



# Planning for Prevention:

## PUTTING YOUTH SAFETY FIRST

Positive youth development starts with appropriate, positive, and safe relationships between youth and adults. Inappropriate or harmful interactions put youth at risk, physically and emotionally. Inappropriate behaviors can happen **between youth, between adults or between youth and adults**.

Potential inappropriate behaviors between adults and youth include showing favoritism, giving gifts, and looking for time alone with youth. **Some situations pose more risk** for inappropriate or harmful behavior than others. For example, interactions during an overnight experience are harder to monitor than in a classroom.

**Plan ahead.** Follow the best practices in this handout to prevent issues and create safe in-person and virtual programs.

### IN-PERSON PROGRAMS

#### Room Setup

- Use open, visible spaces with no hidden areas.
- Make sure you can see and/or hear youth and adults in the space.
- Secure areas not used for program purposes.
- Keep doors open and windows uncovered.

#### Changing Clothes and Bathroom Use

- Establish appropriate time limits before checking on youth.
- Make sure the bathroom is safe and secure before youth arrive. For example, consider multiple exits, stall height, and other users.
- Provide separate spaces where adults and youth can change clothes.

#### Check-in and Checkout Procedures

- Follow check-in and checkout procedures for youth.
- Monitor the arrival, approval, and identification of guests or visitors.
- Make sure it is easy to tell the difference between visitors and authorized staff or volunteers.

#### Off-Site Activities

- Follow transportation policies for field trips and other off-site activities.
- Make sure to have enough staff and volunteers for the number of youth throughout a field trip or off-site activity.

### VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

Model appropriate technology use with youth. This helps youth recognize problems in other virtual settings.

#### Access

Control access to the online platform.

- Use the “waiting room” feature. Check identities before letting participants in.
- Rename participants (first name and last initial) to help protect privacy.
- Disable private chats or make them visible to the host. Watch all chats for potential harassment.

#### Parent/Guardian Involvement

Make online interactions observable.

- Encourage parents or guardians to help monitor their youth’s participation. Give them the activity schedule so they can identify concerns.
- Ask youth and parents/guardians to share feedback about their experience.

#### Communications

- Avoid 1:1 contact between adults and youth in video conferencing, email, text, and chat.
- Make social media interactions with youth visible to others.
- Review policies about youth privacy online.

### ADDRESS ISSUES IMMEDIATELY

Prevention plans that include these best practices help keep youth safe. However, issues can still come up. During educational experiences, pay attention to all interactions, making sure youth are safe. Address issues right away.

*Redirect inappropriate behaviors / Promote positive behaviors / Confront harmful behaviors / Report these behaviors if necessary*

If you have questions, discuss them with a county-based educator (for volunteers) or supervisor (for staff). For more information about additional youth safety concepts, such as ratios of adults-to-minors and out-of-program contact restrictions, visit the [Office of Youth Protection](#) website.



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