



**Sarasota County School Board**

**Guidelines for  
Visiting / Resident Animals  
in the Classroom**

**REVISED 2016 EDITION**

**Curriculum & Instruction  
Grades K-12**

# School Board of Sarasota County Guidelines for Animals in the Classroom

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide information to promote safety for instructors and students when animals are brought into the classroom. Animals are part of our daily lives and can be used effectively as teaching aids. The positive benefits of the human-animal bond are well established. However, the special situation of classrooms necessitates certain safeguards.

Keeping live animals in the classroom presents students and staff with these health and safety-related problems:

- Scratches and/or bites
- Infections
- Allergic reactions
- Asthmatic reactions
- Infestations

**Therefore, students and parents must receive written information for each student (see Appendix F), which the teacher keeps on file.** Parents must have the option to inform the teacher of possible allergic reactions and limit the student's participation.

1. Wildlife in the classroom is acceptable only when it meets a curricular objective. Administration, students, and parents need to be informed in writing of the objective.
2. Students whose parents have limited their access to the wildlife must have an alternative assignment of equal value.
3. It is the teacher's responsibility to care for and clean up after the wildlife. The students, nor the custodians, are responsible for cleaning the cages, etc. or the area upon which they are placed.

**All children who handle animals should be instructed to wash their hands immediately after handling them under the supervision of the teacher. See Appendix A: Hand Washing Recommendations to Reduce Disease Transmission.**

4. Students must be aware that during emergency drills, the wildlife remains in the classroom, and in the event of a real fire, would not be protected. This prevents the well-intentioned student from returning to a dangerous situation to "save a pet."

## II. PERMITTED ANIMALS

1. Live animals permitted for housing and visiting include the following:

aquarium fish (fresh and salt water)  
hermit crab  
fruit flies

anemone  
ant farm  
earthworms

coral  
butterflies

2. Live animals permitted for visiting include the following:

domestic dog  
domestic sheep  
domestic goat  
pet rabbit

domestic cat  
domestic pig  
pet ferret

domestic cow  
domestic horse  
pet rodents

3. Live animals **NOT** permitted for visiting or housing include the following:

wild animals (i.e. lions, tigers)	stray animals	bats
sugar gliders	raccoons	skunks
reptiles* (see below)	amphibians* (see below)	Giant African Land Snail
aggressive animals/pet breeds	birds (feathered vertebrates)	arachnids* (see below)
wolf-dog hybrids	squirrels	chickens/baby chicks
ducks/baby ducks	poisonous animals	

a. Wild Animals

Defining a wild animal is difficult and subjective. For the purposes of these guidelines, a wild animal is any mammal that is **NOT** one of the following:

- domestic dog
- domestic cat
- domestic ferret
- domestic ungulate (e.g. cow, sheep, goat, pig, horse)
- pet rabbit
- pet rodent (e.g. mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, chinchillas)

Wild animals pose a risk for transmitting rabies as well as other *zoonotic diseases* (i.e. diseases which can be transferred from animals to humans) and should never be brought into schools or handled by children.

Wild animals' behavior also tends to be unpredictable. A wild animal that has been raised in captivity is still a wild animal. Domestication takes thousands of years, not just a generation or two.

b. Poisonous Animals

Venomous spiders, venomous insects, poisonous reptiles (including snakes), and poisonous amphibians are prohibited from being brought onto school grounds.

c. Reptiles (including non-poisonous snakes, lizards, turtles and iguanas) and amphibians

These animals can transmit salmonellosis to humans and are more likely than other animals to do so. Because of the high risk of salmonellosis from these animals even when reared in captivity, they are inappropriate in schools. These animals may intermittently shed salmonella. Negative cultures will not guarantee that they are not infected. Treatment of infected animals with antibiotics has not proven useful and may promote the development and spread of resistant bacteria.

d. Wolf-Dog Hybrids

These animals are crosses between a wolf and a domestic dog and have shown a propensity for aggression, especially toward young children. Therefore, they should not be allowed on school grounds.

e. Stray Animals

Stray animals should never be brought onto school grounds because the health and vaccination status of these animals is unknown.

f. Baby Chicks and Ducks

Because of the high risk of salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis from these animals, they are inappropriate in schools. Transmission of these diseases from chicks and ducklings to children is well documented in the medical literature.

#### g. Aggressive Animals

Animals that are bred or trained to demonstrate aggression towards humans or other animals, or animals that have demonstrated such aggressive behavior in the past, should not be permitted on school campuses. Aggressive, unprovoked, or threatening behavior of any animal should mandate immediate removal.

#### h. Psittacine Birds

Because psittacine birds can carry zoonotic diseases such as psittacosis (*Chlamydia psittaci*, parrot fever), such birds (parrots, parakeets, budgies, and cockatiels) should not be handled by children. The infection can be transmitted by inhaling the agent from desiccated droppings, secretions and dust from feathers of infected birds. Even birds that appear healthy can be carriers and shed the infectious agent.

### **III. SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR SPECIFIC ANIMALS**

#### a. Housed Animals

All animals housed in schools should be provided an appropriate environment (e.g. secure housing, suitable temperature, adequate exercise) and a proper diet. In addition, there should be a plan for the continued care of these animals during the days that school is not in session. Consultation with a veterinarian is advised to help with environmental and nutritional needs and provide care in the event of illness or injury to the animal. Established school agricultural programs should follow the guidelines set forth through the partnered organization.

#### b. Guide, Hearing, and other Service Animals and Law Enforcement Animals

These animals should not be prohibited from being on school grounds or in classrooms.

#### c. Ferrets

Ferrets can be allowed to visit school classrooms, but the person responsible for them must handle them. They should be currently vaccinated against rabies. Because of their propensity to bite when startled, it is not recommended that school children hold ferrets visiting the classroom. Children should never be left alone with a ferret.

