

NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE

Youth Policy



Approved by the Board of Directors - March 29, 2011

Youth Policy

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Youth Policy

WELCOME

Dear New York-New Jersey Trail Conference Colleague,

Working with youth can bring you immense satisfaction as you help them learn, develop and succeed. A policy for working with youth is also a complicated and important issue. The goal of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference's Youth Policy is to ensure the well-being and safety of the youth with whom we work, as well as to protect the Trail Conference, its volunteers and employees.

This policy is divided into several sections, including definitions, standards of conduct and responsibilities for adults and youth, as well as the Trail Conference's role if a violation does occur.

The most salient part of the policy is the "Two-Adult Rule," which requires any Trail Conference worker to have another adult present any time he or she interacts with youth on a Trail Conference project.

People working with youth will need to be familiar with our Youth Policy, and the rules detailed herein must be strictly adhered to, except in an emergency, where the life or welfare of a youth or adult takes precedence. As you might imagine, it is not possible to anticipate every potential situation that may arise between people and, in such situations, common sense would be the overriding rule.

All individuals working with youth must complete a Trail Conference Youth Program Application form annually, and will be required to have a background check. Youth Advisors will also be required to obtain a Trail Conference Parental Consent form for each youth participant in a program under the advisor's supervision.

The policy and relevant forms are available to any interested party. Please direct any questions or comments to the Trail Conference Volunteer Administrator at: 201.512.9348.

We hope you recognize the tremendous benefits of working with youth and will join us in helping ensure that everyone involved has a positive and rewarding experience.

We appreciate your cooperation and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Volunteer Committee

New York-New Jersey Trail Conference

Section 1: ABOUT THE TRAIL CONFERENCE

1.1 Mission

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference is a federation of member clubs and individuals dedicated to providing recreational hiking opportunities in the region and to representing the interests and concerns of the hiking community. The Trail Conference is a volunteer-directed public service organization committed to:

- Developing, building, and maintaining hiking trails
- Protecting hiking trail lands through support and advocacy
- Educating the public in the responsible use of trails and the natural environment

1.2 Vision

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference will maintain its position as the leading hiking trail organization in the region. In pursuit of that goal, the Trail Conference will:

- Continue programs of developing, building and maintaining hiking trails.
- Expand its role as an advocate for better stewardship of trail lands.
- Enhance its efforts to preserve and protect trail lands.
- Increase visibility and cooperation with member clubs, partners and the public.
- Sustain a high level of quality volunteer participation.
- Produce high-quality publications.
- Broaden the demographic base of its membership.
- Strengthen the financial base of its operation.

1.3 Brief History

In 1920, the NY-NJ Trail Conference was formed when local hiking clubs gathered to plan a system of marked hiking trails to make Harriman-Bear Mountain State Park more accessible to the public. In this same park, Trail Conference founders constructed and opened the first section of the Appalachian Trail (AT) in 1923. During the 1930s, more trails were built and a system of trail maintenance was developed, giving each hiking club a share of the responsibility.

By the 1970s, the Trail Conference began to do more than just maintain trails. For example, it began to publish hiking maps, beginning with Harriman-Bear Mountain State Park. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Trail Conference moved the AT off roads and onto National Park Service (NPS) property purchased to permanently protect it. The efforts to protect the AT marked the beginning of expanding the number of miles of trails the Trail Conference maintained.

Today, this maintenance network covers over 1,700 miles of foot trails from the Delaware Water Gap north to beyond the Catskills. The Trail Conference is also involved with other not-for-profits and governmental units to ensure public access to hiking trails.

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Section 2: PURPOSE

2.1 Statement of Purpose

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (Trail Conference) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the youth who participate in our programs. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to protect the youth participants in our programs from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior, while also protecting our employees and volunteers from false accusations.

Although the Trail Conference works closely with our many partners – trail maintaining clubs and other partner agencies – this policy applies to Trail Conference employees and volunteers who are representing the Trail Conference and who are working on programs that involve youth.

These rules must be strictly adhered to, except in case of an emergency, where the life of a youth or adult takes precedence.

