

Hendricks County Parks and Recreation Board

Policy Name: Youth Protection

Adoption Date: April 8th, 2021

Amendment Date(s):

I. **Purpose and Scope**

The purpose of this Policy is to establish guidelines to govern the Hendricks County Parks and Recreation Department (“Department”) in protecting youth involved in Department programs on or off Department property.

This Policy applies to staff (all employees, full and part-time who have contact with youth), volunteers who have contact with youth on or off Park property, and youth served by the Department (ages 17 and younger).

II. **Policy Statement**

The Board desires to protect youth involved in Department programs on or off Department properties from behavior including but not limited to inappropriate physical contact, bullying, intimidation, and verbal abuse initiated by staff, volunteers or other youth involved in Department programs on or off Department property. At the time this policy is adopted, the Board is not aware that any such conduct has occurred, but the Board wishes to be proactive in establishing a policy to enhance a respectful environment for youth involved in Department programs.

III. **Guidelines**

Employees and volunteers are expected to treat youth (and one another) involved in Department programs respectfully. Inappropriate physical contact with youth, bullying, intimidation, and verbal abuse of youth involved in Department programs will not be tolerated.

For all Department programs and volunteer activities involving youth, employees and volunteers will always follow the “Rule of Three” whereby when there is a youth involved there will be at least three people present, such as one adult and two or more youth, or two adults and one youth. The sole exception is if a youth involved in a Department program is with only his or her parent or guardian.

Employees and volunteers should generally avoid touching youth, but there may be instances where touching is acceptable, such as preventing a youth from falling or other emergency prevention or mitigating circumstances. Employees and volunteers will strictly respect children's rights to not be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say no. Employees and volunteers shall always ask permission from a youth before touching. An example is to ask a youth before adjusting the youth’s grip on a fishing pole. If the youth does not give permission, the employee or volunteer will continue verbally giving instructions and demonstrating the proper technique to complete the activity.

Employees and volunteers shall never disrobe a youth, except in emergency situations where lifesaving first aid is being administered (using an AED, packing a laceration, etc.). In any such emergency situation, timely and diligent efforts will be made to contact the parent/guardian as soon as possible to seek parental/guardian direction.

Employees and volunteers will never change clothes in front of youth, nor will youth ever change clothes in front of employees or volunteers.

Employees and volunteers will use technology in an appropriate manner that reflects the best practices in youth development.

- Employees and volunteers will not “friend” any youth from Department programs on any social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, Tik Tok, Twitch, or any other social media.
- Employees and volunteers will include the parent/guardian in any email or texting communication with a youth.

IV. Administration

Criminal background checks and checks of the Sex Offender Registry will be conducted on all employees and volunteers at the beginning of their service to the Department and periodically throughout their service. Employees or volunteers with a felony criminal conviction or a misdemeanor conviction involving sexual misconduct will not be permitted to interact with youth in Department programs, except for their own children. Extenuating circumstances whereby this prohibition is waived or modified to be less restrictive will be reviewed by the Park Board on a case-by-case basis.

It is the responsibility of all Department employees to remain vigilant in enforcing and complying with this policy. Any employee or volunteer who witnesses behavior involving youth that violates this policy shall immediately report the incident to the Parks Superintendent or to their immediate supervisor, who then shall immediately relay the information to the Parks Superintendent. Department Leadership will uphold and consistently remind employees and volunteers of the policy and potential situations to avoid.

Full-time naturalists will complete periodic training to stay up to date on youth protection and will share this information with other naturalists and volunteers, who are welcome to also complete youth protection training outside of the Department. Suggested youth protection training includes, but is not limited to, training offered through the following organizations: Boy Scouts of America; Girl Scouts of the USA; American Camp Association; Darkness to Light; and 4-H.

Employees and volunteers will be given this policy to sign during orientation, agreeing to comply with this policy, and will have ample opportunities to discuss and ask questions about the policy. Example situations will be discussed and will include discussion of potential touching scenarios. Employees and volunteers will understand that disciplinary action will take place for violation of this policy, up to termination of employment.

Training for staff and volunteers will be updated and refreshed as new information or changes in policy becomes available.

Documentation of all training will be maintained in each individual’s personnel file.

This Policy will be made available on the Department website for parents/legal guardians when registering youth for Department programs and activities.

Hendricks County Parks and Recreation Board

Youth Protection Policy- Acknowledgement & Acceptance

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