

LEGAL ASPECTS OF YOUTH AT WORKSITES

Any job or workplace opportunity you broker for a young person should be part of something more comprehensive. The cognitive process of an adolescent is very different from those of adults, so we have safety measures and procedures in place to provide for student safety. It is well established that the brain undergoes a [“rewiring” process](#) that is not complete until approximately 25 years of age. This is an opportunity for students to learn and grow on the job.

Many of the same employability, safety, and liability issues you would encounter with your employees will apply to students operating under work-based learning activities. Child labor laws established by the Fair Labor Standards Act and [Michigan Child Labor Law](#) do apply for both paid and unpaid experiences, so make sure you review and understand them.

PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO:

AGE CERTIFICATES:

Youth under age 18 must provide a work permit acquired through their high school.

INSURANCE COVERAGE:

Employers should have general liability insurance, the school should have liability coverage with a work-based learning endorsement, and youth should have health/accident coverage. In case of injury at the workplace, youth in paid work-based learning experiences should be covered by the employer’s workers’ compensation insurance. Unpaid youth are not; however, they may be covered by the youth program’s insurance, so you should check.

OCCUPATIONS, WAGES AND HOURS:

Youth under 17 are prohibited from certain jobs and have some restrictions on the number of hours and days they work. Youth ages 14-15 have greater restrictions on the number of hours, particularly on school days. You need to follow Michigan youth minimum wage guidelines.

SAFETY:

Federal laws prohibit youth under 18 from operating certain types of machinery and youth under 17 from on-the-job driving on public roads, unless they meet certain requirements (including completion of a state approved driver’s education course). Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) regulations apply to youth at the worksite. Employers must provide training, protective equipment and other health or safety support given to regular employees. [Federal Child Labor Provisions](#)
[Hazardous Occupations - Summary](#)
[Hazardous Occupations – Federal Site](#)

PARENTAL PERMISSION:

Parental permission slips are the norm for most schools and youth programs that work with youth 18 and under – permission to participate in a mentoring program, job shadow, etc.

WORK-BASED LEARNING AGREEMENT:

Many programs also ask the employer, participant, youth program, and parent or family member to sign a formal Work-Based Learning Agreement that outlines the responsibilities of each person (including adherence to workplace rules, fair labor practices, etc.), as well as wages, hours, and other official information.

WHAT TO DO IN THE FIRST DAYS

A FIRST DAY WORKSITE ORIENTATION AGENDA:

Take full advantage of the first day youth and employers spend together. A good agenda covers: an introduction to the workplace mentor or supervisor, an overview of the company, a tour of the worksite, introductions to other staff, a review of the youth's schedule, introduction to responsibilities and possible projects, and workplace safety training.

A CALENDAR OF INFORMAL REFLECTION OR EVALUATION CHECKPOINTS:

One week, two weeks, and monthly checkpoints are very helpful for students. At the halfway point (9 weeks) the employer, in conjunction with the Work-Based Learning Coordinator, will support a student with a formal evaluation. Most of the meetings should include a review of the work-based learning plan. However, some early meetings can purely be about relationship-building; for example, having lunch together or with other people in the business.

A LIST OF EXPECTATIONS OR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AGREEMENT:

This should include requirements and expectations of the worksite (dress code, hours, what to do if you are sick, company values). It should also provide guidelines for how supervisor/mentor and youth should work together (weekly meetings, young person's responsibilities, etc.). As mentioned earlier, this is often part and parcel of a work-based learning plan.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS:

Mentors, job shadow volunteers, and internship hosts especially appreciate a simple handout with suggestions and ideas on what to do with youth. It's also a great way for you to communicate the themes and goals of your program – and translate them into concrete actions. Don't leave off obvious activities; for example, tour the company, introduce your youth to other colleagues, talk about your first job, etc. It's easy for mentors and youth to isolate their activities from other operations.



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