2.2 Definitions

- **Alone:** Out of view of another adult.
- **Child, Youth:** The terms “child” and “youth” include all persons under the age of 18.
- **Program:** Any program, project or event over which the Trail Conference has direct operational control.
- **Volunteer Administrator:** The Trail Conference staff member responsible for volunteers.
- **Youth Advisor:** Any Trail Conference employee or adult volunteer who will be working as part of a Trail Conference program with youth in any of these circumstances:
 - Those who will be leading or helping to lead any Trail Conference programs that are targeted to youth, and who will be teaching or leading youth participants in those groups;
 - Those who will be involved in overnight activities with youth.
- The term Youth Advisor does not apply to:
 - Trail Conference employees and volunteers whose job description requires no planned contact with youth or only occasional or incidental contact with youth;
 - Those meeting briefly with a supervised youth group on a trail crew or other Trail Conference program, but not accompanying the group;
 - Those who provide information to youth groups or serve as liaisons for youth group leaders but do not work directly with youth;
 - Those addressing participants at Trail Conference programs where youth might be included, along with adult participants.
- **Participant:** Any youth taking part in a Trail Conference program.
- **Youth Group Leader:** An adult supervising a youth group who is not representing the Trail Conference.

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Section 3: TWO-ADULT RULE

There must be at least two adults present at all times in any program involving the Trail Conference and youth. There should never be one Trail Conference representative alone with youth participants, regardless of who has organized or controls the program.

When planning programs with youth, it is to be anticipated that the group may split up. Plans must be made to include two adults with each group, regardless of group size.

Enforcement: Violations of the two-adult rule must be reported to the Executive Director or Deputy Executive Director, who will determine what remedial action is necessary.

Section 4: YOUTH ADVISOR APPLICATION PROCESS

4.1 Screening Process

All potential Youth Advisors will be screened as follows:

- **Written Application:** All applicants seeking to work with youth must complete and sign a Trail Conference Youth Program Application form. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, references, employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions.
- **Background checks:** Background checks will be conducted in accordance with the Trail Conference's insurance company requirements.
- **Reference Checks:** The applicants' references will be checked only if there are any questions raised by the background checks. These references preferably should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past, if possible.

4.2 Disqualification

Disqualifying offenses – those that will keep an individual from working with youth in a Trail Conference program – will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Executive Director or Deputy Executive Director in consultation, as needed, with the Volunteer Committee Chair. Generally, disqualifying events include convictions for an offense involving youth, offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency or any conduct contrary to our mission. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

Anyone determined to be disqualified may appeal the decision to the Executive Director within thirty days of being informed of this disqualification.

4.3 Confidentiality of Records

The Volunteer Administrator will maintain, in confidence and in a secure location, the records of all Youth Advisors, including applications, documentation of reference checks and results.

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Section 5: STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

The following applies to all adults in any Trail Conference program involving youth, whether or not they are Youth Advisors.

Trail Conference policies prohibit harassment of any kind – relating to gender, race, color, age, national origin, religion, disability, veteran status and all other legally protected classifications. In addition, Trail Conference volunteers and employees should ensure that they – and the youths they are supervising – do not engage in any behavior that could create a hostile environment.

It is always the adult's responsibility to set and respect boundaries. If a youth attempts to involve an adult in inappropriate behavior, the adult must reject the overture.

5.1 Guidelines for Adults

The Trail Conference has provided the following guidelines for Trail Conference adult volunteers and employees:

- No adult is ever alone with any youth participant in a Trail Conference program. There must be two adults present at all times. Except in case of an emergency where necessary to preserve life or health, the adult must ensure that s/he is not alone with a youth participant.
- When it is necessary for an adult to speak privately with a participant, s/he should find a place out of earshot, but within sight of another adult.
- No adult should transport a youth participant alone in his or her car, regardless of parental permission.
- When interacting with youth participants, adults should never touch areas that are normally covered by swimming suits: breasts, buttocks, and groin. Sexual jokes, comments of a sexual nature, kissing, massages or sexual gestures are not appropriate behavior. In addition, revealing personal information to a youth about an adult's sex life is never appropriate.
- Corporal punishment is never appropriate. This includes spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of participants.
- Adults are not permitted to have or use weapons, alcohol products or illegal drugs. Weapons include, but are not limited to: guns, explosives of any kind, or flare pistols. Trail Conference program managers will determine what type of knives, if any, are appropriate for a particular program or event.

5.2 Compliance

When a Youth Advisor is working with an organized youth group, the Youth Advisor must determine in advance that the youth group and its leaders are acquainted with and can comply with the Trail Conference Youth Policy as well as any other applicable policies.

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5.3 Regulations for Youth Participants

The Trail Conference expects youth participants to respect others in the group, hold a sense of community, have an appreciation for the environment, participate in program activities, be willing to contribute to the whole group and on an individual basis, and have a tolerance for individual differences.

