

# UGA Programs and Activities Serving Minors Best Practices

The following documents are intended for UGA Minors Program/Activity leaders and staff to serve as best practices on key areas of creating and managing safe and effective programs. Program/Activity Administrators must recognize that all Programs/Activities are unique, and these best practices may or may not apply equally to each Program/Activity.

In addition to these guides please also review information on our website, <https://programsforminors.uga.edu/>, including forms and other resources, <https://programsforminors.uga.edu/documents>.

If there are any questions on these best practices or additional guidance is requested, contact the Director of Compliance at 706-542-7255 or [programs-forminors@uga.edu](mailto:programs-forminors@uga.edu).

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# Accountability & Supervision

*Ensuring the safety of minors and always providing effective supervision should be the primary concern of program administrators. Implementing strong accountability procedures is a key step towards safe program operations. All program staff should be properly trained on accountability and supervision requirements.*

- Having an accountability system to know where all program minors are is a baseline safety requirement for all programs. This may include the taking and re-taking of attendance, attendance logs, and the use of a buddy system – particularly for field trips or during high-risk activities to include being around lakes, streams, swimming pools, and similar areas.
- Pre-program training should ensure staff understand their role in accountability of program minors. Training on both personal responsibility for accounting for minors assigned to each staff member and effective teamwork and coordination should be included.
- Staff supervision should be designed so that each staff member has accountability for an appropriate number of minors; this will better ensure effective scope of responsibility throughout the program. The American Camp Association recommends the following staff to minor ratios:
  - 5 years & younger: 1 staff for each 5 overnight campers and 1 staff for 6 day campers
  - 6–8 years: 1:6 for overnight, and 1:8 for day
  - 9–14 years: 1:8 for overnight and 1:10 for day
  - 15–18 years: 1:10 for overnight and 1:12 for day
- Accountability is most critical at movement times (from one activity area to another, from dorm to dining hall, at start and end of field trips). By name accounting is preferred to head counts, when possible; this limits possibility of incorrect count before movement.
- If a minor is discovered missing from the program, safety of the minor must be prioritized over individual or institutional reputation concerns. If the minor is not quickly located in the immediate vicinity, UGA Police (706-542-2200 or 911) and department leadership should be notified quickly; there should not be excessive delays in notifying authorities to assist with expanding the search. For camps in other jurisdictions, the program staff should be sure to identify clearly in which county or city the event takes place, and have a reliable manner to contact public safety there. A missing minor protocol should be included in your staff manual and reviewed as part of training. Missing Minor guidance is available here: <https://programsforminors.uga.edu/node/114>. You do not want to wait until a child is actually missing to determine next steps.

# Communication

*Effective communication within programs is critical to safely run operations. Communication needs to occur up, across, down, and out to external organizations and individuals. A culture of continuous communication is key to well-run minors programs.*

- Program leaders should develop an effective communication procedure for program supervisors, staff, and volunteers to ensure all required information is relayed to staff in a timely manner. Through written and oral means information about program procedures as well as about minor participants should be thoroughly communicated to all staff. Program leaders should continually evaluate information and who needs to know it for successful program operations. Regular staff meetings and debriefs should be incorporated into all programs.
- Staff should be trained and encouraged to promptly communicate to program leaders with any significant program information such as incidents involving minors, medical situations, and other program incidents. Strong, continuous communication should be the standard of minors program staff. Program leaders can be hampered in their oversight and decision making if staff do not practice effective communication.
- Communication across program staff is also a critical component of effective programs. A culture of information sharing should exist in all minors programs, with staff members ensuring that all important information is shared between program areas and work shifts.
- Communicating with external stakeholders is also necessary. Ensuring unit leadership is aware of significant incidents should be part of all minors program procedures. Also communicating to other University resources like the Equal Opportunity Office, Legal Affairs, and University Police (706-542-2200 or 911) when situations warrant. Parents/guardians should also be communicated with as needed to provide information on their child.
- Communications to minors, especially electronic communications on e-mail, text, or social media, should only be done using university accounts, only for programmatic purposes, and should include at least two staff members or the minor's parent/guardian.
- A strong culture of continuous communication throughout all parts of minors programs is required to ensure critical information is relayed to all who need to know.

