

Avoiding Potential for Inappropriate Behavior

When minors are in contact with adults who are not their parents, there is often concern about whether they are in danger of becoming victims of sexual abuse. Numerous incidents have demonstrated that predators often seek positions of authority in order to get close to potential victims. This includes becoming teachers, coaches, camp counselors, tutors, and volunteer leaders. While NMSU requires personnel working authorized youth programs to have a background check, it isn't a guarantee that someone who has yet to be caught hasn't been employed. The best way to prevent this type of abuse from taking place is to use a system of controls to prevent a predator from being able to take advantage of a position they might have and victimize someone. Below are some best practices that you should use in your youth program:

No “one-on-one” contact between leaders and youth: There should never be an instance when an adult (outside of a parent) has contact with a youth without another trained person in both visual and auditory range, and watching for issues. If it is necessary to talk to a youth away from other program participants, the adult should first notify another trained person and arrange for them to both watch and hear what takes place. There should also be a minimum of two trained leaders present during drop-off and pickup times to ensure there is no one-on-one contact. When it comes to electronic communication, the same steps should apply, with another trained adult copied on electronic messages. (NOTE: One way to minimize risk with electronic communication is to limit electronic communications to authorized platforms that log all communication. In addition, use of a “generic” contact address (like STEMYouthCamp@nmsu.edu or Team1Leaders@nmsu.edu) that goes to several individuals can reduce the potential for one-on-one contact and hidden messages.)

Train youth participants and parents: Make sure the youth participants and their parents are aware of the signs and dangers of “grooming” behaviors used by predators and know how to recognize risky situations. The training should include the steps taken to avoid one-on-one contact, prohibited conduct, and how to report inappropriate conduct (contacting local law enforcement is always a good recommendation).

If transporting youth, make sure you are covered: If transportation of youth program participants will take place by the program, make sure that there are at least two trained leaders in each vehicle to ensure there is no opportunity for one-on-one contact. In addition, make sure the driver(s) has a chauffeur driver license, if needed (required if they are being paid to transport people). Vehicles used to transport participants need to have adequate and appropriate insurance coverage, and should undergo a safety inspection by the driver before each trip.

Keeping Parents Informed / Consent Forms

- Provide an orientation session, training, or materials to parents who enroll their children in the program

- Include a description of all activities, along with identification of any risks and mitigation efforts
- Explain the role of parents in encouraging participants to follow rules and safety direction, along with making sure their child is able to participate safely
- Explain the physical setting of the program and how it is structured, to include an understanding of the college environment, supervision provided in the program, contact with adults, and potential adult content (if applicable)
- Describe measures taken by the program to address safety concerns
- List computer and equipment use expectations and limitations
- Ensure parents know they are responsible for maintaining health insurance
- If this is an overnight program, or parents will be far away, obtain authorization for medical treatment