



**ACE Mentor Program of America, Inc.**  
**Affiliate Mentor Liaison Policy Handbook**

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## I. Introduction

This handbook's purpose is to help mentors, team leaders, and *affiliate mentor liaisons* as they support mentors and strengthen their mentoring relationships with students. Included in this document are succinct summaries of all ACE policies relative to mentoring, some procedures and best practices mentors must follow when working with students, strategies for mentors to use when responding to difficult questions from students, and copies of relevant forms.

Every affiliate must select an ***affiliate mentor liaison*** who is required to complete the web-based training through ACE National annually based on this [Affiliate Mentor Liaison Policy Handbook](#).

The ***affiliate mentor liaison*** has several responsibilities, including:

- Ensure that all mentors and team leaders in the affiliate are aware that they must report to the *affiliate mentor liaison* any incident of suspected child abuse or any incident involving ACE students and/or mentors that puts their health, safety, and welfare at risk.
- Complete and submit to ACE National any reports of suspected child abuse or any incident involving ACE students and/or mentors that puts their health, safety, and welfare at risk. The report to ACE National must be made using the [Incident Report Form](#) located in the Appendix. Additional reporting requirements can be found below in the Youth Protection Policy and Student Expectation Policy sections of the Handbook.
- Work with the affiliate's legal counsel to familiarize themselves with their state's requirements for mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and ensure any suspected cases of child abuse are reported to local law enforcement, and any other matters as required by state or relevant laws or regulations.
- Maintain an accurate list of school contacts for each school involved with your affiliate. Use the [School Contacts Form](#) found in the Appendix.

Copies of the [Affiliate Mentor Liaison Policy Handbook](#) can be found on the ACE Mentor Tools website ([www.acementortools.org](http://www.acementortools.org)) and made available for any mentor or team leader.

This handbook does not comprehensively describe all the dynamics or situations that mentors may encounter as they work with students. If you encounter an issue not addressed in this handbook and need additional support, please contact your ACE Regional Director.

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## II. Policies

### **Youth Protection Policy**

The safety and security of students are of utmost importance for ACE. It is the policy of ACE National that ALL adult volunteers participating in ACE are considered “mandated reporters of child abuse.” This means they must report any good-faith suspicion or belief that any child is or has been physically or sexually abused, physically or emotionally neglected or exposed to any form of violence or threat.

#### **Steps to Reporting Suspected Child Abuse:**

1. Ensure the child is in a safe environment.
2. In cases of medical emergencies and/or imminent harm, call 911 immediately.
3. Together with the *affiliate mentor liaison*, complete the Incident Report Form and submit it to your ACE Regional Director immediately; within 12 hours of observing the suspected abuse.
4. Contact the local law enforcement and child protective services within 12 hours of observing the suspected abuse. State law may require additional reporting.\*\*
5. Notify the school contact of the suspected abuse within 24 hours of observing the suspected abuse.

\*\* All states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have statutes identifying persons who are required to report suspected child maltreatment to an appropriate agency, such as child protective services, a law enforcement agency or a child abuse reporting hotline. Each affiliate is responsible for complying with their state requirements and must review them with the assistance of their legal counsel. If a discrepancy is observed between state law requirements and ACE’s Youth Protection Policy, please notify your Regional Director immediately.

Please [click here](#) to link to state-specific policies on mandatory reporting laws.

You need only have a reasonable suspicion that a youth under 18 has been maltreated. No evidence or proof is required to make a report. Law enforcement and/or child welfare services will take over the investigation.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding how to handle such a matter, please promptly contact ACE National, in turn, legal counsel will be sought as applicable.

### **Student Expectation Policy**

The ACE Mentor Program is committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for all students. The program expects all students admitted into the program to conduct themselves in a professional manner always and to refrain from any interaction that could be interpreted as inappropriate, such as actions of a sexual nature, verbal or physical conduct of an inappropriate nature or bullying. ACE’s expectations of students are clearly spelled out in the Expectations of ACE Students section of the Parent/Guardian/Student Consent Form located in the Appendix.

All adult volunteers involved with ACE must report serious violations of the Student Expectation Policy that occur during ACE sessions or events. Apart from suspected child abuse for which the reporting requirements are listed in the Youth Protection Policy section above, any incident involving ACE students and/or mentors that puts their health, safety, and welfare at risk must be reported to ACE.

