



POLICY TITLE: Protection of Minors

POLICY NUMBER: 4

DEVELOPED BY: Ocean Park Association (OPA) Personnel
Sub-Committee in conjunction with the Executive Team & Executive
Director, April, 2025

APPROVED BY: Executive Committee on April 1, 2025

POLICY: This policy is considered a definitive document and supersedes any other documents including the Employee & Volunteer Handbooks.

OVERVIEW: OPA has a zero-tolerance policy for incidents of child abuse. We understand that protecting children is our most important responsibility. This document provides guidelines and establishes clearance procedures for those individuals involved in OPA programming that includes minors. Minors include those under 18 years of age. A report of molestation and abuse, or suspected molestation or abuse, will be treated with absolute priority, and the OPA will do everything in its power to fully support the successful prosecution of any perpetrator of the law.

SCOPE: This policy applies to full and part time employees, seasonal employees, volunteers, contractors, and 3rd party vendors that are involved in OPA programming specifically geared to minors. This does not apply to a one time guest teacher or speaker if they are supervised at all times, but rather for anyone who has regular contact with minors.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this policy is to state OPA's position regarding the protection of minors and provide practical guidance for interacting with minors.

RESPONSIBILITIES: The Executive Director is responsible for implementation and for assuring compliance with the policy.

Staff and Volunteer Selection and Screening

No screening method can eliminate the possibility of abuse and harassment, but a thorough process can identify applicants with a history of inappropriate conduct and deter dangerous people from applying or gaining access to minors. A rigorous screening and selection process signifies to potential applicants that our organization is committed to protecting minors and gives participants, parents, and other community members confidence that we are doing everything possible to keep children safe.

OPA will complete the appropriate background and references checks on individuals based on their level of involvement with minors. All those involved with minors in a paid or volunteer position shall have a background check completed, provide a minimum of two (2) references and complete the State Mandatory Reporting Training (See below for a link to the training). These items must be completed before working with minors.

IF an employee or volunteer already has obtained references, clearance/background check and/or a training certificate during employment for another organization, they may turn copies of them in to the office as long as they have been obtained within the past 2 years.

Background checks are a critical part of any protection of minors policy because they deter potential offenders and detect known offenders. Many organizations supporting minors require a criminal background check for all adult volunteers who work with minors.

Due to the confidential nature of information, background checks are typically administered by OPA's Executive Director (ED) or office administration. If the ED is not available the Personnel Sub-Committee Chair can initiate the background check. All information acquired through the check is confidential and will only be shared with

individuals who need access to the information. Each applicant has the right to see their personal information which has been gained through the background check process. Background checks will be completed every 2 years.

The OPA reserves the right to remove an individual from a position or to not offer a volunteer position or employment to anyone with a criminal background or who is on the Sex Offender Registry.

Background checks will include:

- National Criminal File
- National Sex Offender Registry
- Social Security Number Verification
- Public Records such as Driver's Licence

Appropriate Boundaries Between Adults and Minors

It is important for both adults and minors to understand the boundaries of appropriate behavior and know how to tell others when their own personal boundaries, or those set by this policy, have been crossed. Throughout this section you'll see examples of interactions between adults and minors that are appropriate and others that are inappropriate, regardless of who initiates the behavior.

Physical Interactions

Always get consent by asking the other person if it is okay to engage in any type of physical contact, especially with a minor — even to engage in a hug. Remember that consent can be withdrawn at any time. Minors should feel comfortable saying no. Understanding what kinds of physical contact are acceptable can foster a positive and safe environment that protects both minors and adults. Since acceptable norms change over time it is important to review the information below. The following are examples of acceptable interaction, but this list is not exhaustive.

NOTE: Keep in mind that some children on the Autism Spectrum or with past histories of abuse may not like to be touched at all, so it is good to gain permission to engage in any physical touch.

Acceptable physical interactions (if culturally appropriate and with consent)	Unacceptable physical interactions (with or without consent)
<p>Hugging from the side</p> <p>Patting on the shoulder or back</p> <p>Shaking hands</p> <p>Small gestures of approval, such as a hand gesture, high five or clapping of hands</p>	<p>Unwanted physical affection such as, fully body hugging, kissing on the lips, wrestling, tickling, massages</p> <p>Showing physical expressions of affection in an isolated location</p> <p>Sexual contact of any kind to include touching the bottom, waist, chest, or genital areas</p>

Verbal and Written Interactions

Keeping verbal and written interactions between adults and minors appropriate is just as important as maintaining appropriate physical boundaries. The following are examples of acceptable interaction, but this list is not exhaustive.

