

USC | Guidelines for Interacting with Minors

As outlined in [USC's Protecting Minors policy](#), all members of the university community are expected to be role models for young people and to therefore maintain the highest standards of behavior when interacting with minors, including acting in a respectful and responsible manner that is consistent with the university's [Code of Ethics](#) and the behavioral expectations set forth in the Guidelines for Interacting with Minors below.

These guidelines have been developed to help foster safe, welcoming environments that promote the growth and development of minors at USC, help adults avoid exhibiting behaviors that could cause harm or be misinterpreted, and help minors understand what healthy boundaries and appropriate adult-minor interactions should look like.

Note: [USC's Protecting Minors policy](#) places additional requirements on adults participating in camps, programs, activities and events with minors.

All members of the university community are expected to:

1. Establish and maintain appropriate boundaries when interacting with minors.

- **Do not have private, one-on-one interactions with a minor.** All interactions between an adult and a minor are to be observable and interruptible. In other words, contact must be able to be seen by another individual (observable), and someone must be able to stop the interaction easily (interruptible).

Tip: Plan ahead so that you don't find yourself in a situation that leaves you alone with a minor. If you do unexpectedly find yourself in this situation (e.g., a minor comes to your office, stays late after an activity to speak with you), ask another informed adult to join you, or work with the minor to reschedule the meeting for a time and place that would allow for an observable and interruptible interaction. If a minor feels it's important to speak privately with you, simply move the conversation to a public location or common area where you can still speak privately but others can observe and/or interrupt.

- **Do not engage in private electronic communication with a minor.** Ensure all electronic communication with minors is open and transparent, meaning at least three individuals (e.g., a fellow colleague, the minor's parent/guardian, multiple participants, etc.) are included on all communications. This is sometimes referred to as the "rule of three."

Tip: If a minor reaches out to you privately, simply include another informed adult (e.g., the minor's parent/guardian, or a colleague) on the response for transparency.

- **Do not communicate with minors using personal accounts, including personal email, phone, or social media accounts.** In addition to following the "rule of three," maintain professional boundaries by only using professional and/or programmatic accounts to communicate with minors.

Tip: If you're involved in a youth program, consider using an app designed specifically to promote safe, open and transparent communication. Or, consider creating a shared, monitored inbox/email address that functions similarly. Additionally, it's not uncommon for minors to want to stay in touch with those they see as mentors or can look to for educational or professional guidance. Set their expectations from the beginning by establishing boundaries for communication. If you receive a social media connection request or if they ask you for your personal contact information, remind them of your role (professional, educator, etc.) and explain how they can appropriately contact you.

- **Do not shower, bathe, or undress in the presence of a minor.**

Tip: Plan ahead to ensure there are separate accommodations available for adults and minors.

2. Understand and exhibit appropriate behavior at all times.

- **Do not engage in any abusive conduct (or conduct that could be perceived as such) toward or in the presence of a minor.** This includes, but is not limited to, hitting, kicking, shaking, slapping, restraining, degrading, threatening, shaming, humiliating, withholding basic needs (e.g., water during physical activities), etc.
- **Do not engage in any sexual activity, engage in sexually explicit conversations, or share sexually explicit material (or assist in any way to provide access to such material) with minors.**
- **Do not touch minors in a manner that a reasonable person could interpret as inappropriate.** Limit physical contact unless there is a clear, appropriate purpose (e.g., treatment of an injury), it is done in the presence of others, and the consent of the minor and/or the parent/guardian is received first.

Tip: Some examples of appropriate (when consent is given) and inappropriate physical interactions are outlined below.

Appropriate physical interactions (with consent)	Inappropriate physical interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hugging from the side ● Patting on the shoulder or upper back ● Shaking hands ● High-fives and “fist (or elbow) bumps” ● Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hugging with full body contact ● Kisses ● Sitting on someone’s lap ● Wrestling ● Carrying a minor / piggyback rides ● Tickling ● Massages ● Touching the bottom, waist, chest, or genital areas ● Any physical expressions of affection ● Sexual contact of any kind ● Staring at a minor’s body

- **Do not comment on the physique or body development of a minor, make sexual comments or jokes in their presence, or talk about sexual relationships or encounters with a minor.** Keeping verbal interactions between adults and youth appropriate is just as important as maintaining appropriate physical boundaries.

