

## Your Guide to Working with Minors What you need to know





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## INTRODUCTION

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey serves more than 71,000 minors annually. University students, faculty, and staff interact with youth in many ways. You may be a coach, counselor, mentor, researcher, teacher, or volunteer. Perhaps you are with an outside group, such as a school or camp, that brings kids to Rutgers.

Whatever your role, this guide will help you work effectively with youth. It offers good practices, describes the signs of child abuse and neglect, and explains your legal duty to make a report. Following this guide will help you protect youth and also protect yourself.

## TIPS FOR WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUTH

**Keep kids out of danger.** The #1 priority is to keep children and youth out of dangerous situations. Some dangers are obvious, such as crossing a busy street. Others are more subtle, such as the risk of heatstroke. Kids do not always have good judgment, and some typical adult activities are unsuitable for younger people. Climbing ladders is risky for youth, as is operating machinery. Kids don't know to take shelter in a thunderstorm. Part of your role in working with minors is to anticipate and avoid dangers.

If youth are engaged in laboratories or research activities, seek advice on appropriate training and protocols. Do not assume that minors are fully informed and competent.

**Avoid being alone with a minor.** One-on-one situations create the risk of child abuse. If you are teaching a child to read or to play a sport, stay in an open area with other people around. Do not be alone in an office or classroom with a single child. Remaining visible to other people protects the child and also protects you.

If you need to check on a minor in a private area such as a sleeping room, locker room, or bathroom, bring another adult along.

If you have an important reason to be alone with a child, such as for music lessons or individual counseling, discuss safeguards in advance with your director or supervisor.

# TIPS FOR WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUTH *(Continued)*

**Stay vigilant.** If you are supervising kids, keep your attention on them. Avoid distractions including personal electronics and conversations with other adults. The moment your attention wanders is the moment that a fight will start or a participant will slip away.

**Steer clear of transportation complications.** Watch for problems when parents pick up children. Know who is authorized, and not authorized, to pick up each child. Don't release a child to someone else. Unless you have written permission from a parent or guardian, do not transport a minor yourself. You can, of course, transport your own kids.

**Avoid abuse.** Don't engage any abusive conduct toward a youth or in the presence of youth. Take special care not to touch minors inappropriately. Do not use corporal punishment or any discipline designed to humiliate a minor. Discuss questions and concerns with your director or supervisor.

**Keep kids away from drugs, alcohol, and sexual materials.** Rutgers University does not tolerate the use or possession of illicit drugs. Do not provide illicit drugs to minors or use drugs in the presence of minors. Everyone knows that drinking before age 21 is illegal. Youth should not possess or consume alcohol. Adults should not drink when they have responsibility for the well being of youth. Treat smoking the same way.

Can minors receive or use prescription drugs or over-the-counter medications? Consult your program director or supervisor about obtaining written parental permission.

Sexual topics are also off limits. Avoid risqué jokes, even if youth are telling them. Do not share sexual material with kids. If sexual content may be relevant to an academic course, counseling session, or other professional setting, follow professional norms. As always, discuss any issues with your director or supervisor.

**Enjoy working with youth, within boundaries.** Enjoy the opportunity to serve as a role model, teacher, and guide to minors. At the same time, maintain boundaries and take your responsibilities seriously. Treat youth with respect at all times. Avoid singling one child out from a group to become your special friend.

## DO

## DON'T

Maintain the highest standards of personal behavior when interacting with youth.

Don't spend significant time alone with one minor away from the group or interact with minors in private.

Stay vigilant at all times when you are responsible for youth.

Don't engage in inappropriate touching or have any physical contact with a minor in private locations.

Conduct necessary one-on-one interactions with minors in a public environment where you can be observed.

Don't use inappropriate language, tell risqué jokes, or make sexually suggestive comments around minors, even if minors themselves are doing so.

Have another adult present when you are working with minors in an unsupervised setting.

Avoid driving alone with a single child. Don't drive any children in your private vehicle without written parental permission.

Follow the "rule of three." Have two adults present with a single child.

Don't give personal gifts to, or do special favors for, a minor or do things that may be seen as favoring one minor over others.

Listen to minors. Provide praise and positive reinforcement. If a minor expresses discomfort, tell your supervisor.

Don't engage in rough or suggestive games, including horseplay.

Treat all minors in a group consistently and fairly, with respect and dignity.

Don't strike or hit a minor. Don't use corporal punishment or other punishment involving physical pain, discomfort, or humiliation.

Be friendly with minors within the context of the formal program or activity, while observing appropriate boundaries.

Don't share information with minors about your private life or have informal or purely social contact with minor program participants outside of program activities.

Maintain discipline. Challenge minors if they engage in inappropriate behavior, including inappropriate touch or language.

Don't date or become romantically or sexually involved with a minor. Don't show pornography to minors or involve minors in pornographic activities.

Know who is authorized to pick up a child and bar others from doing so.

Don't provide alcohol, drugs, or tobacco to minors or use them around minors.

Be aware of how your actions and intentions might be perceived or misinterpreted.

Don't undress or shower around minors or sleep in the same room.

Consult with other adult supervisors or colleagues when you feel uncertain about a situation.

Don't relate to minors as if they were peers, conduct private correspondence, or take on the role of "confidant" (outside of a professional counseling relationship).

