

Guide for Youth Programs

Youth Protection Office

January 2026





PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The University of Arkansas is committed to providing a safe and welcoming experience for minors. All University employees, students, contractors, and volunteers are therefore expected to hold themselves to the highest standards of conduct when interacting with minors, as outlined by the Youth Protection Policy. This Guide is designed to assist with the development of practices to support compliance with the Youth Protection Policy. Third-Party Youth Programs must meet the additional requirements of the Guide for Third-Party Youth Programs. All areas/programs are still subject to all other relevant University policies and procedures, including the Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect Policy. Questions, documents, or communications should be directed to:

Youth Protection Office
University of Arkansas, AR 72701
479-575-4432
youthprotection@uark.edu



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REGISTRATION

All Youth Programs must register with the Youth Protection Office and identify both a Program Director and Program Contact at least thirty (30) calendar days before the Youth Program start date. Upon review, Youth Protection will notify the Program Director and Program Contact with additional information that must be provided and/or changes made before moving forward.

Should a Youth Program fail to be registered by the registration deadline, Youth Protection has the authority to require the Program to alter its start date to promote a safe learning environment for Program participants.

Should a Youth Program fail to comply with the operational requirements set forth in this Policy, including failing to register the Program, Youth Protection has the authority to deny the Program's request to operate and/or immediately cancel or suspend the Program.

To register a Youth Program, [click here](#).

PLANNING YOUR PROGRAM

There are several components to planning Youth Programs that should be considered early in the process to ensure a successful event. Those needing assistance in the planning and operation of a program may wish to contact Melissa Graham at youthprotection@uark.edu

AGENDA

Create an agenda for the program, detailing the activities, locations, and timeframes. Ensure that drop-off, pick-up, meals, free time, and transitional times are accounted for, and that supervision is provided during the entire program, including down time.

PROGRAM RULES

Participants and Youth Program Personnel must abide by all University regulations and may be removed from the program for non-compliance with rules. The following should be included in program rules, if applicable. Other program rules may be included as appropriate:

- The possession or use of alcohol, tobacco, non-prescribed prescription drugs, illicit drugs, fireworks, guns, and other weapons is strictly prohibited. Toy weapons are also prohibited.
- Violence, sexual abuse, harassment, hazing, or bullying will not be tolerated.
- Theft of property—regardless of owner—will not be tolerated.



- Misuse or damage of university property is prohibited. Charges will be assessed against those participants who are responsible for damage or misuse of university property.
- The inappropriate use of cameras, imaging, and digital devices is prohibited, including use of such devices in showers, restrooms, or other areas where privacy is expected.
- The operation of a motor vehicle by a participant is prohibited while attending and participating in the program.
- The parking of Youth Program Personnel and participant vehicles must follow University parking regulations.
- Rules and procedures governing when and under what circumstances participants may leave University property during the program.

HOUSING

Overnight programs present a unique set of challenges that should be managed carefully. Please be aware of the following safety precautions:

- Additional supervision is required for overnight programs.
- Youth Program Personnel should not enter participant rooms alone. If it is necessary to enter a room to check on a participant, two Youth Program Personnel should be present.
- The program must provide overnight supervision for its participants. University Housing staff are responsible for building operations and are NOT intended to serve as supervision for participants.

The program must adopt and implement rules and regulations for proper supervision of participants in university housing:

- Establish a curfew time which is age-appropriate for participants.
- Guests of participants (other than other minor participants) are restricted to visitation in the building lobby and/or floor lounges during approved hours specified by the program.
- The program must comply with all security measures and procedures specified by University Housing and Campus Safety & Security.



TRANSPORTATION

Transportation plans, including information regarding drop-off and pick-up and transportation within the Program, should be documented. Programs that use University vehicles or drivers must also comply with the University Vehicle Safety Policy regarding drivers and vehicles.

EMERGENCY PLANS

Emergency plans, including guidelines for weather emergencies and for communicating and responding to UA Alerts, should be documented and provided to all Youth Program Personnel. At least two members of the Youth Program Personnel should be registered through the Campus Safety App, **SafeZone**, [click here](#). Programs should require parent/guardian contact information and keep this information accessible for use in case of an emergency. Each program should also develop a plan for communicating pertinent emergency procedures to parents/guardians.