Minor infractions of the Student Expectation Policy must be evaluated by the *affiliate mentor liaison* with the team leader and/or mentor. At the discretion of the *affiliate mentor liaison* and the team leader, minor infractions may warrant a warning to the student and are not required to be reported. Refer to the Disciplinary Issues section in the Handbook.

### **Steps to Reporting Violations of Student Expectations:**

1. Ensure the child is in a safe environment.
2. In cases of medical emergencies and/or imminent harm, call 911 immediately.
3. Together with the *affiliate mentor liaison*, complete the Incident Report Form and submit it to your Regional Director within 12 hours of observing the violation.
4. Notify the parent/guardian within 12 hours of observing the violation.
5. Notify the school contact of the violation within 24 hours of observing the violation.

### **Physical Contact**

Mentors must limit physical contact with students to a handshake, pat on the back, or a “high five.” A mentor must not meet alone with a student behind closed doors.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Students and mentors must always conduct themselves in a professional manner and refrain from any interaction that might be interpreted as inappropriate, such as sexual advances, verbal or physical conduct of an inappropriate or sexual nature, or requests for sexual favors.

### **Harassment**

ACE is committed to providing all students with a safe and supportive learning environment. Harassment of a student by another student or a mentor in the program is a violation of ACE policy. This includes (but is not limited to) harassment based on race, national origin, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or disability. Harassment includes verbal conduct that creates a hostile environment by substantially interfering with a student’s educational benefits, opportunities, or performance, or with a student’s physical or psychological well-being. Any student or mentor violating this policy will be promptly dismissed from the program.

### **Discrimination**

ACE is committed to equal opportunities for all students and mentors. Consequently, ACE policy dictates that no one shall be treated differently, separately, or have any action directly affecting him or her taken on the basis of race, religion, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. Any mentor or student violating this policy will be promptly dismissed from the program.

## **Confidentiality**

Personal information that mentors learn about students may be confidential. Divulging such information may have legal consequences and must be avoided. If mentors believe there is a legitimate need to divulge personal information about their mentees, they are advised to discuss the matter first with their affiliate leaders.

Mentors must:

- Limit the sharing of their own personal information with mentees.
- Only use their business email and phone number for student communication.
- Not share personal student information from the database.

The full [Personal Information Security Policy](#) can be found on the ACE Mentor Tools website ([www.acementortools.org](http://www.acementortools.org)) under Affiliate Resources.

## **Background Checks**

All mentors and other volunteers who attend 20% or more of ACE sessions (more than 2 meetings) and/or have access to student/mentor personal info in the ACE database must undergo a criminal background check every three years, using ACE's provider, Sterling Volunteers.

The full [Background Check Policy](#) can be found on the ACE Mentor Tools website ([www.acementortools.org](http://www.acementortools.org)) under Affiliate Resources.

## **Transportation**

### *Personal Cars*

Mentors must never transport students in their personal cars. ACE does not carry an insurance policy covering the transportation of students in a mentor's private car.

### *Transportation to and from ACE meetings*

Students are responsible for their own transportation to and from ACE meetings. Affiliates may offer stipends or grants to help cover the cost of transportation, but the transportation is to be arranged and provided by the student and his/her parent or guardian.

### *Transportation to field trips or special events*

Affiliates must arrange for transportation of students and mentors through a licensed transportation company. A van or bus driven by a licensed employee of the licensed and insured company is the recommended form of transportation. An approved mentor or teacher must be on the bus with the students at all times.

The full [Transportation Policy](#) can be found on the ACE Mentor Tools website ([www.acementortools.org](http://www.acementortools.org)) under Affiliate Resources.

## **Field Trips**

The ACE experience should include visits to different places such as construction sites, training facilities and/or mentor's offices. These visits provide incomparable learning opportunities for students.

- For each field trip, all participating students must have a signed Field Trip Permission Form.
- All students must have transportation to and from the field trip site.
- Mentors must never transport students in their personal cars.
- Only approved mentors, teachers and students are allowed to be transported by the busing service. No guests may be included.
- Students are not to be left unattended during the trip.
- If the site requires personal protective equipment such as hard hats, closed-toe shoes, eye protection, and safety vests, mentors must ensure each student is equipped with the required attire.

