

Your guide to maintaining the safety of yourself,
the youth we serve, and all participants in
MentorKids USA programming

MentorKids USA

Safe Work Practices

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Introduction

MentorKids USA has identified and acknowledged practices which are considered to be safe ways of working that benefit the safety of both the youth we serve and representatives* of MentorKids USA. This ensures that all representatives of MentorKids USA are working in ways that reduce risk to the children we serve. This section looks to provide guidance on safe work practices for working around children.

RESPONSIBILITY OF MENTORKIDS REPRESENTATIVES:

All adults who work with children have a responsibility to safeguard and promote their welfare. The public, employers, parents, and children have the right to expect professionals who work with children to have to a certain standard of safe work practices, and to always maintain and protect the safety of the children served. When individuals accept a role that involves working with children and young people they need to understand and acknowledge the responsibilities and trust inherent in that role, and act accordingly.

The following document outlines what MentorKids believes to be safe work practices and can be used for guidance when working with children. However, this is a *general* guide, and should not be expected to cover every situation that may arise. Individuals who accept roles working with children must realize that no guidance or code of conduct can provide a complete checklist for all circumstances of what is, or is not appropriate behavior for those who work with children. There may be occasions and circumstances in which these individuals may have to make decisions or take actions in ways that are not specified in a guidance or code of conduct in order to protect the best interests of the child or young person.

MENTORKIDS REQUIRES ALL OF ITS REPRESENTATIVES TO:

- Always act and be seen to act in the child's best interests
- Avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and/or intention
- Take responsibilities for their own actions and behaviors

*Representatives in this document refer to staff members, interns, volunteers, iLeaders, and any person representing MKUSA.

Power and Positions of Trust

A relationship between an adult and a child is not a relationship between equals. There is potential for exploitation and harm of vulnerable youth. Adults therefore have a responsibility to ensure that an unequal balance of power is not used for advantage or gratification.

Adults should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behavior which might be misinterpreted by others. They should report and record any incident with this potential.

MENTORKIDS REPRESENTATIVES SHOULD NOT:

- Use your position to intimidate, bully, humiliate, threaten, coerce, or undermine a child
- Use your status and standing to form or promote relationships which are of sexual nature, or which may become so

Physical Interaction with Children

Here at MentorKids, we want to promote healthy physical contact among children and representatives. However, we ask that all representatives limit their physical contact with students and refrain from inappropriate physical interactions. When physical contact is made with a child this should be in appropriate response to their age, gender, and background.

EXAMPLES OF APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL INTERACTION:

- High-fives
- Fist bumps
- Side hugs

EXAMPLES OF INAPPROPRIATE PHYSICAL INTERACTION:

- Frontal hugs
- Lifting students up into the air
- Kisses
- Lap sitting
- Handholding
- Etc.

Positive Role Models

Adults in contact with children should understand and be aware that safe practice also involves using judgement and integrity about behaviors and practices in the work place. A person's dress and appearance are matters of personal choice and self-expression. However, adults should dress in ways which are appropriate to their role and this may need to be different to how they dress when not at work.

MENTORKIDS REQUIRES ALL OF ITS REPRESENTATIVES TO:

- Dress appropriately to their role
- Not wear anything that can be viewed as offensive, political, revealing, sexual in nature, or contradicting to the values of MentorKids

Communicating with children by using technology

MentorKids representatives are strictly prohibited from communicating with the youth we serve by using any technology, mobile and otherwise. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of social media, mobile phones, text messages, emails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites, and blogs.

MENTORKIDS REPRESENTATIVES ARE REQUIRED TO:

- Ensure communication with the youth we serve takes place within the boundaries of a professional relationship.
- Have NO secret social contact with children or their parents
- Report and record any situation, which may place a child at risk or which may compromise the service or professional standing of the official

Photography, Video, and Images

Working with children may involve taking or recording images. Families served by MentorKids are informed of this and are asked to provide written consent to the taking or recording images of their child. However, not all children have authorization from their parent/guardian to be captured on film or video. Careful consideration should be given as to how activities involving the taking of images are organized and undertaken.