WAIVERS

Each participant's parent/guardian must complete and submit a Liability Waiver form, a photo release form, and a medication release form. Exemptions to this requirement must be requested in advance.

MANAGING MEDICAL ISSUES

Information regarding medical information requirements and medication management procedures should be communicated in writing to parents/guardians in advance of the Program. At a minimum, all programs should have a plan for responding to accidents and medical emergencies. Each Program Director should train Youth Program Personnel on these plans.

SEEKING MEDICAL CARE

If emergency medical care is needed, call 911 for an ambulance. If it appears that a participant requires medical care beyond basic first aid or their prescription/over-the-counter medication, parents/guardians should be contacted immediately.

ACCOMMODATING SPECIAL NEEDS

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that programs provide reasonable modifications when necessary to enable participants with disabilities to participate fully unless it can be demonstrated that necessary modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of services offered by the program.

FOOD ALLERGIES

All programs should be prepared to accommodate participants with food allergies and other special dietary needs. Programs serving food should have a method for soliciting and



collecting information on food allergies such as the Youth Protection – Medical Information Form and the Youth Protection – Food Allergy, Intolerance, or Dietary Concern Form. It is important to clearly communicate with any food vendors regarding food allergies and other special dietary needs. Chartwells Dining is well versed in food allergy management. When there are participants with allergies, program staff should be familiar with recognizing and responding to signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction.

PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMUNICATION

Communication and parent/guardian information packages should address the following:

- Detailed agenda
- Procedures for medication management
- Personnel identification to be worn by Youth Program Personnel
- Drop-off and pick-up procedures
- Curfews (if overnight)
- Code of conduct for participants
- Program rules (including the requirements detailed in the Program Rules section)
- Program Director contact information for parent/guardian use
- If Internet access is provided to the participants, parents/guardians should be notified that there are no restrictions placed on the content.

A Parent Handbook Template has been developed to assist programs in developing a single communication piece that may be distributed to parents/guardians. The template should be customized to reflect the details for the program.

MARKETING MATERIALS

Approval from the University of Arkansas Licensing Office is mandatory for all marketing and advertising materials associated with university-operated programs. This includes materials such as print advertising, flyers, brochures and other collateral materials, giveaway items, invitations, digital ads and graphics, radio and television ads, outdoor advertisements such as billboards, magazines, and other promotional materials. All materials should be submitted for review prior to purchase or placement. Please contact: licenses@uark.edu.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

Virtual programs should comply with the requirements of this Guide to the extent applicable. In addition, Guidelines for Virtual Youth Programming have been developed as recommendations.



TRAINING

All Youth Program Personnel shall attend annual mandatory training on protecting participants from abusive emotional and physical treatment and on reporting child abuse or neglect. Program Directors are responsible for ensuring that all required training has been completed by Youth Program Personnel and Mandatory Reporting certificates of completion and signed Acknowledgments submitted to the Youth Protection Office. Training is valid for one year from the date of completion and must be renewed annually. In addition to the training required, Program Directors should address the following with Youth Program Personnel:

- Responsibilities and expectations;
- Policies, procedures, and enforcement, including check-in and check-out procedures;
- Appropriate crisis/emergency responses;
- Safety and security precautions;
- Addressing medical emergencies;
- Confidentiality issues involving minors;
- How to report suspected child abuse or neglect in accordance with the Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect Policy; and
- How to report other problematic behaviors by participants or by other Personnel.

HIRING PROCEDURE

Procedure and Steps for Employees and Volunteers working with Minors:

The following steps are required for individuals who provide care or supervision of minors as part of their University of Arkansas job/volunteer responsibilities:

University Employees:

- Background check of employee ([per campus policy 402.1](#)); this must occur pre-hire or before existing employee begins new duties involving minors.
- Give employees a copy of the university policy [on protection of minors \(217.1\)](#); Employee signs a form that they have read and understand the policy.
- Require employees to complete the Workday Mandatory Reporting Training and other training relevant to minors when applicable.
- HR person in the hiring unit in accordance with the Youth Protection Office ensures the completion of training and/or related documentation.