The Field Trip Permission Form can be accessed at <https://acementor.org/about-us/literature/forms/>, or in the Appendix at the end of the Handbook.

### **Gifts**

Gifts to individual students are not permitted. A sponsor firm may give all students an inexpensive gift such as a pen with a company logo. Never loan or give students money.

### **Digital/Social Media Use**

Mentors must not connect with students via their personal social media pages. Instead, mentors may encourage students to follow ACE National's and an affiliate's social media platforms.

Mentors may, however, connect with students using professional social media pages such as LinkedIn.

Mentors must use their business email and phone number for student communication, and email communications must concern only ACE matters.

### **Photo & Image Use**

Before a mentor or affiliate uses an image of an ACE student in a publication or social media post, it must confirm the student has on file the ACE consent form signed by the parent/guardian. It includes a statement allowing ACE to use a student's image for ACE publicity purposes.

The Parent/Guardian/Student Consent Form can be accessed here <https://acementor.org/about-us/literature/forms/> and can also be found in this handbook's Appendix.

### **School and Student Information Policy**

The *affiliate mentor liaison* is expected to maintain an updated list of important school contacts at all times. Please refer to the Appendix for a template that can be utilized to track this information.

Team leaders are required to maintain a list of student information regarding medical conditions, food allergies, and emergency contact information. This information must be

with the team leader at all ACE meetings, field trips and events, and can be obtained from the completed Parent/Guardian/Student Consent Form.

### **III. Working with Students**

#### **Food/Snacks**

Food allergies and/or sensitivities are quite common. Additionally, some students may have religious objections to consuming certain foods. Please closely review the Parent/Guardian/Student Consent Form for each student to ensure any food or snacks provided align with the information disclosed on the form.

#### **Student Medical Conditions**

ACE takes students' medical conditions very seriously. Parents are asked to disclose any medical conditions of their students on the Parent/Guardian/Student Consent Form. Please review this information for each student and ensure mentors are informed of any medical conditions of their students.

#### **Emergency Situations**

ACE meetings take place in offices and schools. Team leaders must familiarize themselves with the emergency procedures at the meeting site(s) in case of a fire, catastrophic weather event, or other type of emergency. Please also ensure mentors are aware of necessary procedures and feel comfortable directing students to safety, if needed.

Team leaders must make themselves aware of the established safety precautions at the meeting location. Team leaders should share this information in a brief safety talk at the beginning of each session, including but not limited to:

- Emergency exits, routes, and outside meeting location in case of an emergency building evacuation.
- Identify a telephone in the room that can be used for making emergency calls.
- Identify the location of the nearest fire extinguisher and Automated External Defibrillator (AED).
- Identify people in the room who are CPR and/or First Aid certified.

#### **Disciplinary Issues**

ACE's expectations of students are clearly spelled out in the Parent/Guardian/Student Consent Form. Students must always conduct themselves in a professional manner and shall refrain from any interaction that could be interpreted as inappropriate, including actions of a sexual nature, verbal or physical conduct of an inappropriate nature, and bullying. Students who do not adhere to ACE's expectations will first be warned and reminded of their signed agreement. If a student continues to violate any of the expectations, they will be dismissed from the program in order to protect the learning environment of the other students. If a student's behavior violates ACE's expectations in a manner deemed disruptive or unsafe by the team leader, students may be dismissed from the program upon first offense at the discretion of the team leader.

### **Self-Harming Thoughts**

When interacting with a student whom a mentor suspects is self-injuring, mentors should maintain a sympathetic attitude. They should ask simple questions in order to help determine whether the student has purposefully hurt themselves. Even if you are unsure whether the injury was self-inflicted or a possible suicide attempt, always ensure the student is referred to a school psychologist or counselor for further support and assessment. If there is a fresh wound or injury, mentors should refer the student directly to the school nurse and also immediately notify the school contact of the situation. If the fresh wound or injury occurs at a location outside of the school, mentors should seek medical attention and notify the school contact of the situation. For reporting requirements, refer to Section II – Youth Protection Policy.