MENTORKIDS REPRESENTATIVES SHOULD BE AWARE:

- Only staff members are approved to take or record images of the youth we serve
- Any other representatives must obtain written consent from MentorKids before taking or recording any images of the youth we serve

One to One Situations

No adult should find themselves alone with a child. One to one situations have the potential to make a child more vulnerable to harm by those who seek to exploit their position of trust. Adults working in a one to one setting with a child may also be more vulnerable to unjust or unfounded allegations being made against them. Occasionally a one to one conference with a student may be necessary, however, every attempt should be made to ensure the safety and security of children and the adults who work with them.

SAFE PRACTICES FOR MENTORKIDS REPRESENTATIVES:

- Ensure that you do not put yourself in a situation where your motives/intentions with a child can be questioned. Always make sure that whenever you are working in a classroom, activity, event, etc., that another adult or representative is present
- If you must talk with a child one on one because of a confidentiality concern, always make sure another representative is within at least either audible or visible distance. To have both is preferable

Gifts, Rewards, and Favoritism

Any gifts or rewards given from a MentorKids representative should first be discussed and agreed upon by MentorKids leadership before anything is given out. Adults need to be aware, that the giving of gifts may sometimes be misinterpreted by others as a gesture either to bribe or 'groom' a young person. Gifts will be given openly and not based on favoritism.

MENTORKIDS REPRESENTATIVES SHOULD:

- Speak with leadership before gift giving to discuss the nature of and recipients of the gift
- Be aware that giving individuals or a small group of students rather than the entirety of the student body can be misinterpreted as showing favoritism

Infatuations

Occasionally, a child may develop an infatuation with an adult who works with them. These adults should deal with these situations sensitively and appropriately to maintain the dignity and safety of all concerned. They should remain aware, however, that such infatuations carry a high risk of words or actions being misinterpreted and should therefore make every effort to ensure that their own behavior is above reproach.

IF YOU BECOME AWARE THAT A CHILD IS DEVELOPING AN INFATUATION:

- Notify MentorKids leadership immediately upon knowledge of the infatuation
- Collaborate with MentorKids leadership to find a solution for the situation with as little hurt, distress, or embarrassment as possible for all parties involved in the situation

Confidentiality and Mandatory reporting

Individuals who work with children may sometimes have access to confidential information about the children they serve. This may contain highly sensitive information about them or their family. Care and consideration must be taken with the sharing of information as trust and confidentiality are important at MentorKids.

MENTORKIDS REPRESENTATIVES SHOULD:

- Be mindful about where discussions about sensitive information take place, ensuring a private place where others will not overhear.
- Treat information they received about a child in a discreet and confidential manner
- Seek advice from MentorKids leadership if you are in any doubt about sharing information that you hold or that is being requested

What is mandatory reporting

MentorKids is a **mandatory reporting agency**. Mandated reporters are required by law, as defined by §ARS 13-3620, to report all concerns of child abuse or neglect. Because of this there are three instances in which confidentiality **MUST** be broken:

1. When someone is suspected of abusing the student
2. When the student is abusing someone
3. When the student is planning on abusing themselves

A report of suspected child abuse, neglect, exploitation or abandonment is a responsible attempt to protect a child. Arizona law requires certain persons who suspect that a child has received non-accidental injury or has been neglected to report their concerns to DCS or local law enforcement (ARS §13-3620.A).

Department of Child Safety (DCS) also provides a secure website for mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect to report non-emergency concerns, as authorized by ARS §13-3620. Non-emergency concerns are those in which a child is not at immediate risk of abuse or neglect that could result in serious harm. An emergency is a situation where a child faces an immediate risk of abuse or neglect that could result in death or serious harm.

If a child tells a MentorKids representative of such experiences, we will act to protect that child by calling the toll-free Arizona Child Abuse Hotline at 1-888-SOS-CHILD (1-888-767-2445), or by calling 911 in case of any emergency situations

PLEASE NOTE:

Any information regarding a student in a suspected abusive situation should be given directly to the lead MentorKids staff member immediately. Due to the sensitive nature of these situations, MentorKids asks that all Interns, Volunteers, iLeaders, etc., handle situations of suspected abuse with the assistance of regular MentorKids staff members so that all protocols are followed properly, and to best protect the safety of all parties involved.

