

National Audubon Society
Youth Protection Policy: Guidelines on Youth Protection
Effective: February 3, 2012

Audubon seeks to ensure that youth have a positive, healthy experience when they participate in its programs. Because each young person is an individual, the interaction with each youth will be unique and based upon the youth's needs. This requires that employees and volunteers exercise good judgment and be thoughtful about the speech, gestures and touch they employ and about the boundaries they establish. Good judgment begins with consideration of the counsel contained in these Guidelines. Any questions should be directed to the Human Resources Department.

A. Young people look to adults for examples of appropriate behavior.

Audubon employees and volunteers should model responsible and enthusiastic scientific inquiry, respect for all creatures, and concern for others. They should always treat others with respect and courtesy. They should use appropriate language and model honorable behavior. Inappropriate language and behavior includes, but is not limited to, sexualized language and jokes or allowing the performance of sexually explicit lyrics.

B. Some young people have had unhealthy experiences with relationships in the past and may interpret the actions of adults through a "lens" clouded by those experiences.

A helpful hand or encouraging touch is a way of leading young people to a better understanding of our world. Yet, the human touch plays other roles as well. Most understand the distinction between appropriate and gracious touching and a touching which is sexual or capable of being perceived as sexual. Everyone involved in activities with youth should consider the character of their physical contacts with the young people they serve.

C. Because one-on-one interactions can be misinterpreted, Audubon recommends implementing the "2-deep" guideline when reasonably possible.

Good teaching is about relationships. While teaching relationships often occur in groups, they sometimes occur in one-on-one encounters. Careful consideration should be given before getting involved in any one-on-one encounter. Might such an encounter be confusing to the young person? Where is the least confusing site for such an encounter? Does a one-on-one meeting place the adult at risk of being falsely accused? Adults should ensure that all interactions with young people both are appropriate and appear appropriate. Significant time alone with one child or providing significant gifts to one child can be perceived as favoritism by others or even grooming behavior. It is not generally advisable. Audubon recommends implementing a "2-deep" practice when reasonably possible. This means that, when reasonably possible, there should be at least two adults within visual range of each other when minors are present.

D. Young people find it difficult to state discomfort or objections.

Adults must bring added sensitivity to physical and verbal cues that youth may provide. Audubon employees and volunteers should ask a young person if they feel comfortable in a certain situation or with a certain person and to allow them appropriate control over their surroundings.

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E. Young people sometimes either exaggerate or trivialize incidents.

Adults should take every complaint seriously, but also carefully verify facts before jumping to an unsupported conclusion.

F. Youth deserve personal privacy.

Although most Audubon activities will be in groups, there will be times when a young person needs individual attention and observing the recommended 2-deep practice is not reasonably possible. Such times may involve answering a personal, individual question, or times when a child needs physical care or assistance. In these situations, adults should provide such care with the needs of the child remaining paramount and with due consideration to the appearances of propriety.