University Volunteers:

- Background check of volunteer (per campus [policy 402.1](#)); this must occur before volunteer begins duties involving minors.
- Give volunteers a copy of the university policy on protection of minors ([217.1](#)); Volunteer signs a form that they have read and understand the policy.
- Require volunteer to complete the Mandatory Reporting Training and other training relevant to minors when applicable.
- The Program Director, in accordance with the Youth Protection Office ensures the completion of training and/or related documentation.

The Youth Protection Office of the University of Arkansas would like to express our sincere gratitude for your unwavering commitment to the safety and well-being of the young participants in our programs. Your dedication to implementing and adhering to the guidelines outlined in this Youth Protection Handbook is crucial in maintaining a secure environment for all children under our care. Your diligence in completing necessary background checks, training, and following reporting procedures is appreciated. As we continue to work together to protect our youth, please remember that your efforts are invaluable in fostering a safe and nurturing atmosphere where children can thrive and grow. If the Youth Protection Office can be of assistance in any way, please contact us. Thank you for your continued partnership.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

Criteria

Background checks are required for all Authorized Program Staff. Information about the Standard Background Check may be found in the policy on [Background Checks](#). Supervised Program Staff may be required to pass the same background check based on the nature of the program. It is the responsibility of the Program Director to ensure that each Authorized Program Staff member has an acceptable background check before they are allowed to engage with participants. Additionally, Youth Program Personnel who will be driving as part of their duties in the Youth Program are subject to the requirements of the [University Vehicle Safety Policy](#). Youth Programs can require background checks on broader categories of individuals than those who are likely to have responsibility for the care, custody, or control of a minor as part of an activity or program, provided there is a business justification, that checks are made consistently across specific positions, and that the process and the results of individual background checks have been approved. Youth Programs must perform background checks on broader categories of individuals if



required by law. In addition to a criminal background check and child abuse registry check, Youth Programs may perform Personal Reference Checks for Youth Program Personnel.

Frequency

Background checks will be required every 2 years for Authorized Program Staff. All Youth Program Personnel are required to disclose any arrests, pending charges, or criminal convictions, not including minor traffic violations, to the Program Director within three business days of the arrest, indictment, or conviction, whichever is sooner. The Program Director will consult with appropriate University officials for review, as detailed in the Disqualifications section below. Background clearances from governmental agencies (e.g., school districts) that have been completed within 3 years from the start date of the activity and that meet the minimum requirements as indicated above are acceptable. The Authorized Program Staff must submit confirmation if a governmental agency's background clearance is being used to satisfy this requirement.

Disqualifications

Criminal convictions, deferred adjudications, pending charges, and/or sex offender background checks that return any offense could potentially disqualify a person from being employed by or assigned to a Youth Program. Social media findings may also be considered in the review of potential Youth Program Personnel. Any areas of concern will be forwarded to the appropriate University officials for review. In the event that the University officials restrict a person from working with minors, this restriction will be communicated to the Program Director. Convictions or pending charges in the following categories or categories that are similar in nature to the following may disqualify potential Youth Program Personnel from working in a Youth Program:

- Assault or battery
- Crimes against children, including child pornography
- Child abuse, neglect, or endangerment
- Domestic violence
- Drug-related offenses
- Human trafficking
- Kidnapping
- Murder, manslaughter, or criminally negligent homicide
- Sexual offenses
- Stalking

Conviction of criminal offenses relating to the abuse, exploitation, or neglect of an elderly person, an individual with disabilities, or animals will also be considered. The Youth



Protection Program reserves the right to consider other convictions as a reason for disqualification.

SUPERVISION OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Supervision

Youth Program Personnel must make every effort to ensure all of the program's activities are adequately supervised. Some of the factors to be considered in determining requirements for supervision are the number and age of minors involved in the program, the activities involved, the type of housing if applicable, and the age and experience of the staff members. Additional personnel should be assigned to ensure one-on-one contact with minors does not occur and that appropriate levels of supervision are implemented and maintained. The Program Director shall assign an Authorized Program Staff member who is at least 21 years of age to be accessible to participants. The staff member must reside in the housing unit, if applicable. In addition to the requirement that two Youth Program Personnel are to be present at all times when participants are being supervised, an additional Youth Program Personnel member should be available as a "floater" to stand in if one of the two Youth Program Personnel must leave the area.

Ratios

At no time should a participant or group of participants be left alone or without the appropriate number of Youth Program Personnel. The following minimum supervision ratios should be maintained at all times while the participants are in the care, control, or custody of Youth Program Personnel.