Tip: Some examples of appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions with minors are outlined below.

Appropriate verbal interactions	Inappropriate verbal interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Praise (e.g., “well done!” or “keep up the good work!”) ● Encouragement (e.g., “you can do it!”) ● Asking general questions about a minor’s day or weekend ● Using language that is supportive and positive ● Age-appropriate conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Calling someone names ● Adults discussing personal relationship problems with a minor ● Asking a minor to keep a secret ● Cursing ● Discriminatory or sexual jokes ● Shaming or belittling someone ● Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate ● Negative remarks about a minor or their family ● Commenting on or complimenting a person’s body or body development ● Showing special attention to one child

3. Prioritize the safety and well-being of minors.

- **Do not take or post images (or other personally identifiable information) of minors on social media or elsewhere without prior parental consent.** It’s surprisingly easy to gather personal information about people through photos or posts shared online (frequented locations, routines, interests, names, family information, etc.). Protect the privacy of minors by obtaining proper consent before posting anything about them. Authorized posts should only be shared on professional or programmatic platforms and after waiting a few days before doing so to protect their safety.

Tip: When it comes to keeping minors protected in a digital age, education is a critical component. Help ensure that minors and their families understand online threats and what they can do to keep themselves and others safe. For additional resources related to online safety, visit the Office of Youth Protection and Programming’s [Resource Library](#).

- **Do not use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal or mind-altering drugs while interacting with a minor or when responsible for a minor's welfare.**

Tip: For related information, see [USC Drug-Free](#) policy, which also includes resources and information about support for USC faculty, staff, students, and the university community.

- **Do not have or use firearms or weapons of any kind while maintaining custody of care of minors.**

Tip: For related information, see [USC’s Violence-Free Campus](#) policy.

- **Do not transport minors alone in any vehicle, except in an emergency.** Additionally, personal vehicles should never be used for transporting minors, and transportation should only take place when done in accordance with university transportation policies.

- **Tip:** If you need to transport a minor, ask another informed adult to accompany you, ensuring the “rule of three.”

4. Treat all minors and their families equitably and respectfully.

- **Do not discriminate against a minor based on their sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, color, religion, culture, place of birth, age, class, ability, health, citizenship, language, or other identities.** All minors are individuals whose differences are to be valued, and they (and their families) must always be treated equitably, fairly, and respectfully.

Tip: Review USC's [Discrimination, Harassment and Retaliation policy](#) for more information. And for resources on how to foster diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments for youth, visit the Office of Youth Protection and Programming's Resource Library.

- **Do not provide gifts or special attention to an individual minor or their parent/guardian that is not given to others.**

Tip: Praise and recognition are important components to youth development, but giving an individual minor or their family special attention or gifts, or engaging in behavior that encourages keeping secrets from a parent/guardian, could be misinterpreted as grooming – a method used by offenders to manipulate a young person (and the family) in order to gain their trust and gain access to a child.

Reporting violations of USC's Guidelines for Interacting with Minors

If you are concerned that a member of the USC community has violated the Guidelines for Interacting with Minors, or if you have concerns about possible child abuse or neglect, follow the steps outlined on the [Office of Youth Protection and Programming's Reporting webpage](#) to notify the proper external and/or university officials.

Questions about USC's Guidelines for Interacting with Minors can be directed to USC's Office of Youth Protection and Programming by emailing minors@usc.edu.

Confirmation of Understanding

Please sign below and return the signed original copy to SHINE Director Monica Lopez.

I have read USC's Guidelines for Interacting with Minors, and I agree to abide by the expectations. I also understand that if I am participating in a camp, program, activity or event with minors, I am responsible for meeting the additional requirements outlined in [USC's Protecting Minors policy](#).

Signature: _____

Date: _____