

Pacific Crest Trail Association Policy for Working with Minors

PCTA aims to support our leaders in inspiring future trail users, trail stewards, and outdoor leaders. While it's important and enjoyable to engage minors, we need to take special precautions to protect them. One of the most critical precautions is to avoid one-on-one situations between minors and adults. This and other standards for supervision, conduct, and participation are outlined in this document.

Conditions of Minor Participation

Age Requirements

PCTA engages with minors in a variety of ways and strives to engage a wide age range of participants in our work. Age requirements vary depending on nature and complexity of the work.

In compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act, for volunteers under the age of 16, permissible work hours are:

- 3 hours on a school day;
- 18 hours in a school week;
- 8 hours on a non-school day;
- 40 hours in a non-school week; and
- between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., except from June 1 through Labor Day, when nighttime work hours are extended to 9 p.m.

On trail maintenance and construction projects:

- A minor can participate with a leader's approval.
- Many PCTA projects can accommodate volunteers 14 years of age and older.
- Select projects have tasks appropriate for children under the age of 14.
- Volunteers under the age of 16 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.
- Volunteers between the age of 16 – 17 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian or by a designated volunteer crew leader who is authorized to work with minors.
- Volunteers under the age of 18 shall not use chainsaws or other power tools.

Required Documents

All volunteers including minors must complete PCTA's Volunteer Sign-In, and Volunteer Application before participating.

All minors, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, must present to PCTA a [Participant Waiver and Release](#) and an [Emergency Medical Release](#), signed by a parent or legal guardian, before participation begins. When working on USFS and NPS lands, individual volunteer service agreements need to be in place to comply with requirements. (see the Addendum for more information).

Many of the minors PCTA works with come as part of an organized and chaperoned group, such as a school or scout group. These groups usually employ their parental consent and release forms, which, when fully completed and signed, may in some cases substitute for PCTA's Participant Waiver and Release and Emergency Medical Release.

If the group prefers to use their forms, the PCTA Associate Director of Volunteer Programs or Regional Manager must review the group's form templates in advance.

- Often, the **medical release** won't need to be repeated. Check that the group's form allows the chaperone to secure proper treatment.

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- On the **participant waiver**, ensure the group's template covers the *project sponsor (PCTA) and not just the group's program* regarding:
 - Photo permission
 - Release from liability
- If these are both covered:
 - PCTA's Participant Waiver and Release, and Medical Release forms are not required.
 - The group's program must confirm they have all parent/guardian signatures on file, effectively transferring guardianship to the program.
 - Written confirmation can be achieved via email or on paper, with the group's waiver template and minor roster attached.
- If these aren't covered:
 - All participants' guardians must complete and sign PCTA's Participant Waiver and Release, and Medical Release forms.

A job hazard analysis or risk assessment worksheet (see addendum for more information) must be completed and conveyed before engaging minors in a trail maintenance and construction project.

Conditions of Leader Participation

Reading and Signing this Policy

PCTA Leaders will be required to read and sign this policy annually.

Further, for leaders who meet the definition of *Youth Leader* below, PCTA requires an annual background check. The first time a Youth Leader's background check is conducted, and each time it is repeated, the Youth Leader will also be required to read and sign a copy of this policy. When working on Forest Service lands, a **federal** background check is required (see addendum for more information).

Youth Leader Definition

For purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- *Participant*: a minor (under age 18) volunteering on a PCTA-sponsored activity.
- *Youth Leader*: any PCTA employee or volunteer working with minors when the parent/guardian *will not* be within line of sight or earshot at all times *and* any of the following:
 - will be leading or helping lead any programs targeted to minors,
 - will be leading overnight activities where minors are present, and
 - one-on-one situations with a Participant may not be entirely avoidable.