Acceptable Verbal and Written Interactions	Unacceptable Verbal and Written Interactions
<p>Positive reinforcement to include encouragement and praise</p> <p>Jokes in general but not ones that contain discriminatory or sexual references</p>	<p>Negative reinforcement to include, name calling, cursing, harsh language that may frighten minors, shaming or belittling language</p> <p>Discriminatory or negative references or jokes to a person's culture, sexual orientation, religion, gender identity etc.</p> <p>Adults asking minors to keep secrets of any kind</p> <p>Commenting on or complimenting a person's body or body development.</p>

<p>Email and Social Media (Acceptable)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copying another volunteer or the participant's parent or guardian in the email • Sending a group email to multiple participants in group emails • Copying your supervisor communications between program participants and their parents/guardians. 	<p>Email and Social Media (Unacceptable)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private messages, notes, texts or emails between a volunteer/staff and a minor without prior approval • Posting pictures of minor participants on social media sites without parental or guardian consent • Posting inappropriate comments on pictures posted by minor participants • Sending personal social media friend requests to minors
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One-to-one interactions

An adult and a minor spending time alone with each other can pose both a greater risk of abuse or harassment of the minor and a risk of allegations of inappropriate behavior for the volunteer or employee. It is highly recommended that an adult should never be alone with one individual minor, but rather in a place where another adult or other minors are present to prevent the minor or bystanders from misinterpreting your intentions or alleging inappropriate behavior. There may be specific instances, such as working with a person with a disability who needs assistance, where a parent/guardian could be asked to submit written instructions about who and under what circumstances closed door assistance may be rendered.

Acceptable individual interactions	Unacceptable individual interactions
<p>Meet in a public place where others are present</p> <p>Meeting in a classroom, office, or other private or semi private location, if you leave the door open and notify another adult in advance and have at least another person involved</p> <p>A meeting in a home or other private location, if it's approved in advance and has another adult attending</p> <p>Giving a gift to a single participant or a smaller group with the prior approval of their parents or other adults</p>	<p>Meeting alone with one minor in any space without another adult or minor present</p> <p>Meeting alone with one minor in any space with the door closed and/or locked</p> <p>Assisting a child in the bathroom with the door closed or locked without prior approval from a parent/guardian</p> <p>Transporting only one minor in a vehicle without prior approval by another adult</p> <p>Giving a gift to a single participant in secret.</p>

Reporting and Investigation

All incidences of abuse, harassment, neglect or suspected abuse should be reported to your direct supervisor and the Executive Director immediately. If it is a specific incident, the OPA Incident Report can serve as a documentation of the incident and any associated witnesses or facts that are remembered. The Incident Report can be created in the office during a meeting discussing your concern or can be accessed at any time on the OPA web page under the menu title: *Get Involved*—> Handbooks and Policies.

All reports or allegations of abuse will be investigated immediately. Any employee or volunteer involved in the reported incident could be suspended with or without pay during the investigation. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, anyone found guilty of the violations described in this policy will face termination of employment or volunteer activities.

Mandated Reporter Requirements

Maine law requires that those who work with minors report suspected child abuse and neglect and that those who suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation of an incapacitated or dependent adult report to the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Maine law also requires that certain professionals obtain mandated reporter training once every four years.

If you are working directly with children, you will need to complete the online training to understand your role and responsibilities. This child mandated reporter training can be completed with the DHHS: <https://mainemandatedreporter.org/#/>

If you are working with adults with intellectual disabilities, you will need to complete adult protective mandated reporter training with the DHHS: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/oads/get-support/aps/mandated-reporters>

***Once training is completed you will be able to save or print your certification of completion to provide to the OPA Office via email [opa@oceanpark.org], so it can be added to a file. NOTE: If you are required to complete this training for another employer within the same year, you may provide a copy of that certificate.**

If you suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation you do not need to collect proof, but you do need to report your suspicions to OPA's Executive Director immediately. The ED will do the official reporting.

In all matters, the OPA will comply with any applicable state or federal reporting requirements.

Acknowledgement/Receipt of Protection of Minors Policy

I have received, read and understand the contents of this policy. I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to comply with the Protection of Minors Policy and ensure the safety of minors under my care. I understand that I should consult the Executive Director regarding any questions I have about this policy. I also understand that I need to complete the State of Maine required training and provide a completion certificate to the OPA prior to any work with minors.

NAME (printed): _____

I am a (Circle one): Volunteer Employee

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE SIGNED: _____

SUPERVISOR, CHAIR or ED'S SIGNATURE: _____

NAME (printed): _____