on the body that is normally concealed by a swimsuit. Never touch a minor against his or her will unless there is imminent danger.

Do not initiate frontal hugs. Shoulder-to-shoulder hugs are appropriate if the minor needs to be supported or comforted by a staff member. Do not initiate and try to avoid having a minor sit on the lap of a staff member.

Do not use physical punishment or withholding of necessities such as food, water and/or shelter to modify behavior. Physical hazing and initiation rituals that lead to embarrassment or that require youth to do anything that makes them uncomfortable, are prohibited.

Bathroom Visits

Respect the privacy of minors when toilets are used, clothes are changed or showers taken. Do not use or allow any participant to use cameras, smartphones and other recording devices in bathrooms or locker rooms.

A recommended practice for program staff overseeing bathroom visits for minors in 5th grade or younger is for one program staff to accompany the program participants (minimum of two minors, same gender as staff) to the bathroom facility. If there are no stalls and only one minor can use the bathroom at a time, the adult must wait outside the door with the other minors.

If your program leader directs that middle school minors should be accompanied, an adult can wait outside the bathroom door. Generally minors in high school do not need an adult with them.

If there is a transgender student among the participants, whenever possible use gender neutral bathrooms for the entire group so that no minor feels singled out (family or single stall bathrooms are examples.) Use the [map of gender neutral bathrooms](#) on the Twin Cities campus or [this link](#) for the Duluth campus

Dress

When working with youth, do not wear clothes that are sexually suggestive or revealing. Wear clothing that conceals your midriff (even when arms are raised), cleavage (even when leaning over) and undergarments. Do not wear items that display advertisements for alcohol, tobacco or drugs, or suggestive sayings (e.g. Party Naked.) Avoid hats that are typically prohibited in K-12 schools. Cover tattoos that would be inappropriate for K-12 schools, including certain phrases, pictures of gun or knife graphics, etc.

Confidentiality

Conversations and interactions with minors or their parents should remain confidential. Do not share information about individuals with anyone other than the program leader. Do not post anything (including photos) on social media sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).

Health Concerns

Follow best practices for prevention of illness such as washing hands frequently—particularly before snacks or meals and when using restrooms. Avoid sharing clothing, hats, water bottles and certain toys between children to prevent the spread of contagious conditions.

Have plenty of water available and take frequent breaks to avoid dehydration. Monitor the amount of time spent in extreme heat and use sunscreen for activities outdoors.

Do not provide participants meals or snacks unless information has been collected about allergies.

Unless you have been assigned the responsibility of handling medication, do not dispense over-the-counter or prescribed drugs to the participants.

Preventing and Managing Accidents and Injuries

Be prepared for possible incidents or accidents by identifying potential situations in advance. Make sure that everyone is dressed appropriately for the activity, particularly with proper footwear as foot and leg injuries are extremely common without proper precautions. Be aware of the location of first aid supplies and who has access to the participant medical and emergency information.

If an accident or injury occurs, first assess the situation and call 911 if the situation is an emergency. Inform the minor’s parent and/or guardian of the situation, document the details on an accident form and follow all recommended guidelines within your department to report it.

The program leader will have a plan in place for addressing other emergencies (e.g. fire, weather, toxic gas evacuations, unfamiliar packages, intruders, and lost or missing children). Be aware of where to take youth from the main program location, and how to locate emergency route signage from other locations.

Safe Movement

Be careful when moving groups of minors from one location to another. Take a head count before leaving and upon arrival at the destination,

When walking with groups, use crosswalks and have one person, preferably an adult, lead the group and another walk at the back of the group.

Follow the program leader’s direction for transportation of participants on University busses or through other approved means, ensuring participants are wearing seat belts.

Gift Giving/Receiving

University employees and/or students should not give a minor a gift or receive a gift from a minor. The perception of favoritism (giving a gift) or bribery (receiving a gift) should be avoided. Giving a gift of food or drink could cause problems if the minor has food allergies or certain medical conditions.

Non-discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Follow the U of M’s equal opportunity policy, which means providing equal access to and opportunity in all programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Sexual harassment is prohibited, and includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, sexually motivated physical contact, and other verbal and/or physical conduct and/or communication of a sexual nature. Incidents should be reported to the appropriate person within your unit or to the University equal opportunity officer.

**(For optional use)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I have read and understand and will abide by the *Expectations for Interacting with Youth*.

(Signature)

(Date)