

Safety and Liability Issues

Where should I work with a student?

Locations will vary, depending upon availability and the preference of the student's teacher. Many schools are crowded, so you may end up working with the student in the hallway. Try to find a quiet space with as few distractions as possible.

Sometimes a teacher will direct you to an empty classroom. Be sure to leave the door open at all times, and to sit in two desks which are easily seen by those passing by. **Always work in a public area, on site.**

If you are working with a student in an after school program, it may be tempting to offer the student a ride home. **Never go off site with a student, and never give them a ride in your car.** Your volunteer experience is limited to the public school setting.

What are my confidentiality rights?

As the relationship with a student progresses, he/she will begin to trust you and may start to confide in you. You should take time to listen and show them that you care about them. However, do not make a promise you cannot keep. If a student reveals information relating to a possible abusive situation, let the student know that you care and are there to listen but that you are required to pass this information on to a teacher, counselor, or principal who can offer them help. There is also a chance that someone may already have insight into the situation, which could help you to understand and work better with that student.

Personal information about yourself should be shared only as it is relevant to the work you are doing with the student. Avoid giving personal contact information such as your address, phone, and email.

Can I hug my student?

Some students, especially at the elementary level, will naturally become very attached and affectionate toward you. Many students are craving affection and attention, so it is important that you handle the situation with sensitivity. Unfortunately, **a front hug is unacceptable**, so carefully put your arm around a child's shoulder and turn it into a side hug. Use other signs of affection, such as "high fives", and remember the appropriate places to touch students (see next section). In addition, regardless of age, students should never sit on your lap.

What are some safer touch areas?*

Areas that are safest to touch are:

- Shoulders
- Upper Back
- Arms
- Hands



Remember to keep in mind the cultural perspective and personal context of touch from the student's perspective. Cultural influences, beliefs and personal history affect a student's comfort level regarding personal boundaries. **Some children are not inviting of touch and may want more personal space**; respect their wishes. In general, touch all students in a consistent manner.

** Special circumstances will arise where touch that exceeds these guidelines will be necessary. Special education, nursing and coaching may require additional student contact for the health and hygiene needs of the student. Be clear (to yourself and the student) about when, where, why and how you are touching the student.*

What are some signs of possible child abuse?

The following factors may be present when abuse has occurred, but do not guarantee an abusive situation. If any of the following signs are present in your child, **you are required to alert the teacher, principal, or counselor so that they can further investigate the situation:**

- Signs of injury, such as welts, bruising, cuts, burns, fractures, or swellings.
- A history of repeated, untreated, or unexplained physical injury.
- A contradiction between the story, "I fell off my bed", and the physical evidence, such as repeated bruising.
- The child appears to be uncomfortable or fearful when talking about the injury.
- Child alludes to or seems preoccupied with sexual matters.

What is the purpose of these rules?

The Seattle School District wants you, as volunteers, to carry out your responsibilities in a caring and appropriate manner. We want you to feel comfortable about hugging and touching kids and we want you to feel safe and to have guidelines that will assist you in creating and maintaining a safer environment for you and the students you work with.