



# SOCIETY OF WOMEN ENGINEERS YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

## I. Purpose

The Society of Women Engineers (SWE) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all attendees at SWE-sponsored or SWE-funded youth-focused events and programs.

Ensuring the safety of youth participants at SWE-sponsored activities is the most important responsibility of SWE staff and event volunteers. This policy endeavors to protect event participants, staff, and volunteers during the preparation and execution of youth-focused events and programs involving contact with youth globally.

All volunteers and staff interacting with youth must review and act in accordance with this policy, complete all required training (including SWE's Youth Protection Training at least once every three years), and acknowledge agreement with the standards for interacting with youth outlined in this document.

"Youth" are defined as event or program participants under the age of 18 years.

## II. Event Procedures and Personnel Requirements

### A. Events

1. "Events" are one or more SWE-sponsored interactions with youth.
2. More than one related event is a program and may be considered as a single event with respect to documenting staff and volunteer youth protection obligations during program execution.
3. Events include, but are not limited to, the following youth-facing activities where volunteers may represent the Society:
  - a. Speaker engagements
  - b. Career fairs
  - c. Mentoring programs
  - d. Virtual programs including use of technology to deliver key portions of the program (e.g., e-mail, smart phones, text, learning management systems, online communication platforms)
  - e. Overnight camps or activities sponsored by SWE
  - f. Field trips



## B. Event Participants

1. All participants under the age of 18 (or other legal age of consent) require written parent or guardian permission to attend events.
  - a. Participants under the age of 16 must be signed in and out of the event by an adult parent or guardian. The guardian may be a participating organization leader.
  - b. Participants aged 16 and over may sign themselves in and out of the event with written parental permission. If they are not driving themselves, they must provide the name, relationship, and phone number of their pick-up contact during registration or sign-in.

## C. Event Leads

1. "Event leads or leaders" are SWE members serving as part of the event leadership team.
2. It is mandatory that event leads be aware of the requirements in their location (within or outside the United States) for reporting reasonable suspicions of child abuse.
  - a. Information about each U.S. state requirement is available at the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#). All states require that professionals who work with children report reasonable suspicions of child abuse. Some states require that anyone with suspicions report it.
  - b. Information about non-US based youth protection requirements and regulations can be found in each country's local child welfare laws. More resources are available through the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) or [UNICEF](#).
3. Event leads must complete all youth protection training required for event volunteers and may be required to complete supplemental training as needed by law or procedure.

## D. Event Volunteers

1. "Event volunteers" are SWE members and non-SWE personnel serving as volunteers for a particular SWE-sponsored youth-serving event.
2. All event volunteers (including event leads) must review [SWE's anti-bullying guideline](#) prior to volunteering.
3. All event volunteers must agree to and comply with the standards for interacting with youth outlined in this policy.
4. Volunteers must comply with local health regulations when interacting at SWE-sponsored youth events.

## E. SWE Staff

1. "SWE Staff" are employees of SWE HQ.
2. All SWE staff serving at the event must be aware of this policy.
3. It is mandatory that SWE staff serving at the event be aware of the requirements in their location (within or outside the U.S.) for reporting reasonable suspicions of child abuse and communicate the same in any required youth protection procedures for volunteers.

## III. Standards for Interacting with Youth

The following standards describe SWE's minimum expectations for all personnel who interact with youth in a SWE-sponsored youth-serving activity.

"Youth" refers to any individual under the age of 18. "Personnel," "staff," or "authorized personnel" includes employees of SWE and volunteers who supervise, chaperone, or have custodial or caregiving responsibilities for, or who have unsupervised access to youth.

"Parent" refers to parents and legal guardians.

### A. General Contact: In-Person, Online, Verbal, Virtual, Physical

1. Expectation
  - a. Observe the "rule of three" by having at least one other adult present during interactions with youth.
  - b. Limit physical contact to purposes that are consistent with the program's mission and/or for a clear educational, developmental, or health related purpose, in the presence of another staff member/authorized person, and with the consent of the youth.
  - c. Use program-sponsored e-mail, phone and social media accounts for communication when there is an essential educational or programmatic reason to do so.
  - d. Disclose any pre-existing relationships with youth in the youth program immediately to the program lead. Abide by these standards while affiliated with the youth program, despite any pre-existing personal relationships.
  - e. Virtual interactions may include the use of technology (e.g., e-mail, smart phones, text, learning management systems, online communications platforms, social media, etc.) to carry out program activities.
2. Discouraged or Prohibited

Note: Discouraged behaviors are indicated by use of the word “avoid.” All other behaviors are prohibited.

- a. Avoid being alone with a single youth where interactions cannot be observed by program staff or other adults.
- b. Do not engage in physical or verbal behavior that may be perceived as abusive.
- c. Do not discipline youth by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
- d. Do not engage in purposeful communication or contact including in-person meetings, phone or other electronic communication including social networking, with youth outside of sanctioned program activities.
- e. Avoid texting and other forms of electronic one-on-one communication between a single staff person and a youth. Instead, use technologies and platforms which are accessible by multiple personnel (e.g., a shared email inbox or a group chat functionality) and/or a youth’s parent. It is best practice to copy the parents’ email on messages. Check your country’s regulations for the age of consent.
- f. Do not record images or interactions with youth, except if explicitly allowed by your program and with all requisite parental consents in place. This includes video recordings of online interactions, screen captures, screenshots, or creating other photo or video records of youth.

## B. Equitable Treatment

### 1. Expectation

- a. Treat all youth equitably and consistently, regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, color, religion, culture, place of birth, age, class, ability, health, citizenship, language, or other identities.

