



Volunteering with Alexander Youth Network

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with the children (5-14 years old) on the campus of Alexander Youth Network. **Because of the age range of our children, we ask that volunteers within your group be age 16 and up.** We hope that you will enjoy the time spent on our campus, and that you will share some positive, rewarding moments with the kids. In an effort to make your visit enjoyable for all involved, we have some suggestions for you to follow. Please read them carefully and share them with all the members of your group prior to the visit.

- The Alexander Youth Network campus is considered a long-term care facility and congregate care setting that has stricter guidelines for staff and visitors. The following protocols have been put in place to prevent the spread of COVID:

In accordance with guidelines set forth by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, all volunteers working directly with our children must show proof of full vaccination for COVID-19.

Volunteers must check in at the front office and remain in designated visitation areas at all times.

The number of individuals in a volunteer group is limited to 6 unless the group receives prior approval from the Volunteer Engagement Officer.

- The children in our care have needs that are often very different from those at other organizations, such as schools, shelters, and hospitals.

Many of the children at Alexander are living with mental and behavioral health challenges. A typical child at Alexander may display: aggression, non-compliance, poor social skills, academic and motor delays, anxiety and depression.

More than half of the children in our care have symptoms of attention deficit disorder and may not be able to remain attentive for long periods of time. Therefore, group visits work best when they last for no more than one hour.

The children at Alexander Youth Network are learning how to heal from past experiences and traumas. Some may not feel comfortable receiving hugs, whereas others may hug everyone due to poor physical boundaries. Based on a child's past experiences, touch can be welcomed, uncomfortable, or frightening. We ask that volunteers be mindful of the child's personal space and let the child initiate any hugs or high-fives.

- Our staff of counselors will always be present during your visit; they can manage any behavior problems that may arise, but they are counting on you to provide the leadership for the activities that your group provides.

At times you may see a staff member leave the activity with a child. This may be because the child is anxious. Often children who are early childhood trauma survivors have poor coping and self-regulation skills. Often the staff will provide 1:1 attention away from the activity to help the child relax. Please do not try to talk with a child when they are removed from activities – they may just need a few minutes to decompress.

Should a child ask your permission to leave the area and go to the restroom or some other area, please do not allow them – please direct them to their staff, as they know children’s whereabouts at all times.

- Structure is very important to the children. The more structure you provide, the better your chances are for a successful visit. Many of the children can become easily over stimulated if activities are unstructured. We suggest not starting an activity until everyone is seated, quiet, and waiting for directions from the volunteer(s).
- Volunteers should set a good example for the children by their manner, appearance, and behavior.

Please refrain from any horseplay, as our children can easily become overly excited or upset.

We ask that the members of your group adhere to the following expectations concerning standards of dress. The following apparel should not be worn while volunteering with the children: torn, ripped, or frayed clothing, midriff or off-the-shoulder shirts, sweaters, or dresses, tight, sheer, or revealing clothing; and spaghetti strap or strapless shirts or dresses. Shorts, dresses, or skirts cannot be more than two inches above the knee.

- Do not bring any potentially dangerous supplies or materials with you (i.e. knives, lighters, matches). If supplies are needed (i.e. - a knife for cutting birthday cake), please let the Volunteer Engagement Officer know ahead of time so that we can provide the necessary item.
- Please take a few minutes to clean up the area after the children have been dismissed. There are no maintenance staff on duty during the evenings and weekends, so we appreciate your efforts to leave the area in good shape before leaving.
- Do not take pictures of the children during your visit and do not repeat the names of the children to others after leaving campus. We do not have permission to photograph the children, and we need to protect the safety and confidentiality of the youth in our care.
- There are always plenty of behind-the-scenes jobs for groups to do. Some suggestions include beautification projects (planting flowers, weeding landscaped areas, painting), organizing storage areas, creating bulletin boards, among other things.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact our Volunteer Engagement Officer Ashley Nieves at anieves@aynkids.org 704-227-9115.