

All persons working with Optimist programs for youth (under the age of majority) are expected to read/understand, agree to, and abide by these guidelines. This policy is recommended for all Clubs.

Reporting: All persons involved in an Optimist Club, JOI Club or Optimist Project shall report to local authorities any good-faith suspicion or belief that any child is or has been physically or sexually abused, physically or emotionally neglected, exposed to any form of violence or threat, exposed to any form of sexual exploitation, including the possession, production, or distribution of child pornography, online solicitation, enticement, or showing of obscene material. You may not abdicate this reporting responsibility to any other person.

Investigation of Abuse: Remember that you are not an investigator and that the investigation of allegations of abuse is best left to a trained investigator. Action on reports of suspected child abuse may be facilitated by working through child protective services and law enforcement agencies in your area. Each state has an agency designated to be the central reporting authority for child abuse within that state. The staff of these agencies may be available to provide additional information and training to leaders. Additional sources of assistance can be provided from the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN); P.O. Box 1182, Washington DC 20013 or the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (CCC), 615 Academy Road, Winnipeg MB R3N 03N. Optimists will not tolerate any form of child abuse in their programs and will take all necessary steps to remove any offenders from leadership positions.

Chaperone: A chaperone shall be defined as a parent, an Optimist member, faculty member, legal guardian, or person who has reached the age of majority who is serving in the place of a parent, and registered with and accompanying the youth members at an Optimist Club event.

Alcoholic Beverages: While attending any project, meeting, social event, or other gathering that is conducted for the benefit of youth in attendance, adults are expected to refrain from consumption of alcoholic beverages during any portion of the event in the presence of youth.

Use of Tobacco, E-cigarettes, and Marijuana: While attending any project, meeting, social event, or other gathering that is conducted for the benefit of youth in attendance, adults are expected to refrain from the use of tobacco, e-cigarettes, and marijuana products during any portion of the event in the presence of youth.

Overnight stays: While attending an event that requires overnight stay in a hotel or camp/conference setting, adequate adult chaperoning is expected and should include no fewer than two adult males for each ten or part of ten youth males, and two adult females for each ten or part of ten youth females. Except for a parent sharing a sleeping room with a child of the parent, no adult should share a hotel or dormitory sleeping room with a youth. In the event that sleeping quarters consist of multiple beds, such as a

bunkhouse or camp cabin, adults may share the sleeping quarter with youth members of the same gender, provided that two or more adults are present. At no time should an adult share a bed with a youth, with the exception of parent sharing a bed with the child of the parent.

Transportation: Adults transporting youth in a motor vehicle should do so with a second adult in the vehicle, or in hardship cases, the "rule of threes" being at least three people in the car at all times, is recommended.

Medications: The possession of prescription and non-prescription medications by youth at an event should be permitted only by permission of the parent/guardian.

Background checks: Background checks for adults working with youth should be required and should conform to applicable local and state/provincial laws and requirements. In the absence of local or state/provincial regulations, Optimist Clubs are advised to undertake confidential background checks for all adults who will be working directly with youth who may not have undergone a background check.

Conflicts with other rules: Whenever these guidelines may conflict with local state/provincial, or national laws or regulations, the highest applicable standards for conduct are expected to prevail.

Personal Information: All documents bearing personal information, including registration forms, medical information forms, permission to treat forms, etc. should be treated as being confidential. Processes that protect this information should be created, including minimizing the number of people who have access to any such documents. The documents should be maintained a minimum of three years or longer as may be required by applicable state/provincial laws and regulations. After the maintenance period has expired, the documents should be destroyed in a way that maintains confidentiality, such as shredding. It is also expected that the disposal and destruction of all confidential information will conform to applicable state/provincial laws and regulations.

Two-deep leadership: Two registered adult leaders or one registered adult leader and a parent of a participant, one of whom must be 21 years of age or older, are required on all trips and outings.

One-on-one Contact: One-on-one contact between adults and youth is not permitted. In situations that require personal conferences, the meeting is to be conducted in view of other adults and youth.

- A. Social Media: Optimists and/or JOI Advisors may not engage with youths through private online chatting or gaming or any form of one-on-one type of social media, including but not limited to Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube,

LinkedIn, and any other interactive social media platforms. For purposes of this policy, the term “social media” means websites and applications that enable users to create and share content of any kind, (except texting which is addressed below), or to participate in social networking through online interactions.

- B. Texting: Under no circumstances may adults engage in one-on-one text communication applications (such as SnapChat, WeChat, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and similar instant messaging apps) that may be utilized to communicate one-on-one with youths during the program; One-on-one with youths is prohibited except in the event of an emergency. Group text of program updates or information may be acceptable.
- C. Emails: Emailing one-on-one with youth is prohibited except when Optimist/Directors need to communicate with youths as part of the program application and acceptance process. All other email communications with youth shall be copied to either a parent or other adult Program or project member.
- D. Telephone: Private telephone conversations with youths are prohibited except (a) in the event of an emergency or (b) by Program Directors who need to communicate with youth (i) as part of the program application and acceptance process; or (ii) to communicate program information that the youth needs to know in order to participate in the program.
- E. The use of any device capable of recording or transmitting visual images of youth where privacy is expected is inappropriate and prohibited.

Respect of privacy: Adult leadership needs to respect the privacy of youth in situations (such as changing into swimming suits or taking showers) and intrude only to the extent that health and safety requires. Adult leadership also must protect their own privacy in similar situations.

Separate accommodations: There should be separate shower and restroom facilities for males and females.; Separate male and female usage times should be scheduled and posted when separate facilities are not available.

Secret organizations: There are no secret organizations recognized by Optimist International. All aspects of our programs are open to observation by parents and leaders.

Appropriate attire: Proper clothing is required for all activities.

Discipline: Discipline should be constructive and reflect our values. Corporal punishment is never permitted.

Hazing: Any type of hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any activity.

Bullying or Abusive Behavior: Engaging in any abusive conduct of any kind toward or in the presence of youth, including but not limited to verbal abuse, cyberbullying, striking, hitting, punching, poking, spanking, or restraining is prohibited. If restraint is necessary to protect a youth or others from harm, all incidents must be documented and immediately disclosed to the person in charge of the program and the youth's parent/legal guardian. This policy extends to youth-on-youth behavior.

Socializing: Socializing with youth program participants outside the program or inviting youth to one's home is not permitted. Engaging in any sexual activity, making sexual comments, telling sexual jokes, or sharing sexually explicit material (or assisting in any way to provide access to such material) with youth in the presence of youth is prohibited. Additionally, engaging in or allowing youths to engage you in conversations regarding romantic, sexual, or related matter, is prohibited.

Education: Every Optimist Club is expected to inform and educate its members on these guidelines and best practices annually.

Criminal History Background Checks

To ensure that adults working with youth in Optimist Club sponsored programs are of the utmost moral fiber, a clear criminal history background check is necessary for all adults (Optimist members and non-members) registered for, participating in, or staying overnight at any event an Optimist Club organizes that involves interaction between adults and youth. See Optimist International Member Resources Background Check.

Successful completion of the background check (a "clear check") is based on verification that no conviction has been determined for that person.

Anyone subject to action as a result of an unclear background check should have the right to appeal such action. The Optimist Club's Board of Directors shall have final authority on the matter.

An individual should receive a copy of his/her background check by requesting it in writing.

(Mar 2012; Jul 2018; Mar 2019; Mar 2020; Jun 2023)