The term *Youth Leader* does *not* include the following. Therefore background checks are *not* required for:

- Those engaged in projects or events where parent/guardian of Participants will always be within line of sight or earshot.
- PCTA leaders whose job description requires no planned contact with minors and only very occasional contact with minors, and never alone with minors.
- Leader(s) of a non-minor-oriented day project where one-on-one situations are improbable and avoidable, although one or more minors are present, having approved the participation of a minor with appropriately signed releases.
- Those meeting briefly with a supervised group of minors.
- Those addressing PCTA participants where minors might be included.

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Background Checks

Background checks are performed annually and may be repeated at any time if warranted. Information obtained from a background check will be kept confidential. For staff, PCTA conducts the first background check during the hiring process. For volunteers, PCTA conducts the first background check when PCTA first anticipates the volunteer will meet the definition of *Youth Leader*. This is typically at least 60 days in advance of the qualifying PCTA-sponsored activity involving a minor.

****The following policy will be sent to all youth leaders annually and before hosting minors.****

Standards of Conduct for Adult/Minor Interactions

Setting expectations

PCTA's policies prohibit harassment of any kind – relating to gender, gender identity, race, color, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, veteran status, and other legally protected classifications. On any project where minors are present, the PCTA leader (regardless of whether they fit the definition of *Youth Leader* above), shall ensure that they – and the Participants they are supervising – understand which behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable, and the consequences for unacceptable behavior. PCTA leaders shall set and respect boundaries. If a Participant attempts to involve a PCTA leader in inappropriate behavior, the PCTA leader must reject the overture.

For activities not targeted to minors, but where one or more minors are present, the PCTA leader must make other adults aware of the fact that there are minor(s) present, and that this means it's important to avoid one-on-one situations and to avoid inappropriate behaviors.

Interactions

PCTA leaders shall not engage in jokes with sexual innuendos, comments relating to physical appearance, comments of a sexual nature, or sexual gestures. PCTA leaders shall not engage in discussions of their own, or anyone else's, personal sex life. PCTA leaders shall not engage in one-on-one communication with Participants through online games, social media, texts, or other forms. If digital communication is necessary, ensure that the parent/guardian is copied.

PCTA leaders shall not touch a Participant except when providing first aid. Contact between PCTA leaders and Participants must not create an emotionally or physically unsafe environment for any parties involved. Under no circumstances may PCTA leaders engage in contact that may be construed as sexual in nature, such as hugging, kissing, or massages. PCTA leaders must not engage in contact that may be construed as abusive or otherwise inappropriate. They must avoid activities that may be construed as hazing or bullying. Under no circumstances may PCTA leaders engage in corporal punishment, including spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of Participants.

PCTA leaders shall respect Participants' privacy in situations such as using the bathroom, showering, and changing clothes. Youth Leaders may interrupt only in the case of emergency. Youth Leaders shall preserve their privacy in these situations also. Absolutely no digital equipment or pictures are allowed in situations where privacy is expected.

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Structure of Supervision

Avoid One-on-One Situations

PCTA leaders must position minors in pairs or small groups so that an individual Participant is not alone with an individual adult. One-on-one situations with minors are to be avoided by both the PCTA leaders and any other participating adults. Working groups should be within line of sight or earshot of others as much as possible.

The PCTA leader should monitor any sub-groups involving other adults closely enough to intervene if any inappropriate behaviors are occurring.

There should always be more than one adult leader present during any activity with minors. This could be a combination of PCTA leaders and the group's own chaperones. Target ratio of adults to minors is 1:5 or better.

When it is necessary for a PCTA leader to speak privately with a Participant, especially in cases of reprimand, they shall find a place out of earshot, but within sight of others. Whenever possible, involve the group's leader or another adult.

Overnight Programs

PCTA leaders shall not share sleeping quarters with Participants. Lodging arrangements shall respect individuals' gender while also ensuring privacy and safety. Participants and PCTA leaders must not share accommodations. Private sleeping quarters must be assigned in a way that avoids mixed-gender occupancy unless all individuals involved have provided informed consent and a guardian has been consulted. Visitation between sleeping quarters is not allowed. Age-appropriate and separate accommodations for PCTA leaders and Participants are required. Assigning Participants more than two years apart in age to sleep in the same facility should be avoided.

