



Playspace Policies & Procedures

Playspace Activity Leader (PAL) Expectations & Responsibilities

As a volunteer with Horizons for Homeless Children, I can EXPECT:

- a) A virtual 1.5-hour training, which will address homelessness, realities of shelter living, the Playspace Program, and the PAL experience.
- b) An updated roster of other PALs on my Playspace shift, with contact information.
- c) The name and phone number of a staff person at the shelter where I am placed. This person will act as the Shelter Liaison and will provide me with shelter-related guidance and assistance.
- d) To be assigned a Horizons' staff member who will act as an ongoing support and a resource for questions or concerns that arise during my time as a PAL.
- e) Notification from Horizons or shelter staff regarding any changes to my shelter or shift statuses.

As a volunteer with Horizons for Homeless Children, it is my RESPONSIBILITY to:

- a) Provide Horizons for Homeless Children with a completed application, a signed and notarized CORI authorization form, the names and phone numbers of two references, a signed waiver, and a copy of a valid photo ID.
- b) Attend a 1.5-hour virtual PAL training.
- c) Commit to a 2-hour weekly shift at an assigned shelter for a minimum of six (6) months.
- d) Contact the shelter liaison to retrieve the shelter/program address once I have received my final placement.
- e) Be on time and ready to volunteer at my assigned Playspace shift each week.
- f) Inform the Horizons' staff of any change in my schedule or availability that may affect my placement as soon as possible.
- g) Notify my PAL partner(s) as soon as possible if I know I will not be able to attend a shift. Coordinate with PAL Partners to determine if at least two PALs are available to join a shift and notify my Shelter Liaison and Horizons' staff if a shift cannot occur.
- h) Uphold safe and respectable standards as **I represent the Playspace Program at all times in the shelter setting.**
- i) Maintain appropriate boundaries with children and parents in the shelter (i.e., exchanging contact information, social media, approaching in community, establishing relationships outside of Playspace shift).
- j) Notify shelter and Horizons' staff immediately if I perceive anything to be a safety hazard in the Playspace or have any concerns about the health or safety of a child.



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PAL Partners

- Each volunteer will be assigned one or more PAL partners, depending on the number of children at the shelter/program and the size of the Playspace.
- Volunteers may never be alone in the Playspace with a child. There must be at least two adults in the Playspace at all times (i.e., two PALs, one PAL & a shelter staff). In addition, PAL Partners are responsible for ensuring appropriate ratios do not exceed 3:1. **Please notify shelter staff if you need to limit the number of children in a shift.**
- If you have a conflict that keeps you from attending an assigned shift, please let your PAL partner(s) know as soon as possible, in addition to shelter and Horizons' staff. Advance notice will let everyone plan accordingly to maintain an appropriate child to adult ratio.

Commitment & Consistency

- Uncommunicated, frequent, and consistent shift absences may result in the termination of your volunteer status.
- To prevent unnecessary shift cancelations, please inform Horizons staff of any pauses or breaks in your volunteer service.
- If you can no longer volunteer, you must contact Horizons' staff as soon as possible. To prepare children and staff for your departure, we request at least two weeks' notice.

Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) and Sexual Registry Information (SORI) background checks

- Before a new volunteer can be placed in a shelter, a criminal background and sexual offender registry check must be conducted.
 - If you have a criminal record, a member of the Playspace Team will email you a copy of your record. Per Massachusetts state policy, when you receive your CORI via email, it is your responsibility to call the Playspace office to discuss and review the report to determine if you are eligible for a placement.
 - Applicants with open cases cannot be placed.



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- If you are a registered offender with the sexual offender registry, you will not be allowed to volunteer with our programs.

Safety and Liability

- PALs are not permitted to take children off shelter ground.
- PALs do not change diapers or assist with toileting. If a child needs to be changed or use the bathroom, PALs must find a shelter staff person who will alert the child's parent.
- PALs are not permitted to distribute food, nor should they coordinate any activities using real food, in the Playspace during their shift.
- PALs should practice safe physical boundaries when in the Playspace. Wrestling or other "rough housing" type play is inappropriate in the shelter setting.
 - PALs should redirect any type of hugging, sitting on laps, jumping on PALs, etc., to alternative behaviors, such as high fives, sitting next to you, etc.
- Children must be fully clothed to participate in a shift. If not, please alert parent and request child is dressed for attendance.

Confidentiality

- When talking about your volunteer experience, please do not use children's full names or reveal other identifying information. Any information you share may unintentionally jeopardize the safety or privacy of a family.
- **PALs are prohibited from taking any photos or videos** of children and shelter residents.
- **PALs are prohibited from sharing the shelter location.** For the safety of residents and children, PALs are required to keep their shelter assignments confidential.
 - Some shelters may require PALs to sign an additional confidentiality agreement upon their first shift.



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Alcohol and Drug Use

PALs are prohibited from attending their Playspace shift under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If there is reasonable suspicion that you are using or have used alcohol or any illegal drug prior to your shift, you will be asked to leave the shelter immediately and you will be terminated from the Playspace Program. Please be cautious when attending a PAL shift after starting new medications.

First Aid, Accidents, and Injuries*

PALs are not allowed to provide first aid treatment. If there is an accident, immediately find shelter staff and/or parent for assistance. Please report any accident or injury of a child or PAL to both shelter and Horizons' staff.

**For additional incident-reporting guidelines, please [click here](#).*

Political/Religious Views

PALs should not promote any political and/or religious beliefs, practices, or affiliations in the shelter.

Physical Activity Requirements

Playspaces can be very active, dynamic, and fast-paced environments. PALs must be able to engage physically and mentally with children ages 0-6 years old and make sound decisions about safety in a busy environment.

Dress Code*

We strongly suggest footwear that allows for active play. Clothing should be comfortable, appropriate for playing with young children, and free from any inappropriate words or imagery. Please avoid wearing any accessories that can be easily pulled or removed. Regardless of how you dress, you must dress for the work of play.

**For additional recommendations on how to dress for Playspace, please [click here](#).*



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Contact and General Waiver

Please note that your contact information will only be shared with the other volunteers and staff at the shelter you are placed. It is important for other volunteers on your shift to have your contact information so that they can communicate with you outside the shift.

I give permission for Horizons for Homeless Children to share my contact information with other HHC volunteers.

I hereby waive and release any and all rights, causes of action, and claims for damages I may have against Horizons for Homeless Children and any and all other associated individuals or agencies, for any and all personal injuries or property damage resulting from my participation as a volunteer. I give consent to be administered first aid and to be treated by an emergency medical technician, paramedic, nurse, or physician if necessary. Any follow up medical attention may be given at a local hospital and transportation to a local hospital is authorized.

I understand that failure to comply with Playspace policies, and responsibilities can lead to my termination as a volunteer.

By checking the box on your PAL application, you signify your acceptance of the terms in this document.