Guidelines for Virtual Youth Programming
VCU Protection of Minors office

The guidance below is intended to support Virginia Commonwealth University units with developing and implementing virtual programming for youth participants (under age 18). Recommendations are offered as best practices and should not be construed as official university policy.

Please visit the **Protection of Minors Page** to **register** youth programs/activities (including virtual camps) and review current policies related to youth programming at VCU.

Additional guidance on how to plan and operate virtual camps can be found in the **step-by-step guide** provided by the American Camp Association (ACA).

SELECT APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Select a communication method your staff will use with participants.
Look for communication tools that do not allow for private, unmonitored interactions. Consider a program email address with access by multiple adults.

Enable available security features.
Zoom is the university-supported technology with security features to protect youth privacy and strengthen safety. Best practices for securing a Zoom classroom can be found here and here.

For example, **in Zoom you can**:
- require a unique password to join a meeting,
- enable the "waiting room" feature to give meeting organizers control over who joins the meeting,
- disable screen sharing by non-hosts,
- lock a meeting once all known participants join,
- disable the chat and group messaging features to limit communication to only between the camper and counselor,
- restrict joining to only @vcu.edu participants, and/or
- turn off file transfers.

Additional information on using Zoom at VCU can be found **here**.

Design program activities to eliminate private, unmonitored 1:1 interactions.

- For example, when using Zoom, ensure there will always be two background-checked and trained staff members in each video session.
- Do not allow private chat conversations between a minor and only one adult (allow multiple co-hosts).
- Plan ahead to ensure the Rule of Three is observed and include this requirement in your communications to parents/legal guardians.

SET STANDARDS FOR ONLINE CONTACT

- Provide an agenda outlining the activities of the Program including the times, days, and how to access content.
- Collect registration information such as participant name, address, phone number, parents/legal guardian(s) name(s), phone number(s) and email(s).
- Take attendance and only allow registered participants to participate.
- Only communicate with participants through official Program platforms.
- Ensure that two or more Program staff are present for the duration of the program.
- Keep conversations and interactions focused on the Program goals and objectives.
- Do not share personal information, email, or social media accounts with minor participants.

SET CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS WITH YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Participants at a minimum should:
- Participate in the digital environment to the same standard as a physical environment, including participating when called on, listening attentively, and minimizing distractions to others.
- Not share links or passwords for Program meetings or content.
- Request help if needed.
- Mute when not talking.
- Dress appropriately when on video.
- Not take or share inappropriate screenshots or images.

SET AND ENFORCE EXPECTATIONS WITH STAFF

- Limit virtual contact to purposes consistent with the program's mission and/or for a clear educational, developmental, or health related purpose, in the presence of another staff member, and with the consent of the youth.

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- Ensure accessibility to and support for any technology needed to fully participate in program activities. More information on virtual accessibility can be found **here**. See VCU's **Electronic Accessibility guidelines** for more information.
- Consider enabling automated captioning (live transcription) in **Zoom** to support those with hearing or language barriers.
- Build in frequent breaks for participants to use the bathroom, get food or water, and to refocus their attention.
- Conduct all virtual interactions in a manner that promotes safety and complies with the general contact guidance outlined in the Policy, including:
  - Observing the Rule of Three in online meetings and all other virtual communications.
  - Using only program-sponsored email, phone, video conferencing, or social media platforms.
  - Avoiding text and electronic one-on-one communication between a single staff person and a youth. Instead, use technologies and platforms which are accessible by multiple staff members (e.g., a shared email inbox or a group chat functionality) and/or a youth's parent/legal guardian.
  - Not engaging in purposeful communication or contact including phone or electronic communication or social networking with youth outside of sanctioned program activities.
- Never share sexually explicit online content with youth.
- Never record youth's images or interactions with youth, except if explicitly allowed by your program and with all requisite consents in place. This includes video recordings of online interactions, screen captures, screenshots, or creating other photo or video records of youth.
- Never share personally identifiable information of youth without the requisite consents in place. Be mindful of your online presence and the content shared publicly via your social media or other platforms.
- Ensure online and virtual interactions are conducted via safe, known platforms that limit risks to youth participants.

Engage with staff around conduct code violations or general concerns.
- Monitor methods of communication for program staff and participants to ensure safe and appropriate interactions. Immediately address any concerning behaviors or violations of the conduct code.
- Make sure staff are trained on security features of the selected technology platform and discuss scenarios that may arise requiring them to act (i.e. inappropriate communication, "Zoom-bombing", etc.)

ENGAGE WITH PARENTS/LEGAL GUARDIANS

Inform.
- Educate parents/legal guardians about the technology you are using and how youth will interact with them, and encourage parents/legal guardians to discuss online safety with their children.
- Reiterate parents/legal guardians are responsible for monitoring their child's time online and that program staff are not responsible for nor able to monitor this with distance learning.
- Consider sharing resources with families.
- Parents/legal guardians should understand that they are responsible for:
- Ensuring participant is in an environment that meets the goals of the Program
- Ensuring participant logs in on time and is prepared
- Limiting distractions and keeping participant safe throughout the duration of the Program
- Allowing time for the participant to complete required assignments
- Working with Program staff to resolve issues that may arise
- Reporting illegal or inappropriate online behavior by staff or other program participants
- Get consent.
- Ensure you solicit consent for participation in online youth programming.
- Provide details about how, when, and by what means youth will be interacting virtually with your program.
- Enlist parental supervision.
- Suggest parents/legal guardians be present in the room with participants during online engagement or programming. This is especially important for camp sessions that require physical activity or the use of safety or other personal protective equipment (i.e. STEM-related activities).

PRESERVE YOUTH PRIVACY

- Campers' sign-in information should only display first name and last initial to protect the camper's identity.
- Promote the use of virtual backgrounds to allow for more privacy for counselors and campers.
- Set defaults so all campers are on "mute," with campers un-muted individually by the counselor when there are questions or discussion comments.

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