# Discipline

*All programs should be prepared to handle situations where minors violate the Participant Code of Conduct. Minors, for various reasons, may act inappropriately, including disrespectful actions and words towards fellow program participants and/or staff or bullying behavior. Programs should have procedures in place to handle discipline correctly.*

- In addition to a Staff Code of Conduct, all programs should also use a Participant Code of Conduct that outlines behavior expectations and consequences for failing to follow program rules. A sample Participant Code of Conduct is available for use on our Resources page, <https://programsforminors.uga.edu/node/105>. The Participant Code of Conduct should be signed by both minor participants and parents/guardians. This document establishes how disciplinary issues will be handled by program staff.
- Minors should be reminded of the Code of Conduct and behavioral expectations of the program upon arrival. This can be accomplished by a mass meeting/orientation or in smaller groups. Ensuring all minor participants understand expectations is critical to a successful program.
- Staff should be properly trained on appropriate disciplinary actions that follow the Participant Code of Conduct. As noted in the Staff Code of Conduct, any discipline used should be constructive, not humiliating or isolating. Physical punishment is not an appropriate form of discipline and IS NOT allowed. Typical forms of corrective discipline include: verbal reminder of the Code of Conduct/program expectations for behavior, removing the minor from an activity temporarily, and/or removal from future program activities.
- Minors must still be supervised during periods of removal from activities. Minors should not be sent to a dorm room or any other area away from staff supervision. Having a disciplined minor sit to the side of the activity is an acceptable program procedure. Staff should continue to engage with the minor and return them to program activities as soon as possible, reminding them that proper behavior is expected.
- Program leaders should be prepared for how severe disciplinary issues will be handled, including considerations for removal of a minor from a program and communications with parents/guardians. Review and decision procedures should be standard and fair across the program. Expectations and consequences should be included in the Participant Code of Conduct signed by minors and parents/guardians.
- Programs should use appropriate corrective measures to help minors understand expected behavior.

## Medical and First Aid

*All minors programs should have some degree of medical preparation and training as part of their program planning. At a minimum staff should understand basic first aid responses and have access to a first aid kit. More extensive training and plans should be implemented for residential or extended day programs.*

### **Training:**

- Programs should ensure their staff have at a minimum basic first aid training (how to deal with cuts, scrapes, mild burns). Residential or week-long day programs as well as programs that have higher risk of injury (athletics camps, outdoor activities) should consider more extensive training.
- CPR/AED training is recommended for all or some staff for extended/residential programs. Several organizations offer CPR/AED training. UGA's Office of Emergency Preparedness offers limited opportunities. Other organizations offer training for a small fee including the American Red Cross, and for those in Athens, the Ramsey Center and local hospitals. Those outside Athens can check with your local Red Cross or hospital. Programs should ensure staff awareness of AED locations in facilities.

### **First Aid:**

- Programs should either purchase/create their own first aid kits or have access to facility first aid kits. For recommendations on what to include in a kit you can contact the Director of Compliance for Programs and Activities Serving Minors at [programsforminors@uga.edu](mailto:programsforminors@uga.edu).
- Annual reviews of the contents of first aid kits will ensure that items are replaced as needed.

### **Medical Care:**

- Plans should be developed for how medical issues beyond basic first aid will be handled. For non-emergency medical situations day programs should normally call parents/guardians to pick up minors who need medical care; residential programs will need to develop plans to take minors to either a local hospital or urgent care center for care.
- A best practice is to have a signed medical authorization form from the parent/guardian along with a copy of the family insurance card; this will ease the process of obtaining medical care for the minor. Programs should also have notification plans for parents/guardians in the event of a medical situation.
- Programs should develop plans for how serious medical emergencies will be handled including: who will provide care for the minor; who will notify medical authorities, program leadership, and parents/guardians; and who will transport. There should also be plans for moving other minors away from injury scenes and ensuring appropriate supervision levels are maintained as the medical emergency is handled.

