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Child Protection Policy


It is Ringling College of Art and Design's policy to take all appropriate steps to protect the health and welfare of the children who come to the Ringling College campus and of children with whom our employees, volunteers and students interact in other locations. Ringling College of Art and Design will comply with all applicable reporting laws.

Under Florida law, all faculty and staff are required to report suspected abuse, abandonment, or neglect of a child under age 18 by any individual, regardless of if the person is a parent, legal guardian, or unknown individual to include but not limited to a parent, legal custodian, caregiver or other person responsible for the child's welfare which includes a person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for the supervision of such child (including any employee of the College) or any household or family member of the child. Additionally, faculty and staff are further required to report if a child is in need of supervision and care and has no parent, legal custodian, or other person responsible for the child's welfare.

Abuse, abandonment, or neglect includes:

1. Physical injury, whether visible or not, under circumstances that indicate that a child's health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed;
2. Mental injury, meaning the observable, identifiable and substantial impairment of a child's mental or psychological ability to function, under circumstances that indicate that a child's health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed;
3. The failure to provide essential care and attention to a child (e.g., leaving a child unattended), under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or there is a substantial risk of harm, or that there is mental injury to the child or a substantial risk of such injury; and
4. Any act that involved sexual molestation or exploitation of a child (e.g. any sexual contact or conduct with a child), regardless of whether physical injuries are present.

This policy applies to all faculty, staff, volunteers and students of Ringling College of Art and Design. Additional individuals or organizations doing business at or with the College may also be required to acknowledge and comply with provisions of this policy, as determined by the College. The policy applies to the Ringling College of Art and Design campus, all properties owned or leased by the College, and all off-campus sites at which students, faculty, staff and volunteers participate in college-sponsored activities.

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Please also refer to the Ringling College of Art and Design *Sexual Misconduct Policy*, which prohibits sexual misconduct and requires reporting of known or suspected incidents of sexual misconduct of any person, regardless of age. This policy can be found in the student and employee handbooks.

Ringling College sponsors a number of programs for children. The College requires that children in these programs be appropriately supervised by adults with the proper training and credentials, and subject to criminal background check clearances as required by Florida state law and the College. All program adults (paid staff or volunteers) must receive appropriate information in maintaining professional boundaries at all times when working with children in the program (See Appendix A below).

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- A. Florida Law mandates the reporting of any suspected child abuse, abandonment or neglect. Anyone who has reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse, abandonment or neglect must immediately report to the Florida Department of Children and Families by one of the following methods: (1) call the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-962-2873, (2) via fax at 800-914-0004, or (3) online at <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us>. Instructors and other personnel will be required to provide their names to the DCF hotline staff. All other reporters may remain anonymous, but a record that a report was made will be maintained by the College. If you see a child in immediate danger, call 911. Colleges and Universities that “knowingly and willfully” fail to report suspected child abuse, abandonment or neglect or prevent another person from doing so now face fines of up to \$1 million for each incident, and the penalty has been increased from a misdemeanor to a felony. Individual employees face personal criminal liability as well. A person who is required to report known or suspected child abuse, abandonment or neglect and who knowingly and willfully fails to do so, or who knowingly and willfully prevents another person from doing so, is guilty of a felony of the third degree. The personal criminal penalties include a fine of up to \$5,000 and up to 5 years imprisonment for each incident not reported.

- B. In addition to making the reports required by Florida law, any employee or student of Ringling College of Art and Design who has reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse, abandonment or neglect on the Ringling College campus, any properties owned or leased by the College, or during an event/function sponsored by the College must notify Public Safety (941-359-7500), the Title IX Coordinator, Director of HR or the Vice President for Student Life as soon as possible. Public Safety, the Title IX Coordinator, the Director of

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HR or the Vice President will immediately notify the President. Any employee or student who has reason to believe that a child has been subjected to neglect or abuse at any off-campus sites at which students, faculty, or staff participate in college-sponsored activities must immediately notify the director of the off-campus site and the Ringling College program director. The Ringling College director will notify the Title IX Coordinator as soon as possible.

- C. Any faculty or staff member who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child died as a result of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect must report his or her suspicion to the appropriate medical examiner.
- D. "Mandatory Reporters" in Florida are defined as: social workers, teachers and other school personnel, physicians and other health-care workers, mental health professionals, child care providers, medical examiners, coroners, and law enforcement officers.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All matters pertaining to a report of abuse, abandonment or neglect must be held in the strictest confidence. A person who knowingly and willfully makes public or discloses any confidential information commits a misdemeanor of the second degree, and may be punishable by Florida law.


FALSE REPORTING

All good faith reporting of any instance of suspected child abuse, abandonment or neglect provides immunity and protection from adverse civil liability and/or employment discrimination. Under Florida law, a person who knowingly and willfully makes a false report of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect, or who advises another to make a false report, is guilty of a felony.

Appendix A

Guidelines for Those Working With or Around Children

Child abuse is a difficult and emotionally-charged subject. These guidelines are intended to provide information about your conduct in order to prevent abuse or unfounded allegations of abuse; and explain how to respond to abuse or suspicions of abuse.

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Code of Conduct for Working with Minors

You have a duty to the children with whom you work, to the college and to yourself to prevent any abuse or improper behavior. You also have a duty to prevent unfounded accusations of abuse, by adhering to a proper code of conduct when working with minors.

- Never use any form of physical or emotional punishment to discipline children participating in the program
- Never engage in rough or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- Do not allow children to sit on your lap
- Do not allow any inappropriate touching, including between children
- Be aware of the impact of your words and language on young children
- Do not swear, or use or respond to sexual innuendo, never make a sexually suggestive comment, even in fun
- Do not allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- Be aware of situations in which actions can be misconstrued or manipulated by others (for example, being alone with the last child to leave a class); conduct all dealings with children in a public environment as much as possible, in order that all behavior can be readily observed
- Do not spend time alone with a child away from others; try to avoid being alone with a child, particularly in a restroom, changing area, or shower area (follow the “rule of three” and always make sure there is another person with you). Should you need to be alone with a minor in a changing or shower area, by no means should you be unclothed with a minor, and showering or bathing with minors. Even when you are not alone with one child, is never acceptable.
- Children should use a buddy system or otherwise be encouraged to stay together when going to the bathroom, on field trips or when leaving the classroom area
- Do not give any child a ride in a car or van unless you have express permission from the parents
- Do not appear to favor one child more than another, do not give gifts to any one child in a program, do not accept expensive gifts from any child in the program
- Be professional and maintain the highest standards of personal behavior at all times; do not drink alcohol or smoke when working with minors
- Do not tell children “this is just between us” or use similar language that encourages children to keep secrets from their parent/guardian

What if a Child Tells Me He or She is Being Abused?

- Stay calm; ensure that the child is safe and feels safe

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- Assure the child that you are taking what he/she says seriously
- Be honest; explain you will have to tell someone else. Avoid making promises you cannot keep
- Make a note of what the child has said as soon as possible
- Do not confront the alleged abuser
- Do not investigate on your own
- Report the situation to the Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Tracy Wagner, Executive Vice President at 941-359-7595, or the Deputy Title IX Coordinators, Dr. Tammy Walsh, Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students at 941-359-7510 or Darren Mathews, Director of Human Resources at 941-359-7619.