Guidelines for Interacting with Minors

All members of the Harvard community, contractors, and volunteers who interact with Minors while participating in a Program must abide by these guidelines.

Be Aware: Members of the Harvard community must be aware of their responsibilities that accompany their interactions with Minors, including their responsibilities under the Harvard Policy for the Safety and Protection of Minors and, if the interaction is in connection with research, their responsibilities under the Statement of Policies and Procedures Governing the Use of Human Subjects in Research at Harvard University.

Be Mindful of Boundaries: When interacting with Minors, members of the Harvard community should be aware of the vulnerability of Minors and themselves in such interactions, and be particularly aware of the importance of maintaining appropriate physical, emotional, and sexual boundaries in such interactions. Members of the Harvard community must not engage in any covert or overt sexual behaviors with Minors, including seductive speech, gestures, depictions, or physical contact that exploits, abuses, or harasses.

Physical Contact: Physical contact with Minors can be misconstrued both by the recipient and by those who observe it, and should occur only when nonsexual and otherwise appropriate, and never in private. Members of the Harvard community must, before touching another person, especially a Minor, be aware of how physical touch can be perceived or received, and show prudent discretion in determining whether physical contact would be an appropriate expression of greeting, care, concern, instruction, or celebration. Acceptable forms of physical contact with a Minor include high fives, handshakes, fist bumps, pats on the back or shoulder, and side hugs. Types of physical contact to be avoided include tickling, rough-housing, wrestling, piggyback rides, any type of massage, and any form of unwanted affection.

Discipline: Although at times limit-setting with Minors may be necessary for safety reasons, members of the Harvard community are prohibited at all times from physically disciplining a Minor. Similarly, speech, gestures, or other behaviors that are bullying, demeaning, belittling, hurtful, or meant to embarrass or that make gratuitous reference to the Minor’s physical development or appearance are never appropriate.

One-on-One Interactions: One-on-one meetings with a Minor should be avoided, but if necessary should be held in a public area, in a room where the interaction can be (or is being) observed, or in a room with the door left open. In addition, a supervisor or another member of the Harvard community should be notified about the meeting at the same time as the interaction or as soon as is reasonably practicable thereafter.

Drug and Alcohol Use; Other Prohibited Items: When interacting with Minors, the possession and/or use of illegal drugs and the use of tobacco products or alcohol is prohibited. Members of the Harvard community are prohibited from providing a Minor with alcohol, drugs, tobacco products, inappropriate videos, pornography, or other such items.

Gifts: Members of the Harvard community should not accept gifts from or give gifts to Minors without the knowledge of their parents or guardians.
Communicating with Minors: Communication with Minors is only allowed for the purpose of conducting Harvard business or otherwise furthering the Program-related objectives. The key safety concept is transparency. The following steps will reduce the risk of private or otherwise inappropriate communication:

- Communication that is outside the role of the professional or volunteer relationship (teacher, coach, host, etc.) is prohibited. Faculty, staff, and volunteers who use any form of electronic communications, including social media and text messaging, to communicate with Minors may only do so for activities involving Harvard business and, to the extent possible, should use a Harvard address or site. Before any online communications are sent, the Program must first inform the Minor’s parent or guardian which adults may communicate through the use of such electronic tools. The preferred approach is to include the parent/guardian or another Harvard-affiliated adult in electronic communications with a Minor. If private communication best serves the Minor’s needs, a copy of the exchange should be retained.

- Never photograph, film, or otherwise record a Minor without the prior written consent of the Minor’s parent or guardian.

UPDATE NOTES
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