# Medication

*Medication management should be considered for all minors programs, especially overnight programs where participants share rooms. This ensures the overall safety of minor participants by limiting the sharing or taking of someone else's medication. There are several measures programs can implement to ensure all medication is taken appropriately and that medication usage is recorded.*

- Program administrators should develop a comprehensive plan for medication management for the program; if assistance is needed, contact the Director of Compliance for Programs and Activities Serving Minors at [programsforminors@uga.edu](mailto:programsforminors@uga.edu).
- Residential programs should develop plans to collect and hold all medications (except emergency medications like epi-pens and inhalers, these should be kept by minors). All medications should be in the original container. Ensure all staff know where emergency medications are kept (pocket, backpack, etc.) in case they need to assist the minor. For younger minors, program leaders should work with parents on if staff need to hold and administer emergency medications.
- **If programs do not have medical personnel on staff who are licensed to prescribe or administer medications, program staff will only hold the medications and provide the medications to the minors when they need to take a medication. At no time should a staff member handle a bottle of the individual minor's medication directly, nor should any staff member provide guidance on how or what medications to take. If the minor is unsure of the medication to take or correct dosage, program staff should contact the minor's parent/guardian for clarification.**
- When any medications, including parent/guardian approved over-the-counter medications, are taken program staff should record on a medication administration record. This document should include name of the minor, type and dosage of medication, and date/time taken.
- Program staff should be properly trained to assist the minor with reminders when a prescribed medication should be taken and ensure that the medication is available to the minor at the appropriate time.
- There are many medical and legal aspects to medication management that program administrators should be aware of; if assistance is needed, contact the Director of Compliance at [programsforminors@uga.edu](mailto:programsforminors@uga.edu).

# Misconduct Reporting

*Misconduct reporting is critical to safe programming. It is essential that all program staff, participants, and parents/guardians understand the process to report concerns. Staff especially should be observant for any potential misconduct within the program and vigilant in reporting.*

- Misconduct Reporting can be as significant as reports of abuse to reports of inappropriate language used during programs. Everyone who is part of your program should understand that any misconduct witnessed or reported should be made known to program leadership.
- All program participants and parents/guardians should be made aware of who to report misconduct to (this can be worded in program communications as “concerns about the program” or “any situation that makes you or your child uncomfortable”). Provide a primary and secondary person to report to (in case the primary person is part of the alleged misconduct) including methods of contact like phone number and e-mail.
- All program staff should also know who to report misconduct to, including a primary and secondary program leader or other University official. Additionally, if misconduct is committed by minor program participants, staff should enforce the participant code of conduct via appropriate disciplinary methods.
- All reports of misconduct should be taken seriously and evaluated; depending on the type of alleged misconduct program leadership may need to contact the UGA Equal Opportunity Office, UGA Police (706-542-2200 or 911), or Legal Affairs for assistance.

# Parental Engagement

*Effective communication and interaction with parents/guardians should be a component of all minors program planning. Pre-program information, as well as updates during programs on significant incidents, are critical elements of successful operations. Effective parental engagement will result in much smoother program operations.*

- Program leaders should develop information to provide to parents/guardians prior to program start. This information should include: general itinerary (including the types of activities the minor will engage in), residential housing procedures, program rules and guidelines, participant code of conduct, contact information for program leaders, and how to report concerns. Ensuring parents/guardians have a good understanding of your program and the activities involved can help parents assess whether the program is a good fit for their child, limit parental questions, and enhance engagement during the program.
- Programs should identify staff who will communicate with parents/guardians in the event of significant incidents. These staff should be properly trained in how to best communicate information to parents/guardians including details about their child and actions the program has taken to ensure safety of all participants. Program leaders need to ensure the confidentiality of information about other minors in the program. If program leaders are unsure of what information to share, they should engage their department leadership.
- Program leaders also need to be prepared to handle difficult conversations with parents/guardians about disciplinary issues, inappropriate behavior, and removing minors from programs. Ensuring that all information is gathered first is critical; leaders should speak with staff directly involved in situations.
- Parent/guardian engagement is a critical component of successful programs. Ensure your program staff are prepared to correctly interact with parents/guardians during all phases of programming.

