



## **Trout Unlimited Guidelines for Working with Youth & Preventing Sexual Abuse**

For Trout Unlimited's (TU's) mission to succeed beyond our current generation, we must engage children and youth via hands-on fishing, stewardship and conservation programs, with the ultimate goal of encouraging them to become future leaders in conservation.

TU, on both the national and local levels, has many programs that support youth involvement, including overnight trout camps, Trout-in-the-Classroom programs, fly-tying and fly-casting classes, and on-stream monitoring and habitat-improvement events.

This document provides guidance and policies related to effectively and safely working with youth as further described below.

### **Keeping Children and Youth Safe from Sexual Abuse**

Trout Unlimited (TU) strives to create a safe environment for youth, employees, and volunteers so that youth can grow, learn, and have fun while actively participating in sponsored events. Part of creating a safe environment is making sure that youth are not harmed in any way while participating in organization-sponsored activities. One risk in any organization working directly with youth is child sexual abuse.

Organizers of TU events involving youth must structure those events to minimize the risk of sexual abuse. To do so, organizers must consider (1) screening, selection, and training of volunteers, (2) ensuring a safe event environment, (3) interactions between volunteers and youth, (4) monitoring the event, and (5) responding to inappropriate behavior, breaches in policy, and allegations and suspicions of child sexual abuse. The below must be reviewed by all volunteers who will interact with youth in advance of youth events.

#### **Screening and Training Volunteers**

For youth events that do not involve an overnight-stay component, TU does not currently require background checks. The exception to this rule is for all youth events occurring in Pennsylvania, as PA Act 153 requires volunteers working with children or youth (even if not in an overnight setting) pass a series of background checks. However, for any youth event that *does* involve an overnight component, TU requires that the volunteers working the event pass a background check, regardless of the state it occurs in. If your chapter or council is planning an overnight youth event, please contact TU's Youth Education Director or [Q Collins](#) for a copy of the background check procedure.

Once applicable volunteers have passed background checks, volunteers should be provided training on working with youth and guidelines to inform their interactions, such as those below.

### Ensuring a Safe Environment

- Whenever possible, limit events involving youth to one central area of a stream, pond, lake, recreation area or community center, so activities can be easily monitored.
- Address situations in which unsupervised youth could abuse other youth by determining appropriate preventative and responsive strategies in advance of the event.
- Develop policies to address other intra-youth issues, such as bullying.
- Develop procedures for admitting and releasing youth from activities so their whereabouts are always known. Have policies and procedures for monitoring which people outside your group are allowed in and under what circumstances.
- Decide and communicate when and where TU volunteers are responsible for the youth being served—this is especially critical in a multi-organization setting, such as field trips. Work with partner organizations to determine where that responsibility lies and when it shifts, if ever.
- Drive a culture of interpersonal respect, both between adults and youth, and among youth themselves. Keep an ear out for inappropriate language, jokes, gestures, or contact and be prepared to respond appropriately.

### Interactions Between Adult and Youth

- Limit one-on-one interactions whenever possible by having at least two adults always present with youth.
- Encourage and uplift youth through verbal praise and positive reinforcement. While high-fives and fist-bumps can be appropriate forms of praise, refrain from any other forms of physical contact with youth participants.
- Be wary of physical and behavioral signs of abuse and report suspected abuse to the relevant authorities in your state, which may include law enforcement, child protective services, the national child abuse hotline, etc. For more information, please visit [childhelpline.org](http://childhelpline.org) for an interactive map, which provides state contact info for authorities.

### Monitoring the Event

- Look out for inappropriate, harmful, or abusive behaviors, whether between an adult volunteer and youth participant, or between two or more youth participants.
- Do not allow adult volunteers to show favoritism, give gifts to certain youth but not others, or spend time alone with youth.

- Be cognizant of the risk profile of your event and the difficulty of monitoring—for example, more planning may be necessary for an overnight trip than a single-day field trip.
- Acknowledge and praise appropriate behaviors, enthusiasm, and celebrations of others—reward and reinforce positive interactions, such as providing awards for a friendly team fly casting competition.