### 2. Prohibited

- a. Do not discriminate against any youth based on their sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, color, religion, culture, place of birth, age, class, ability, health, citizenship, language, or other identities.
- b. Do not give personal gifts to youth or their parents, e.g., any item intended to give a youth and/or parent special attention that is not given to others.

## C. Sexual Misconduct

1. Expectation
  - a. Understand and respect physical and personal boundaries set by youth.
2. Prohibited
  - a. Do not engage in sexual contact of any kind (including any verbal or physical contact that can be perceived as sexual in nature).
  - b. Do not date or become romantically involved with youth.
  - c. Do not discuss your own or a youth's sex life or sexual activities.
  - d. Do not share sexually explicit material with youth.

## D. Safety

1. Expectation
  - a. The safety of youth must be the primary concern.
  - b. Report any concerns for suspected abuse or neglect of a youth to authorities per SWE policy requirements.
  - c. Notify SWE representatives per policy requirements of any violations of these standards for interacting with youth.
  - d. Follow all approved transportation and supervision procedures.
2. Prohibited
  - a. Do not possess, sell, use, or be under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, or illegal drugs while engaged in youth-serving activities.
  - b. Do not bring or carry weapons.

## IV. Overnight Events and Transportation

- A. While attending a SWE event requiring an overnight stay, adequate adult chaperoning is expected and must include at least one adult for each ten or part of ten youth.
- B. Any overnight SWE volunteer must be over 21 and have a clear criminal history background check. Approved background checks shall be valid for no more than three years.
- C. Except for a parent sharing sleeping quarters with their own child, no adult should share sleeping quarters with a youth.
- D. In the event that sleeping quarters consist of multiple beds (such as in a bunkhouse or camp cabin), adults may share the sleeping quarters with youth members of the same gender, provided that two or more adults are present.
- E. When transporting youth, the best practice is the "rule of three," with at least three people in the vehicle at all times, along with documented approval from a parent or

guardian for the transportation arrangements. When both of these conditions cannot be met, one of them should be.

- F. All transportation decisions should be made in accordance with local laws and school policies.

## V. Reporting Inappropriate Behaviors, Policy Violations, or Abuse

There are many types of child abuse, but the following are some of the most common: (From the U.S. Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families)

- Physical abuse is non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child.
- Sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child and an adult. This includes any activity, which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult or child.
- Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child and another child when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child has power over the other child. This includes any activity that is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any children attending the event.
- Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury to a child that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development or psychological functioning.
- Neglect is the failure to provide for the basic needs of a child or the failure to protect a child from harm.
- Economic exploitation is the deliberate misplacement, exploitation, or wrongful temporary or permanent use of belongings or money of a child.
- Bullying is seeking to harm, intimidate, or coerce (someone perceived as vulnerable).

When volunteers or staff observe inappropriate behavior, suspected abuse, or possible violations of this policy, they must immediately report their observations to an event lead or SWE staff and, where appropriate or required by law, to local law enforcement.

Reports may be made:

- Verbally or in writing to an event lead
- Verbally or in writing to SWE staff
- By written communication to [youthprotection@swe.org](mailto:youthprotection@swe.org)

All reports of inappropriate behavior, policy violations, or abuse will be taken seriously. Where appropriate or required by law, the event leader or SWE staff will notify local law



enforcement. Event leads and volunteers will fully cooperate with any investigation by local law enforcement.

## VI. Privacy

Photographs or videos may be taken during SWE events for educational, promotional, or documentation purposes. Youth participants will not be identified by full name without parental approval.

Written parental consent is required prior to capturing or publishing media involving youth. Participants who opt out of media use must be clearly identified to ensure exclusion from media and data collection.

- A. For any social networking site that involves requesting a connection (such as inviting someone to be a friend on Facebook), adults should never initiate such connections with youth. If a youth requests such a connection from a SWE volunteer, the volunteer should use their best judgment in responding.
- B. Adults should treat their interaction with youth on social networking sites as though the interaction were occurring in public, in front of other adults and young people. In other words, if it would not be appropriate to say something to a young person in public, it should not be said as a comment on a social networking site either.
- C. SWE volunteers should refrain from social media interactions that can be seen as excessive (such as constantly “liking” or commenting on a person’s posts on Facebook).
- D. Prior to posting any media online, such as photographs, secure written permission from any and all individuals (or parents, for minors) who appear in that media.

## VII. Conflicts with Other Rules

Whenever these guidelines conflict with local school policies, state, provincial, or national laws or regulations, the highest applicable standard shall prevail.

## VIII. Policy Compliance

This policy is intended to assist in monitoring and supervising behaviors and interactions with youth in order to identify and stop behaviors that may be inherently harmful or that may create conditions in which abuse can occur more easily.

Acknowledgment of and agreement to this policy serve as documentary evidence that volunteers and other authorized personnel are in compliance with this policy.

A digital repository will be established and maintained to document training completion, acknowledgments, and adherence to the requirements of this policy.

All volunteers and other authorized personnel who will interact in any way with youth at SWE-sponsored or SWE-funded activities must review and acknowledge this policy, and the consequences for violation, prior to engaging in any such activities.

## **IX. Consequences of Violating Youth Protection Standards**

SWE takes matters involving youth protection seriously. In the case of suspected abuse or neglect of a youth, or violations of the standards for interacting with youth or other requirements of this policy, the Society will adhere to existing policies and procedures for corrective action. Any actions taken will first and foremost consider the need to ensure the safety of youth participating in the program.