

Youth and Family Policies

Approval Date: May 18, 2023



Definitions

1. "Youth" refers to any individual under the age of 18. "Child" is used interchangeably with "youth."
2. "Qualified Youth Leader" refers to any adult age 18 and over who volunteers or is paid to work in a leadership, instructional, or supervisory capacity with youth, and has passed a criminal background check and has been trained in The Mountaineers Youth Policies.
3. "Youth Program Assistant" refers to any adult age 18 and over who volunteers or is paid to work in a leadership, instructional, or supervisory capacity with youth under the direct supervision of a qualified Youth Leader. Volunteers working with youth are inherently Youth Program Assistants and, unless they are qualified Youth Leaders, should receive training from a qualified Youth Leader about accepted practices in the program for which they are volunteering.
4. "Supervision" means at minimum knowing where every youth in the program is at all times.
5. "Zero Tolerance" refers to any portion of the policy, the violation of which will result in immediate termination of rights to participate in programs with youth.
6. "Internal Youth Program" refers to youth programs designed for children of Mountaineers members and Youth Members of The Mountaineers, where youth enroll directly in the program on a Mountaineers roster, and Mountaineers Leaders are responsible for the instruction, safety, and supervision of the youth.
7. "Partner Youth Program" refers to youth programs offered to youth participants of non-Mountaineer programs or organizations, such as school groups, scout troops, or clubs.
8. "Family Program" refers to programs offered to Mountaineers Members in which parents and children participate together, and children are directly supervised by their parents.
9. "Youth Participants in Adult Programs" refers to any Youth under the age of 18 participating in a program designed for participants over 18.

General Youth Policies

1. All youth participants and adult chaperones and instructors in Mountaineers activities must have on file an Individual Acknowledgement of Risk and Waiver of Liability, current within one calendar year. Youth participants' forms must be signed by an adult parent or guardian.
2. All youth participating in Mountaineers activities, without the presence of their own parent or guardian must have a signed "Youth Information Form" form on site during the activity. Youth in Partner Programs can have on site the partner organization's health and permission-to-treat forms in lieu of The Mountaineers' forms.
3. Youth may not bring the following items to any Mountaineers program under any circumstances: illegal drugs, marijuana, fireworks, knives longer than three inches, hatchets, and items that could be used as a weapon. Youth may risk dismissal from the program and/or have items confiscated for violation of this policy.
4. When parents or guardians are not present, lifeguards with current Lifeguarding, CPR, and First Aid certifications from a nationally recognized certifying organization must be present at all youth swimming activities that take place in water greater than three feet deep.
5. Boating activities must follow all state and local boating laws, and all participants (adults and youth) must wear properly fitted personal floatation devices at all times.

General Youth Program Policies

1. All paid and unpaid adults working in a leadership, administrative, supervisory, or instructional capacity on behalf of The Mountaineers with Internal Youth Programs, Partner Youth Programs, and Family Programs in any capacity must be Qualified Youth Leaders.
 - a. All Mountaineers employees must complete an application that includes work history, criminal disclosure statements, and a Child Protection Commitment statement. Employees must also pass a National Criminal Background and Sex Offender Check.
 - b. All Qualified Youth Leaders must sign a Child Protection Commitment Statement.
2. When Youth participate in Adult Programs, a minimum of one qualified Youth Leader must be present on site at all times. That Youth Leader is responsible for monitoring the appropriate behavior of Youth Program Assistants and other adults. This includes properly training Youth Program Assistants in appropriate behavior and in specific ways to avoid risk and protect themselves and the youth in the program.
3. All Qualified Youth Leaders must have passed a criminal background and sex offender check within three years, conducted by a third party company contracted by The Mountaineers for the purpose of conducting the background check.

4. All Youth Leaders will receive training on The Mountaineers Youth Policies.
5. Youth Leaders are, by state law, mandated reporters when another volunteer is suspected or alleged to have caused abuse or neglect to a child under the age of 18.
6. At no time during any Mountaineers program may a Youth Leader or Youth Program Assistant be alone with a single child (other than their own child or grandchild) where they cannot be observed by others. When one-on-one time between a Youth Leader or Youth Program Assistant and a child cannot be avoided (e.g. in the middle of a multi-pitch climb), steps must be taken to mitigate risk to the youth and the Youth Leader or Youth Program Assistant, according to recommended practices in The Mountaineers Youth Handbooks and training. This is a zero tolerance policy.
7. When camping, or during any overnight program, no adult is permitted to sleep in the same sleeping quarters as a youth other than their own child or sibling, unless the accommodations are group accommodations such as a yurt or cabin, or unless a parent or guardian has signed a waiver ahead of time allowing this for an overnight trip. This is a zero tolerance policy. Unless circumstances prevent it, youth should sleep in private sleeping quarters or in groups of three or more youth.
8. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants shall never leave a child unsupervised.
9. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants shall not abuse children including:
 - a. Physical abuse - strike, spank, shake, slap;
 - b. Verbal abuse - humiliate, degrade, threaten;
 - c. Sexual abuse - inappropriate touch or verbal exchange
 - d. Mental abuse - shaming, withholding love, cruelty;
 - e. Neglect - withholding food, water, basic care, etc.Any type of abuse will not be tolerated and may be cause for immediate termination of membership. This is a zero tolerance policy.
10. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants must use positive techniques for guidance, including redirection, positive reinforcement and encouragement rather than competition, comparison, and criticism. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants will have age appropriate expectations and set up guidelines and environments that minimize the need for discipline. Secret organizations, hazing, corporal punishment, and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any Mountaineers activity. Physical restraint is used only in emergency situations necessary to protect the child or other children from immediate harm, and must be documented in writing.

11. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants must respond to children with respect and consideration and treat all children equally regardless of age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, family style, or culture.
12. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants will respect children's rights not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say no. Children are not to be touched in areas of their bodies that would be covered by a bathing suit unless necessary to provide emergency medical care. This is a zero tolerance policy.
13. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants must wear appropriate attire while working with youth.
14. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants will refrain from intimate displays of affection towards others in the presence of children and parents.
15. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs while working with youth is prohibited for Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants during Internal Youth Programs, Partner Youth Programs, and Family Programs. When youth participate in Adult Programs, at least one designated Youth Leader must refrain from consumption of alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs at all times in order to provide reliable supervision for the youth.
16. Smoking or use of tobacco in the presence of children or parents during program hours is prohibited for Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants, except when youth are participating in Adult Programs.
17. Profanity, inappropriate jokes, sharing intimate details of one's personal life, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children or parents are prohibited for Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants. When youth are participating in adult programs, Youth Leaders should carefully monitor and redirect any inappropriate conversation witnessed among other adults in the program.
18. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants must be free of physical or psychological conditions that might adversely affect children's physical or mental health. If in doubt, an expert should be consulted.
19. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants will portray a positive role model for youth by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy, tact, and maturity.
20. Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants may not engage in intimate relationships with program participants under the age of 18. This is a zero tolerance policy.

Internal Youth Programs, Family Programs and Youth Participating in Adult Programs

1. Youth Participants must present signed waiver(s) specific to the type of program the youth is engaging in.
2. Mountaineers Youth Information Forms must be must be current within one year of the dates of the youth's participation.
3. Program leaders of Adult Programs are not required to allow youth to participate in their programs.
4. When Youth under the age of 14 participate in Adult Programs, the program leader must ensure that there is an adult other than the leader, even if the youth is the leader's child, who is directly responsible for the youth during the program.
5. When Youth participate in Family Programs, the program leader must ensure that each youth participant has an adult other than the leader, usually the youth's parent or guardian, who is directly responsible for their care and supervision.
6. Youth participating in drop-off programs where Mountaineers staff and volunteers are directly responsible for the youth participants must be signed in by Mountaineers leaders and signed out by a person listed on the Youth's membership as an authorized pick-up, unless the parent or guardian has signed a form waiving the requirement for program leaders to monitor with whom the youth leaves the program. Under no other circumstance should children be released to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other adult authorized by the parent or guardian in writing.
7. Restroom Supervision: Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants will monitor bathrooms to ensure that:
 - a. Suspicious or unknown individuals are not lingering in or near the bathrooms while youth are using them
 - b. Youth do not engage in horseplay or harassment in the bathrooms
 - c. No more than one youth participant per bathroom stall is allowed in the bathroom at a time
 - d. Youth do not linger in the bathrooms. At larger public restrooms with multiple stalls, Youth Leaders should stand in the doorway while children under 14 are using the restroom without parents present. When parents are not present, always send children in groups of three or more (youth or adults) to the bathroom, and whenever possible with a Youth Leader or Youth Program Assistant.
8. In drop-off programs, when necessary, Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants should conduct or supervise private activities in pairs - diapering, putting on bathing suits, taking

showers, etc. When this is not possible, Youth Leaders and Youth Program Assistants should be positioned so that they are visible to others.

Partner Youth Programs

1. Group leaders must present a Letter of Agreement signed by their organization's appropriate authority, also signed by a Mountaineers staff member, outlining at minimum what facilities, services and other resources each organization agrees to provide, what the agreed upon dates and times of the program are, and when possible an agreement to provide a Certificate of Liability Insurance from their insurance carrier stating that the group will be covered during the dates of The Mountaineers program.
2. Group leaders must provide to The Mountaineers a Mountaineers waiver for each participant, signed by the participant's parent/guardian. Group leaders must also sign a Mountaineers waiver.
3. Groups should prepare to have at least one emergency vehicle on site. The Mountaineers cannot take responsibility for transporting participants. In the event of an injury or emergency, participants will need to be transported off-site by an ambulance to a medical facility if a group does not come with transportation.
4. Group leaders are responsible for having health and permission-to-treat forms on site for each participating youth. The Mountaineers will not collect these forms.

Responsibilities

1. Staff as designated by the CEO are responsible for administering background checks, collecting and keeping forms and addressing identified problems.
2. Director of Programs & Operations or designee is responsible for providing updated training materials and current forms and waivers specific to each type of program.
3. Division, branch or staff sponsor of activities are responsible for administering this policy and identifying and reporting problems.

Exceptions

Events and other single-day programs open to public registration are exempt from the Youth and Family Policies.

Any exceptions to The Mountaineers Youth Policies must be presented in writing, along with any additional precautions needed to mitigate risk, and approved and signed by both the Director of Programs and Operations and the CEO.