Prior to the start of the program, youth participants and their parents or guardians must understand and agree to abide by the following regulations pertaining to youth. These regulations are for the safety of the individual, the group, and the organization.

- Trail Conference policies prohibit harassment of any kind of its employees or volunteers. In addition to sexual harassment, harassment can also relate to an employee or volunteer's gender, age, race, color, national origin, religion, disability, veteran status and other legally protected classifications. Inappropriate sexual behavior or harassment will result in a youth participant being sent home immediately.
- Youth participants who engage in or promote disruptive behavior will be sent home immediately.
- Youth participants in any Trail Conference program are not permitted to have or use weapons, tobacco, alcohol products, or illegal drugs. Possession or use is grounds for the youth's immediate dismissal from the program.

Section 6: RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

6.1 Definition

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action, or lack of action, which endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse includes the following:

- **Emotional abuse:** any emotional injury, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Neglect:** depriving a child of essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.
- **Physical abuse:** any physical injury inflicted on a child that is not accidental, such as hitting, kicking, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Sexual abuse:** any sexual activity between a child and an adult. This may include, but is not limited to, activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.

6.2 Reporting Procedures

Trail Conference adult volunteers and employees may become aware of abuse or neglect of youth participants in a Trail Conference program. In the event that an adult suspects abuse or neglect of a child under his or her care, this should be reported immediately to the Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director or any member of the Board of Directors for further action, including reporting to authorities as mandated by state and federal law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at the Trail Conference office or during our sponsored programs or activities, the Trail Conference will take the following steps:

- The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
- Any Trail Conference volunteer or employee alleged to have perpetrated abuse or misconduct will immediately be prohibited from working with youth, pending an investigation. If Trail Conference or enforcement officials conducting the investigation determine that the alleged abuse or misconduct has occurred, the volunteer or employee will be removed from any position working with youth and may be terminated from employment or affiliation with the Trail Conference.
- The Trail Conference will complete a Personal Incident Report.
- If the Trail Conference is partnering with another agency, that agency will be notified.
- The Trail Conference will comply with requirements of the state where the incident is alleged to have occurred regarding reporting of abuse.
- The Trail Conference's insurance company will be notified.

6.3 Child Abuse Incident Investigation

The Trail Conference will cooperate with any investigation of a child abuse incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, the Trail Conference may investigate the circumstances of the incident, acting in consultation with, and upon advice from, its insurance company or attorney.

- The Executive Director or his/her designee will be the only Trail Conference spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of child abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. The Executive Director will ensure that information disseminated about the incident is accurate, while protecting the privacy of all involved – especially the alleged perpetrator and the victim. All other volunteers and employees should refrain from speaking to the media.
- The alleged perpetrator may appeal within 30 days a determination of abuse or misconduct by the Volunteer Administrator in consultation with, as needed, the Volunteer Committee Chair. The ad hoc appeals panel will consist of a Board Member, the Executive Director and a Program Coordinator (representing a region or project other than where the alleged abuse occurred).

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- A parent or legal guardian whose child was allegedly abused may also appeal within 90 days to the ad hoc appeals panel in cases where the charges against an alleged perpetrator are dismissed by the Volunteer Administrator during the initial investigation.

Section 7: MEDICAL ATTENTION

7.1 Consent

It is the goal of the Trail Conference to provide a healthy and safe environment for all youth participants. Before any work commences, youth participants must hand in to the supervising Trail Conference volunteer or employee a completed and signed Parental Consent Form. The form will include:

- Permission to work on the program
- Basic medical information
- Pertinent illnesses, medications and any known allergies
- Damage and injury disclaimer

7.2 Injury or Illness

Youth Advisors are encouraged to obtain basic first aid and CPR certification before they begin working with youth. In the event that a youth is injured or becomes ill while under Trail Conference supervision, the following steps should be followed:

For minor injuries or illnesses, scrapes, and bruises, a supervising Trail Conference volunteer or employee or adult supervisor from the youth group will provide simple first aid (adhesive bandages etc.) and will notify the youth participant's parent or guardian of the injury when the youth is picked up from a program.

For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, emergency services will be called and the parent or guardian will be contacted.

In the event of injuries or illnesses requiring treatment by a medical professional, a Personal Incident Report will be completed once the child has received appropriate medical attention. This report must be submitted to the Volunteer Administrator within 48 hours of the occurrence.

7.3 Medication

It is the policy of the Trail Conference not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to youth participants in its programs.

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