



## Delaware Nature Society (DNS) Youth Protection Policy

The Delaware Nature Society (DNS) places the greatest importance on creating the most secure environment possible for children. To maintain such an environment, DNS has adopted the following policy for staff, volunteers and long-term contractors.

DNS policies are aimed at keeping children safe by striving to eliminate opportunities for harm within all DNS programs. These policies focus on staff and volunteer selection, training and program safety.

DNS's Youth Protection training is mandated for ALL current and new DNS staff and Level 1 volunteers. This includes training on practices to prevent sexual, physical or emotional abuse (bullying) and to recognize and react responsibly to indications of abuse in participants. It also includes basic first aid and other safety training germane to specific programming/activities.

All staff members, volunteers and long-term contractors must complete Youth Protection Training every two years.

### Background Checks

Child Protection Registry checks are performed on all candidates as a condition of employment. While no current screening techniques exist that can absolutely identify every potential child abuser, DNS continually seeks to increase awareness of this societal problem and to provide the most secure environment possible for its youth participants. Background checks are also completed for all Level 1 volunteers and are required for "long-term contractors" and other outside vendors anticipated being on the property for an extended period of time as referenced in the appendix. As an employee it is your responsibility to notify the Human Resources officer if you are convicted of a felony, crime of violence, or crime involving children between background checks. Additionally, DNS drivers shall also report any interim traffic citations/arrests.

### Operational Policies

The DNS has adopted the following policies for the safety and well-being of its participants:

#### Mandatory Reporting

Child Abuse, Neglect or Dependency: The State of Delaware has a mandatory child abuse, neglect, and dependency reporting requirement: if you have reason to suspect abuse, you must call 1-800-292-9582. All persons having reasonable suspicion must report directly to the hotline and may not rely on another to make the report on their behalf.

Eyewitness to a significant incident, crime or other emergency: After making any necessary emergency notifications or rendering of aid and the when reasonably safe to do so, the incident must be reported to your supervisor and you must submit an Incident Report. Whenever the police are called the Acting Executive Director Anne Harper must also be called immediately at 302-239-2334 x141 (office) or 501-558-9070 (cell), if not available contact the Director of Education Helen Fischel 302-239-2334 x114 (office) or 302-993-6368 (cell) or Acting Deputy Executive Director Joanne McGeoch 302-239-2334 x103 or 601-513-2054 (cell)

Other reported incidents: An Incident Report must be filed if a leader hears of or learns of suspected physical or sexual abuse (Delaware is a mandatory reporting state, see above) or other serious violation of this policy. The leader also must report this to his or her supervisor as soon as possible so that the



concern can be investigated. The supervisor will meet with the executive director to evaluate and discuss next steps. For other infractions, based on their severity, the leader may choose to involve the supervisor and complete an Incident Report.

#### No Retaliation

DNS has adopted a policy of non-retaliation for all reports of observations made in good faith by an employee or volunteer. No disciplinary action will be taken against an employee acting in accordance and in good faith with this policy. In cases of self-reporting or finding of wrong-doing by the reporting party, does not prevent findings of violation of this policy but may serve to mitigate any punitive decisions that follow.

#### Prevention is "key"

All staff, volunteers, vendors, and participants are encouraged to report any dangerous situation or policy violations observed immediately so we may prevent any threat of injury or harm to others.

#### Adult: Child Interaction/Ratio

Adult leadership at all DNS programs and outings is required. In all instances, there is ideally one adult staff leader or level 1 volunteer and an additional adult staff leader, Level 1 volunteer, adult chaperone or other approved adult for all DNS programs and activities with youth. While discouraged, where unavoidable, there shall always be minimally one adult supervisor present with children. Where one-on-one supervision of a child is unavoidable, it shall be observable and interruptible at all times. If a personal conference with a child is required, it shall be conducted in the view of other adults and/or children.

Appropriate adult leadership must be present for all overnight DNS activities. The one-on-one interaction prohibitions still apply. Bathroom and shower facilities shall be monitored during usage by more than one adult at the same time or by one adult in view of other adults/children.

Whenever practicable, older youth shall not be left alone with younger youth. Youth will be directed to use the "buddy system" of travelling with at least one other similarly-aged youth, when unaccompanied by an adult or if only one adult is present. Whenever necessary, the "Buddy System" may be used for emergencies or other unplanned moments, such as: a quick bathroom trip or attending to a minor injury or other occurrences that may separate a few participants from the group. If the buddies are both children, they should be of similar age.

#### Privacy of youth respected

Adult leaders must respect the privacy of youth participants in situations such as changing clothes and taking showers and intrude only in emergencies concerning health and safety. Adults must protect their own privacy in similar situations. Adults shall not expose any portion of their bodies normally covered by a bathing suit in view of children. Staff and volunteers will also insist that all participants respect the privacy of all other participants.