### **Homelessness**

ACE is open to any student regardless of family or living situation, including homeless individuals. If a mentor or affiliate leader suspects, or a student discloses they are homeless and seems to need assistance, it's important to first ask students what they need, what would help them, and not to make any assumptions. Ask the student if the school is aware of their situation and if they are comfortable letting the school know. If given permission by the student, the *affiliate mentor liaison* should then report this information to school officials to help ensure the student gets connected to needed resources in the community.

### **Attendance**

Per the Parent/Guardian/Student Consent Form, students should attend all ACE meetings. If a student must miss a meeting or arrive late, they must inform their team leader in advance. Lack of attendance could end participation in the program. Excused absences may be granted at the discretion of the team leader.

The ACE database has the capability of tracking student and mentor attendance. Team leaders should record student and mentor participation in the database using the "Manage Attendance" feature. Contact your Regional Director for assistance utilizing this feature.

## **IV. Responding to Students' Difficult Questions**

An ACE mentor's primary role is to support students in their pursuit of careers in the A-E-C fields. Do not be surprised, however, if mentors and mentees develop meaningful relationships. Because of this unique relationship, mentees may bring to a mentor's attention personal issues or concerns in their personal lives they need help navigating.

If mentors feel unprepared for a mentee-initiated conversation that is personal in nature, the mentor can suggest the mentee discuss this issue with another trusted adult such as a parent/guardian, guidance counselor, or other school professional.

While not all difficult topics of conversation between mentors and students can be anticipated in this handbook, the framework below has some helpful hints for mentors in thinking through how to respond to difficult questions.

Mentors should not feel obliged to respond to or answer every inquiry. Responding by saying, "I am not in a position to help with you that...", is an acceptable response.

## V. Difficult Questions Framework

<p>Validate</p>	<p>Pause to acknowledge and validate the student’s question.</p> <p>“That’s a great question.”</p> <p>“A lot of people wonder that.” “Thank you for asking that question.”</p>
<p>Clarify</p>	<p>Make sure you understand what the student means. Check to see what they know about the topic. Clarify where the question is coming from. Pay attention to any signs that this question is a request for help.</p> <p>“Can you tell me what you already know about that?” “What do you mean by the word?”</p>
<p>Identify</p>	<p>Decide how to proceed based on what is being asked: Fact, Value</p> <p>Fact vs. Value</p> <p>A fact is something for which proof exists, or something for which there is information to support or back up. A value is an intrinsically held belief and cannot be proven true or false by any sort of scientific method.</p>
<p>Communicate Message</p>	<p>Answer all factual questions in a simple and factual manner.</p> <p>Identify personal and value-based questions as such.</p> <p>Discuss the range of values that exist.</p> <p>Decide on a follow up plan for providing more information, including who will find out more and by when.</p>
<p>Check Understanding</p>	<p>Verify that you have answered the question.</p> <p>Make sure the student has understood your answer and leave the door open for follow up questions.</p>

## VI. References

Responding to Depression or Self-Harming Thoughts

<https://elunanetwork.org/resources/responding-to-youth-who-have-depression-or-suicidal-thoughts/>

Responding to Racial Discrimination

<https://www.evidencebasedmentoring.org/10-healthy-strategies-youth-can-use-to-cope-with-racial-discrimination/>

Responding to Bullying

[https://www.stopbullying.gov/sites/default/files/2017-09/hrsa\\_guide\\_youth\\_professionals\\_mentors\\_508v2.pdf](https://www.stopbullying.gov/sites/default/files/2017-09/hrsa_guide_youth_professionals_mentors_508v2.pdf)

Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect - State Statutes

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/manda.pdf>

Anti-Harassment and Discrimination

<https://www.aclu.org/other/model-anti-harrassment-and-discrimination-policies-schools>

Responding to Self-Injury

<https://educatorsandselfinjury.com/self-injury-protocol/>

Responding to Student Homelessness

<http://www.americaspromise.org/news/how-teachers-adults-and-legislators-can-respond-student-homelessness>

## **VII. Appendices**

[Incident Report Form](#)

[School Contacts Form](#)

[Parent/Guardian/Student Consent Form](#)

[Field Trip Permission Form](#)