If separate shower and latrine facilities are not available, scheduled times based on gender shall be arranged for to ensure privacy and comfort.

In situations where a 16 or 17-year-old Participant unaccompanied by a parent/guardian joins an overnight trail maintenance project, they should camp within line of sight or earshot of the PCTA leader.

Alcohol, Tobacco, Drug Use, and Weapons

Marijuana and illegal drugs are not allowed at any time during PCTA activities. In addition, on trips targeted to youth, participants and PCTA leaders shall not have or use tobacco or alcohol products. This includes the use of electronic cigarettes, vaporizers, and nicotine delivery systems that simulate tobacco smoking.

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The possession or carrying of firearms or weapons including but not limited to guns and explosives of any kind, which are not intended for PCTA-sponsored trail maintenance and reconstruction activities, base camp management, or livestock operations, are prohibited during or within the vicinity of any PCTA activity.

PCTA program managers will determine what type of knives, if any, are appropriate for a particular program or event. For example, supervised food preparation might employ kitchen knives, or, an evening program might involve pocket knives for a whittling demonstration.

Circumstances Requiring Immediate Action

The following incidents require immediate action of the PCTA leader(s) and chaperone(s) and attention of the parent/guardian and PCTA:

- Digital recording in any area where privacy is expected.
- Threat or use of a weapon.
- Mention or threats of suicide. If someone is at immediate risk of harm, call 911 or on a trail maintenance project follow the Trailhead Communications Plan.
- Suspicion of physical or sexual abuse. Call 911 or on a trail maintenance project follow the Trailhead Communications Plan.
- Use of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco.

I have read and understood the above policy for working with minors.

Signature of PCTA leader

Date

Printed name of PCTA leader

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Addendum:

USFS Requirements for Working with Minors

The following reflects recent updates from the USFS and is applicable when a PCTA minor will be working on federal land and in addition to PCTA's required paperwork.

Individual Volunteer Service Agreement

- Minors may not participate under the general volunteer agreement for adults.
- To participate in a project taking place on federal land, each minor must have an individual Volunteer Service Agreement (VSA) approved and signed by the local Forest Service unit.
- This process must be coordinated in advance through the PCTA Regional Manager who will work with the parent or guardian and the local unit to complete the required paperwork.

Parental/Guardian Supervision Requirements

- If a parent or guardian will be present for the full duration of the project, the regional manager will help coordinate the completion of the individual VSA with the local forest.
- Once approved, the minor may participate in any project within the same forest accompanied by their parent or guardian for one year.

If a Parent/Guardian Cannot Attend:

- In cases where a parent/guardian cannot be present, the minor may still participate if supervised by a project leader who has completed a federal background check submitted by the Forest Service.
 - Submitting a federal background check can take weeks, sometimes longer, to receive results, depending on agency processing times.
- To allow time for approvals and required steps, interested parties must contact a Regional Manager in advance to express interest.

Planning Note

To ensure enough time for coordination, **families or minors interested in volunteering are encouraged to reach out to the PCTA Regional Manager as early as possible**, especially if the parent or guardian will not be present. Once the minor's individual VSA is in place with the local forest, they may join future projects within that forest for one year, provided the appropriate supervision requirements are met.

NPS Requirements for Working with Minors

Individual Volunteer Service Agreements

- All minors must have a completed and signed individual volunteer service agreement
- The form must be signed by both the minor and their parent/guardian. Group forms are not permitted
- VSA's must be renewed annually

Supervision Requirements:

- PCTA background check policy meets the supervision requirements set forth by PCTA.

BLM Requirements for Working with Minors

- PCTA requirements adhere to BLM regulations.