*Responding to Breaches of the Sexual Abuse Policy  
&  
Allegations and Suspicions of Child Sexual Abuse*

- It is not the role of a volunteer to evaluate or investigate an allegation or suspicion of sexual abuse. Rather, any suspected sexual abuse should be reported to the appropriate authorities for their investigation. Trying to investigate yourself can harm the youth or the legal investigative process.
- Balance the action and response—for example, if a youth participant makes a sexual innuendo, provide the youth with guidance, redirection, and instruction. However, if a youth participant or volunteer forces sexual contact with a youth, this violation should always be reported to the appropriate authorities.
- Tailor strategies, policies, and procedures to each type of child sexual abuse. Identify to whom reports are made in advance of the event. In most states, child protective services is responsible for caretaker abuse and law enforcement is responsible for abuse by all other individuals. Responsibility can vary by state, so consult experts such as those in your nearest child advocacy center, your state sexual violence coalition, or your local rape crisis center to incorporate state guidelines into your specific policies.
- Do not speak with anyone from the media or release any names or incident-associated information under any circumstances. Refer such inquiries to TU Senior Staff.

TU has adopted a Sexual Abuse Policy. *Every volunteer, TU employee, or other TU-retained staff who will be involved with children or youth in a TU-sponsored event must read, sign, and return the policy to the chapter or council's board of directors and/or camp director.* The chapter or council's board of directors and/or camp director must retain these signed policies.

Those volunteering or working at an *overnight youth event* must read, sign and return the policy to TU's Youth Education Director, the camp director (if applicable), and the chapter or council's board of directors before participating in the event. It's the responsibility of the person in charge of the council or chapter youth program to assure that every volunteer, TU employee, or other TU-retained staff has reviewed and signed the Sexual Abuse Policy. People volunteering in an overnight capacity will also be required to pass a background check.

**Releases**

Organizers of TU events involving children and youth must keep in mind that children and youth cannot legally consent to participate in the event, cannot agree to waive any right they may have to pursue claims against the organizers of the event, and cannot consent to the use of photographs containing their image. Therefore, TU strongly recommends that TU national staff and each chapter and council sponsoring a project involving children or youth obtain signed [Liability Waiver and Appearance Release](#) forms from the parent or legal guardian of each child or youth who will be involved in the event. The requirements for a successful liability waiver differ from state to state, and TU urges the organizers of TU events involving youth to have a local lawyer review the waiver and amend as necessary to bring them into compliance with the particular state's law.

Children and youth, like adults, have a right to their privacy, and no one may use photographs, videos, or other depictions of a child's or youth's likeness without the express written permission of the child's or youth's parent or legal guardian. The Liability Waiver and Appearance Release form, once signed by the participant (or the participant's parent or legal guardian, if under 18 years old) gives TU, its chapters and its councils the ability to use photographs or videos of the adults and youth participants who have signed the form. However, no child or youth should be prohibited from participating in a TU-sponsored event if his or her parent or guardian checks the box on the form indicating they do NOT agree to use of the participant's name, voice, or image. If a parent or guardian of a child or youth checks that box, no pictures, videos or other likenesses of the participant may be used by anyone associated with the TU-sponsored event.

Please remember that a child's or youth's contact information is to be used solely for chapter-related or council-related business and must be held in compliance with Trout Unlimited's Privacy Policy. Youth member contact information should never be used for external purposes without the written consent of the child's or youth's parent or guardian. For more information, please see our document on youth member communications best practices.

### **Insurance**

TU's liability policy covers events involving children and youth, subject to the limitations and exclusions of the policy. Councils and chapters have the option of purchasing supplemental accident insurance, which covers physical injury to a participant in a TU event without regard to whether the injury was caused by anyone's fault. For more information on TU's insurance, please contact [Q Collins](#), Volunteer Governance & Reporting Manager at [q.collins@tu.org](mailto:q.collins@tu.org).