When to report

According to ARS §13-3620 “any person who **reasonably believes** that a minor is or has been the victim of abuse...they shall **immediately** report” this suspected behavior. A minor or child means anyone under the age of 18. You form a “reasonable belief” when any of the following instances happens:

- A child discloses information indicating abuse or neglect has occurred
- A child has unexplained injuries or an explanation for injuries that is inconsistent with the injuries present that may lead you to suspect abuse
- A third party discloses information that gives you reason to believe abuse or neglect has occurred

What is abuse? The state of Arizona has specific definitions for categories of abuse and neglect: *Emotional Abuse, Neglect, Physical Abuse, Exploitation, and Abandonment.*

For more information on these definitions, please visit the DCS Website at:

<https://dcs.az.gov/report-child-abuse-or-neglect>

Legal information for reporting abuse

ARS §13-3620 grants immunity for reporters. Any person who reports in good faith will be “immune from any civil or criminal liability” for reporting unless:

- The reporter is charged with or is suspected of committing the abuse
- Reporter has acted with malice

If a mandated reporter **fails to report suspected abuse**, there are certain legal ramifications which may be held against the individual who fails to report:

- A mandated reporter who does not report a sexual offense can be charged with a Class 6 Felony. A Class 6 Felony in this instance is punishable up to:
 - 2 years in prison
 - \$150,000 fine plus 80% surcharge
- A mandated reporter who does not report another type of abuse can be charged with a Class 1 Misdemeanor. A Class 1 Misdemeanor in this instance is punishable up to:
 - 6 months in jail
 - \$2,500 fine plus 80% surcharge

Maricopa County protocol for reporting

Because of the nature of the work that Mandated Reporters do, Maricopa County views mandated reporters as the “eyes and ears” of law enforcement and DCS. Mandated Reporters tend to have extensive contact with children on a daily basis, and are often the first people that children will disclose abusive situations to because of their relationship with the Reporter, and, because they recognize behavioral patterns, would potentially be the first people to suspect an abusive situation.

Maricopa County states that suspected child abuse can come to the attention of a Mandated Reporter through three different methods:

1. A child tells of an abusive situation to the Reporter
2. The Reporter observes an injury or unusual behavior
3. A third party discloses information regarding abuse

If the Mandated Reporter directly encounters an unexplained injury or unusual behavior, or if the child self discloses abuse, the Maricopa County Protocol is as follows:

First, basic information will need to be gathered from the child:

- If possible, find a quiet and private place to talk with the child
- Do not make any promises to the child, rather, let the child know that you will do anything necessary to keep him/her safe
- Do not be judgmental, but be supporting
- Do not make any assumptions, just listen to whatever the child says
- Document exact quotes that the child provides
- Do not ask leading questions, only the four questions below need to be asked

ONLY four questions need to be asked if the following information has not been given to you already when the child was disclosing the situation:

1. What happened?
2. Who did this to you?
3. Where were you when this happened?
4. When did this happen?

If a third party informs the Mandated Reporter it is still the Mandated Reporter’s responsibility to file a report with law enforcement and/or the DCS hotline, however the third party should also be encouraged to make a report.

DO NOT notify the parent/guardian that you have contacted DCS or the police. Mandated Reporters shall maintain confidentiality of all information regarding the abuse report. It is the duty of Police and DCS, not the Mandated Reporter to notify parents/guardians of any investigations. Premature and/or inappropriate notifications can hinder investigations and potentially create more dangerous situations

EMPLOYEE /VOLUNTEER ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM OF SAFE WORK PRACTICES

I _____, hereby acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the "Safe Work Practices" for MentorKids USA.

I agree to conform to all Company practices, rules, and regulations relating to safe work performance. I understand that my failure to follow these safety procedures could result in disciplinary action up to and including discharge.

I further understand that it is my responsibility to report all unsafe conditions or violations of the Code of Safe Practices to my supervisor or other management personnel in order to minimize the potential of injury to my fellow workers.

(Signature of Employee/Volunteer) _____ Date _____

(Signature of Supervisor) _____ Date _____