Enjoy the opportunity to serve as a role model, teacher, and guide to minors.

Don't tell a child "this is just between the two of us," or otherwise encourage a child to keep secrets from parents or guardians.

## SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families defines child abuse and child neglect:

- **Abuse** is the physical, sexual or emotional harm or risk of harm to a child under the age of 18 caused by a parent or other person who acts as a caregiver for the child.
- **Neglect** occurs when a parent or caregiver fails to provide proper supervision for a child or adequate food, clothing, shelter, education or medical care although financially able or assisted to do so.

The Department describes these common signs of abuse and neglect.

PHYSICAL ABUSE	
<i>Physical Indicators</i>	<i>Behavioral Indicators</i>
<p>Unexplained bruises and welts:  <i>On face, lips, mouth, torso, back, buttocks, thighs</i>  <i>In various stages of healing</i>  <i>Cluster, forming regular patterns</i>  <i>Reflecting shape of article used to inflict (electric cord, belt buckle)</i>  <i>On several different surface areas</i>  <i>Regularly appear after absence, weekend or vacation</i></p> <p>Unexplained burns:  <i>Cigar, cigarette burns, especially on soles, palms, back or buttocks</i>  <i>Immersion burns (sock-like, glove-like, doughnut-shaped on buttocks or genitalia)</i>  <i>Patterned like electric burner, iron, etc.</i>  <i>Rope burns on arms, legs, neck or torso</i></p> <p>Unexplained fractures:  <i>To skull, nose, facial structure</i>  <i>In various stages of healing</i>  <i>Multiple or spiral fractures</i></p> <p>Unexplained laceration or abrasions:  <i>To mouth, lips, gums, eyes</i>  <i>To external genitalia</i></p>	<p>Wary of adult contacts</p> <p>Apprehensive when other children cry</p> <p>Behavioral extremes:            Aggressiveness            Withdrawal</p> <p>Frightened of parents</p> <p>Afraid to go home</p> <p>Reports injury by parents</p>

Be alert to minors showing these signs or similar ones.

## PHYSICAL NEGLECT

<i>Physical Indicators</i>	<i>Behavioral Indicators</i>
Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress	Begging, stealing food
Consistent lack of supervision, especially in dangerous activities or long periods	Extended stays at school (early arrival and late departure)
Constant fatigue or listlessness	Constantly falling asleep in class
Unattended physical problems or medical needs	Alcohol or drug abuse
Abandonment	Delinquency (e.g. thefts)
	States there is no caregiver

## SEXUAL ABUSE

<i>Physical Indicators</i>	<i>Behavioral Indicators</i>
Difficulty in walking or sitting	Unwilling to change for gym or participate in PE
Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing	Withdrawn, fantasy or infantile behavior
Pain or itching in genital area	Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior or knowledge
Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal areas	Poor peer relationships
Venereal disease, especially in pre-teens	Delinquent or run away
Pregnancy	Reports sexual assault by caregiver

## EMOTIONAL MALTREATMENT

<i>Physical Indicators</i>	<i>Behavioral Indicators</i>
Habit disorders (sucking, biting, rocking, etc.)	Behavior extremes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliant, passive</li> <li>• Aggressive, demanding</li> </ul>
Conduct disorders (antisocial, destructive, etc.)	Overly adaptive behavior: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inappropriately adult</li> <li>• Inappropriately infant</li> </ul>
Neurotic traits (sleep disorders, speech disorders, inhibition of play)	

## REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Countless minors suffer abuse or neglect each year. The consequences can be deadly. In 2011 in New Jersey, 25 minors died from abuse or neglect. Under New Jersey law, everyone has a legal duty to report child abuse and neglect. Together we can reduce the emotional and physical pain that minors needlessly experience.

What should you do? In case of any emergency, dial 911 immediately.

In addition, you must take these two steps if you suspect or know that a child is suffering abuse or neglect.

**Step #1.** Call the New Jersey toll-free 24-hour hotline for reporting child abuse and neglect.  
1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873) TTY 1-800-835-5510

**Step #2.** Call the Rutgers University Police Department for your campus.

New Brunswick Campus 732-932-7211  
Health Sciences Campus at Newark 973-972-4491  
Camden Campus 856-225-6111  
Newark Campus 973-353-5581

### Make a Report:

- If you *know that a minor is suffering abuse or neglect*
- If you *suspect that a minor is suffering abuse or neglect*
- Regardless of who the suspected culprit may be — a family member, teacher, religious leader, student, or coach, well-respected or not
- Regardless of where the abuse or neglect may be occurring, for example in the home, at Rutgers, or elsewhere.

Before making a report, you do not need to conduct your own investigation or be certain that mistreatment has occurred.

You do not need to call the Rutgers University Police Department for abuse or neglect that you encounter in a private capacity, outside the scope of your university role.

Anyone who makes a report in good faith receives legal protection from retaliation. So pick up the phone. It's your legal duty, and it's the right thing to do.

## CONCLUSION

If you have any questions about your role and responsibilities, get advice. Talk to your program director or supervisor.

You can also email general questions and concerns to: [protectminors@aps.rutgers.edu](mailto:protectminors@aps.rutgers.edu)

Thanks for reading and thanks for caring!





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