# Residential Housing

*Many programs involve minors staying overnight at a university dormitory, camp cabin, or hotel. Residential program planning and supervision are critical to program safety. Ensuring the overall well-being of minors during evening and overnight hours should be a key component of planning.*

- Campus dormitories are preferred due to the ability to control access to the building and general greater safety of the campus environment. If hotels are used for minors programs, program leaders and staff need to be vigilant about security and maintain awareness of others near minor rooms.
- If rooming minors two or more to a room, they should be housed by age and each minor should have their own bed. Generally house minors the same age or within a year or two in age of each other. This will mitigate potential issues of inappropriate behavior based on larger age differences and should help protect against bullying.
- Residential staff should be housed in separate rooms but interspersed around the minors' rooms. This will allow staff to be close enough to resolve issues and be readily available to minors as needed. Ensure staffing ratios are appropriate based on ages of the minors.
- Programs should have well defined and explained rules for minors in the residential component of the program including: common areas that minors can use, off limit floors for males and females, and curfew times for being in rooms and lights out. Minors should be aware of consequences if they are found in off limits areas or leave the dormitory without permission or supervision. These rules should be reviewed during program orientation with reminders throughout program as needed.
- Overnight hours are the only times typically when minors are alone with other minor participants without staff supervision. Staff need to be aware of the potential for inappropriate behavior at these times, including misconduct, bullying, and cyberbullying. All staff and minor participants should be aware of who to report misconduct to and how to report.

# Safety and Security

*Programs should develop well planned safety and security procedures to ensure the well-being of minor participants. Safety and security can encompass many areas from accountability of minors to awareness of potential internal and external risks to program participants. Program administrators should develop effective plans, document plans, and train all program staff on their role in safety and security areas.*

## Safety:

- Overall safety begins with a detailed review of all program elements to identify areas of risk, and then creating a plan for risk mitigation. This can involve many aspects of the program including program activities, movement between program areas, and ensuring continuous supervision. While all risk cannot be eliminated, unnecessary risks should be addressed. Program changes can be made to provide the safest environment possible.
- Program staff should be trained to recognize areas and times of significant risk and to implement measures to keep minors safe. An inspection of facilities, equipment, and safety items before programs begin can better ensure overall safety; a mismatch between facilities and users is a common source of injury. It is critical to have detailed pre-program staff training, refresher training during the program on key areas, and a well-developed communications plan between staff and program leadership.
- All programs should have safety plans in place for events like a missing minor, severe weather response, evacuation of facility, active shooter/active threat, and medical emergencies. Program leaders should develop plans for these situations and facilitate training for all staff. An emergency template is available for free from the UGA Office of Emergency Preparedness at <https://prepare.uga.edu/campus-emergencies/departmental-planning/>.
- A strong safety-first program allows anyone, staff or minor participant, to raise a concern about safety. All potential safety issues raised should be considered by staff before continuing with program activities.

## Security:

- Since many of our programs take place on open campuses and facilities, program leaders and staff need to be aware of their surroundings at all times. If a potentially unsafe situation develops, staff should notify campus police or other appropriate authorities.
- Housing should be in secured campus dormitories preferably; this will provide the best security during overnight hours. If housing in other facilities, like hotels, program staff will need to maintain heightened awareness of others in the vicinity of program minors.
- All staff and minor participants should know who to notify in the event of a significant safety or security event, including program and department leadership and, if needed, UGA Police (706-542-2200 or 911) or other emergency response authorities. For camps in other jurisdictions, the program staff should be sure to identify clearly in which county or city the event takes place, and have a reliable manner to contact public safety there.