Inappropriate use of cameras, imaging, or digital devices is strictly prohibited. Additionally, there shall be NO recording, photograph, or other memorialization whatsoever in areas where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy; such as bathrooms and showers.

#### Bullying:

Bullying in all forms: verbal, physical, and cyber bullying are strictly prohibited at DNS and all DNS programs, on and off-site. DNS also forbids retaliation for the reporting of any of the above bullying behaviors. Bullying is identified as:



- Intentional;
- Physical, verbal, written or electronic communication;
- Towards student, DNS employee, volunteer or vendor; which a
- Reasonable person will know his/her actions have the effects of:
  - Causing reasonable fear of substantial harm to one's physical emotional well-being or damage to property;
  - Pervasiveness/persistent actions or power differential which creates a hostile environment;
  - Interfering with safe environment for the targeted individual or witnesses; or
  - Coercing others to cause above harms.

#### Other Inappropriate Conduct Prohibited

Physical violence, theft, verbal insults, drug and alcohol use have no place in a DNS program and may result in removal of the participant from the program and/or being prohibited from participating in future DNS programs.

**NOTE:** Should a situation present any conflict with this policy, DNS supervision shall be immediately contacted in order to mitigate any existing safety concerns. In such cases, leaders will protect the health and physical safety of the participant first, but will attempt to do so in a manner that is as respectful of the participant's privacy as possible under the circumstances. In such situations, the leader may be asked to prepare an Incident Report which outlines the circumstances of the exception.

#### Youth leadership monitored by Staff

Adult leaders must monitor and guide the leadership techniques used by youth leaders (ages 14-17, such as camp counselors) and ensure that all DNS policies are followed.

#### Unsanctioned DNS activities

Whenever a DNS staff-member is participating in activities related to their job description responsibilities such as birding, hunting, fishing, camping, etc., the prohibition against one-on-one contact with a youth (under 18 years of age) still applies. This refers specifically to adults interacting with youth, whose relationship with a leader was formed through a DNS contact, program, or activity. This youth protection policy is required even during personal time when the above mention conditions apply.

In any situation, one-on-one communications between adults and youth having non-familial or non-custodial relationships or whose relationship originated at DNS, shall take place through the use of an electronic medium (cell phone, text, email) or via social media, gaming or any online platforms is strictly forbidden.

#### Rentals

Any rental events that take place on DNS sites will be bound by the rental agreement which expressly requires compliance with this Policy.

*This Policy is to be used in conjunction with the employee policy manual and approved DNS training.*



## Youth Protection Policy Appendix

### 1. Definitions.

#### A. Level One Volunteers:

- a. Provide direct program or have direct contact with children
- b. Will be onsite for an extended period of more than 5 consecutive days.
- c. Counselors (14-17years-old)

#### B. Long Term Contractors:

- a. On-site on a regular basis for over three (3) months
- b. On-site daily for over five (5) consecutive days.

### 2. Background checks required of:

#### A. All Staff

B. Level One Volunteers (volunteers under 18 years of age require two references and may be in lieu of background checks)

C. Long Term Contractors (short term contractors to sign one page acknowledgement that all sites are child safe zones)

### 3. Law

"The Joseph R. "Beau" Biden III Child Protection Act strengthens background check requirements for organizations such as summer camps and private schools. The law, which went into effect on April 7, 2016, requires summer camps to obtain the following:

1) a fingerprinted Delaware background check completed by the Delaware State Bureau of Identification (SBI); 2) a fingerprinted national background check completed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); and 3) a Child Protection Registry check completed by the Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families.

As an alternative, private schools and associated youth camps must perform a name-based Delaware criminal background check for prospective employees, volunteers and contractors through the Delaware Justice Information System (DELJIS) and an out-of-state criminal record check using private, third party providers, provided that any out-of-state criminal record check includes a social security trace search and county-based criminal record search in the counties where the individual has resided within the past 10 years.

Under the new law, private schools and camps operated by private schools may elect not to meet the three standards outlined above. However, they must inform parents of their decision and must obtain and retain for at least one year a signed acknowledgement from the child's parents or guardians."



## Acknowledgement Page

I have read and been informed about the content, requirements, and expectations of the Youth Protection Policy for Staff of Delaware Nature Society (DNS). I have received a copy of the policy and agree to abide by the policy guidelines as a condition of my employment with DNS.

I understand that if I have questions, at any time, regarding the policy, I will consult with my immediate supervisor or the Human Resources staff.

Please read the Youth Protection Policy carefully to ensure that you understand the policy before signing this document.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_