Day Programs

- Age 5 One Authorized Adult for every 6 Minors (1:6)
- Ages 6-8 One Authorized Adult for every 8 Minors (1:8)
- Ages 9-14 One Authorized Adult for every 10 Minors (1:10)
- Ages 15-17 One Authorized Adult for every 12 Minors (1:12)

No Minors under the age of five (5) may participate in a Day Program unless accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Residential or Overnight Programs

- Age 8 One Authorized Adult for every 6 Minors (1:6)
- Ages 9-14 One Authorized Adult for every 8 Minors (1:8)
- Ages 15-17 One Authorized Adult for every 10 Minors (1:10)



No Minors under the age of 8 may participate in a Residential or Overnight Program.

If participants from multiple age groups are combined in a single group, the ratio from the youngest participant in the group shall be applied to the whole.

All Youth Program Personnel ratios should conform to the above guidelines from the American Camps Association. If the calculation results in a fractional number, round up to the nearest whole number.

Examples:

- A day camp of 10-year-olds with 5 participants would require a minimum of 2 Youth Program Personnel.
- A day camp of 10-year-olds with 50 participants would require 6 Youth Program Personnel (1:10 ratio plus 1 additional staff).
- An overnight camp of 15-year-olds with 1000 participants would require 101 Youth Program Personnel (1:10 ratio plus 1 additional staff). These ratios should be maintained at all times, including but not limited to:
 - Periods when participants are given “free” or “rest” time.
 - Overnight when participants are housed in U of A residence halls or hotels without being accompanied by their parents. There should be sufficient staff on each floor to maintain the appropriate ratio for the age of the participants.
 - Travel to and from meals and activities.

Youth Programs with a small number (less than five) of participants should have a minimum of two individuals responsible for oversight. In large groups of participants, programs may need to provide additional staff for the oversight of participants, depending on the intended activities. The ratio of Youth Program Personnel to program minors should reflect the gender distribution of the participants if possible.

It is acceptable for an individual Authorized Program Staff member to provide program services to a group of participants (e.g., classroom instruction or outdoor activities) if the activity is: (1) conducted in an open or public area that is well-illuminated, and (2) where the group is observable to and interruptible by others outside the group at all times. This includes classroom or meeting activities where open doors or windows allow for a clear line of sight.

For assistance with determining the appropriate numbers of Youth Program Personnel or questions regarding staffing requirements, contact the Youth Protection Office.



INTERACTIONS BETWEEN YOUTH PROGRAM PERSONNEL AND PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Youth Program Personnel should behave professionally and always maintain the highest standards of personal behavior during a Youth Program. Youth Program Personnel should be aware of situations in which actions can be misconstrued or manipulated by others (for example, being alone with the last participant to leave). Conduct all dealings with participants in a public environment as much as possible, in order that all behavior can be readily observed.

Youth Program Personnel participating in a Youth Program should NOT:

- a) Have one-on-one contact with participants unless the interaction takes place in an open, well-illuminated space which is observable and interruptible by other adults. One-on-one contact, even in these spaces, should be avoided.
- b) Have any direct electronic communication, including contact on social media, with participants without at least two Youth Program Personnel members, the participant's parent/guardian, or a shared Program email address being included in the communication. Additionally, do not communicate with participants through email, text messages, social networking websites, Internet chat rooms, or other forms of social media unless there is an educational or programmatic purpose for the communication.
- c) Enter a participant's room, bathroom facility, changing area, shower area or similar area without at least two Youth Program Personnel in attendance. Participants should use a "buddy system" or otherwise be encouraged to stay together when going to the bathroom, on field trips, or when leaving the classroom area. If there is an emergency situation and two Youth Program Personnel are not available, the door(s) must remain open at all times.
- d) Share sleeping quarters, a bed, or sleeping bag with minors. Separate accommodations for Youth Program Personnel are required unless the Youth Program Personnel is the parent/guardian of the Participant. Participants should be placed in accommodations that allow for a locked door between themselves and Youth Program Personnel. Exceptions for accommodations where a locked door is not possible must be requested in advance.
- e) Shower, bathe, or undress with or in the presence of minors.
- f) Engage in abusive conduct of any kind toward, or in the presence of, a minor.
- g) Strike, hit, administer corporal punishment to, or touch any participant in an inappropriate or illegal manner.