# Screening

*While criminal history background investigations are a key component of staff hiring and are required by the Programs and Activities Serving Minors Policy, programs should also utilize other methods to ensure potential staff and volunteers are properly screened appropriate to the level of contact they are expected to have with minors. Effective screening options are provided below.*

## **For Programs/Activities hiring staff:**

- Closely review resume and cover letter for experience working with minors. Ensure the applicant has the necessary background experience for the position.
- During the interview, ask questions about reasons for applying for position, focusing on motivation for working with minors and understanding of the unique responsibilities of supervising minors.
- Contact references and ask about prior experience working with minors and their impression of the candidate's approach to safely engaging with minors in their care.

## **For Programs/Activities working with non-hired staff (volunteers, university students):**

- Use a screening system to evaluate volunteers or other non-hired staff for their understanding of the requirements of working with minors and their motivation to work with a minors program.

## **For all Program/Activity staff:**

- Evaluate prior experience to understand level of training needed to ensure full understanding of minors protection role.
- Only permit fully qualified staff to work with minors; do not just fill a position, select the right individual to ensure your program is being managed safely.
- Develop systems to monitor new staff to ensure they are following safe procedures for working with minors; have reviews of conduct and performance at intervals in time working with the Program/Activity.

# Staff Training

*One of the keys to a well-managed and safely run minors program is effective staff training. Program leaders need to ensure that program plans and procedures are effectively communicated to all staff so that program safety is maintained at all times. Whether programs are for a few hours or weeklong and residential, staff training should be incorporated into program plans.*

- Program leaders can provide initial training before the program by utilizing a mixture of externally created online training modules, program-specific online training, and by creating a staff manual. This will allow staff to begin to learn and understand program requirements before arriving for the program event.
- Program leaders need to ensure all staff complete the required trainings under the policy:
  - Mandated Reporter (what to do if child abuse/neglect is seen or suspected)
  - Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment and Sexual Misconduct
  - Staff Code of Conduct

These are the minimum requirements for all UGA minors programs but should not be considered the only training required.

- In person staff training will differ depending on the scale of your program. Training for a two hour activity will look different from training for a multi-week residential program. But all training should include some core components: accountability plan, Staff Code of Conduct, emergency response procedures, general safety discussion, first aid/medical situations.
- For programs that run for multiple weeks, develop training refreshers on key areas like safety and security to ensure continued awareness by all staff. Be deliberate about setting aside time for these refresher trainings.
- Program leaders can develop well designed and safe program plans, but if that information is not provided to front line staff, the program will not run effectively and safely. Developing and implementing effective staff training is critical to well run programs.
- Contact the Director of Compliance for Programs and Activities Serving Minors at [programsforminors.uga.edu](mailto:programsforminors.uga.edu) if you need assistance in designing a staff training plan or creating a staff manual.

# Transportation

*Programs that provide transportation to minors should ensure they are following all UGA motor vehicle use requirements. Additionally, all program staff who drive or ride in vehicles with minors should perform their duties in a safe manner at all times.*

- All program staff who drive vehicles on University business must follow the [UGA Motor Vehicle Use Policy](#). Program leadership should provide hands on training, especially if staff will be driving 12-passenger vans or larger vehicles. Many organizations are restricting use of 15-passenger vans for minors programs due to roll over concerns.
- Minor transportation should preferably be done in UGA vehicles; while personal vehicles can be used if needed for infrequent trips, personal vehicle use for minors should be minimized.
- Programs should plan to have two staff members in each vehicle to follow the two adult guidelines while in the vehicle as well as having the ability to offload and park the vehicle away from the offload location. Developing plans for movement and loading/unloading will ensure continuous supervision of the minors.
- Use of UGA and other buses is another option for transportation. If program staff will drive buses, drivers must have a commercial driver's license for larger vehicles. Ensure staff have good accountability before boarding and after departing bus.
- Staff should operate all vehicles safely and follow all motor vehicle rules to ensure the safety of the minors they are transporting.