- h) Engage in rough or sexually provocative games, including horseplay.
- i) Allow any inappropriate touching, including between participants.
- j) Use obscene language, use or respond to sexual innuendo, or make sexually suggestive comments.
- k) Transport participants to or from their homes, other than the driver's child(ren), except as specifically authorized in writing by the participant's parent/guardian and by the Program Director. Youth Program Personnel should not be alone in a vehicle with a participant who is not their child.
- l) Provide alcohol or drugs to any participant, consume alcohol or non-prescribed prescription drugs during a Youth Program, or provide any drugs or medication to any participant unless specifically authorized in writing by the parent/guardian and as outlined in in this document.
- m) Make sexual material in any form available to participants or assist them in any way in gaining access to such materials.
- n) Favor one participant more than another, give gifts to any one participant, or accept gifts of monetary value from any participant.
- o) Use language that encourages participants to keep secrets from their parent/guardians or from other Youth Program Personnel.

INJURIES, INCIDENTS, OR ACCIDENTS

Incidents and accidents can include such things as physical illness or injuries of participants and/or Youth Program Personnel; behavioral issues among participants, Youth Program Personnel, or visitors; violent or potentially violent behavior; the possession or use of alcohol or other drugs; inappropriate physical contact; or violations or potential violations of University policies. Emergencies, including emergency medical situations, should be reported to 911 immediately. Any incidents, accidents, or injuries occurring during a Youth Program should be reported to the University according to established policies. In addition to any other reporting or incident documentation, the Program Director should report any accidents/incidents to Risk Management & Safety as soon as possible. If consultation regarding reporting is needed, please contact Risk Management & Safety.

<https://risk.uark.edu/>

ABUSE OR NEGLECT OF A MINOR

If Youth Program Personnel become aware or suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect, they must act. If a child is in imminent danger, contact police at 911 to obtain immediate protection for the child, then call Campus Safety & Security at 479-575-2222. If the child is not in imminent danger, contact the Youth Protection Office. See the Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect Policy for more information about reporting.



Tips for recognizing abuse:

- Listen closely. Participants often form a bond with program staff and may disclose past or current abusive situations.
- Believe them. It is not your responsibility to investigate or substantiate claims. Remember that even highly regarded members of the community could be abusers.
- Watch participants carefully. As Youth Programs place more emphasis on controlling adult/child interactions, they sometimes leave an opening for peer abuse. Identify blind spots where peers might be alone together and supervise them closely.
- Know what you are looking for. Child abuse can take many forms including:
 - Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare, which can occur through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation, or attempted sexual abuse or sexual exploitation.
 - Sexual abuse or sexual exploitation, which may be perpetrated by an adult or another child, and it may or may not involve touching.
 - Negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child, which includes the failure to provide adequate food, medical treatment, supervision, clothing, or shelter.
- Err on the side of caution. In deciding whether to report an incident, it is not required that you have definitive proof that abuse or neglect has occurred. Any uncertainty in deciding to report suspected abuse or neglect should be resolved in favor of making a good faith report, and Arkansas law contains protection for those who make a good faith report.

If an allegation of child abuse, attempted child abuse, or child neglect has been made against Youth Program Personnel, they shall discontinue any further participation in Youth Programs until such allegation has been satisfactorily resolved.

MAINTAINING RECORDS

At the conclusion of the event, the program should maintain the following records:

- Final list of participants;
- Final list of Youth Program Personnel;
- Copies of all waivers and medical documentation including medication forms, physician's instructions, or medical clearance forms;
- Records of any incidents, injuries, or accidents that may have occurred during the activity or program; and
- Finalized version of participant handbooks and parent/guardian communications.



The University of Arkansas is steadfast in its dedication to creating and sustaining a safe, supportive, and compliant environment for all minors participating in University-sponsored programs. This guide serves as a comprehensive resource to assist Program Directors, staff, and volunteers in understanding their responsibilities, implementing best practices, and adhering to university policies and legal requirements. Your commitment to following these standards plays a vital role in protecting youth and upholding the integrity of our institution. We thank you for your partnership in ensuring the safety, dignity, and well-being of every child entrusted to our care. Should you have any questions or need further guidance, the Youth Protection Office remains available to assist.