#### d. Aggressive Domestic Dog Breeds

Some research shows there are not specific dog breeds that are labeled as “aggressive”. However, it is known that certain dog breeds, such as pit bulls, chow chows, and rottweilers, tend to show statistically higher than average aggressive behaviors. These dog breeds are NOT permitted in the classroom.

#### e. Reptiles, Amphibians, and Arachnids

Certain high school classrooms, such as biology or zoology, may house non-venomous reptiles, amphibians, and arachnids with prior written approval from the school administrator. Upon approval, all students and parents must be notified which animals are housed within the classroom, along with the risks of housing and handling such animals. A permission slip must be signed for each student (see Appendix G).

### **IV. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PERMITTED VISITING ANIMALS**

It is important that animals that are brought onto school campuses be clean and healthy so that the risk of transmitting diseases is minimal. Children tend to be more susceptible to zoonotic disease and parasitic infections than adults because of their lack of handwashing and greater propensity for putting their hands in their mouths.

Therefore, animals that are brought to school should be clean and free of disease and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites to decrease the likelihood of the animal transmitting these agents or vectors to the students.

Visiting animals should be restricted to an area designated by the principal or administrator. Kittens and puppies are appropriate only for short classroom visits.

Pets brought on campus should be spayed/neutered as altered pets have a tendency to display better behavior as per recommendation of the Humane Society of Sarasota County.

The following are specific recommendations for some common-visiting animals:

a. Verified Rabies Vaccination

Current rabies vaccination by a licensed veterinarian should be documented for all dogs, cats, and ferrets brought onto the school campus for instructional purposes. **Dogs and cats under three months of age or not vaccinated against rabies should not be handled by children.**

b. Health Certificates for Dogs

A **health certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian** showing proof of current vaccinations **must be provided** to the principal per recommendation of the Humane Society of Sarasota County. The animal should be free of internal and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites, and free of obvious skin lesions. Dogs over four months of age should be housebroken.

c. Health Certificates for Cats

A **health certificate which is signed by a licensed veterinarian** showing proof of current vaccinations **must be provided** to the principal as recommended by the Humane Society of Sarasota County. The animal should be free of internal and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites, and free of obvious skin lesions.

d. Health Certificates for Ferrets

A **health certificate that is signed by a licensed veterinarian** showing proof of current vaccinations **must be provided** to the principal as recommended by the Humane Society of Sarasota County. The animal should be free of internal and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites, and be free of obvious skin lesions.

## V. PROPER RESTRAINT OF ANIMALS

Because animals may react strangely to classroom situations, it is important to have an effective way to control them. Fear may cause an animal to attempt to escape or even act aggressively in situations that are unusual to the (the “flight or fight” phenomenon). Appropriate restraint devices will allow the holder to react quickly and prevent harm to students or escape of the animals.

a. Collars and Leashes

Dogs, cats, and ferrets should be wearing a proper collar, harness, and/or leash when on the school campus or in the classroom so they can be easily controlled. Household rope or string is not an appropriate restraint tool. The owner or responsible person should stay with the animal during its visit to the school. No animal should be allowed to roam unrestrained on the school campus or in the classroom.

b. Designated Areas

All animals should be restricted to the area designated by the principal or administrator. In school facilities in which the common dining area is also used as an auditorium, gymnasium, or multi-purpose room animals may be allowed in the area at times other than meals if:

- 1) Effective partitioning or self-closing doors separate the area from food storage and food preparation areas.
- 2) Condiments, equipment, and utensils are stored in enclosed cabinets or removed from the area when animals are present.
- 3) Dining areas, including tables, countertops, and similar surfaces are effectively cleaned before the next meal service. Cleaning should be done with a 10% bleach solution or commercial disinfectant. **Animals should not be in dining areas during mealtime.**

c. Estrus

While all female dogs and cats should be spayed before arrival on campus, other female animals not able to be altered **MUST NOT** be in estrus (heat) at the time of the visit.

## VI. STUDENT CONTACT WITH ANIMALS

Increased activity and sudden movements can make animals feel threatened. All student contact with animals should always be supervised and conform to a few basic rules. Even very tame animals may act aggressively in strange situations.

a. Animal bites can usually be avoided if students are kept in small groups.

**Animal Bites: “Any person bitten or having knowledge of any person bitten by any dog, cat or other animal, shall report the fact immediately to the County Health Officer and Animal Services” (Sarasota County Ordinance: Section 13 of Ordinance 95-042).**

**Treatment of Animal Bites: See School Health Services Manual of Sarasota County Public Schools, p. 31-32.**

b. Rough play or teasing should absolutely not be allowed.

c. Children should not be allowed to feed pets directly from their hands.

d. Small animals such as rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, and mice should be handled very gently.

- 1) Rabbits rarely like to be held and will struggle to free themselves.
- 2) Rodents may bite when they feel threatened, but rabies post-exposure prophylaxis is almost never warranted with small rodent bites.

e. Children should be discouraged from “kissing” animals or having them in close contact with their faces.

f. Education with animals should be used to reemphasize proper hygiene and hand washing recommendations. All children who handle animals should be instructed to wash their hands immediately after handling them.

g. Animals should not be allowed in the vicinity of sinks where children wash their hands or in any areas where food is prepared, stored, or served. Animals should not be kept in areas used for cleaning or

storage of food utensils or dishes. Animals should also be restricted from school health rooms or sterile and clean supply rooms.

h. Do not allow cats or dogs in sandboxes where children play.

i. Immunocompromised students (e.g. children with organ transplants, children currently receiving cancer chemotherapy or radiation therapy) may be especially susceptible to zoonotic diseases; therefore, special precautions may be needed to minimize the risk of disease transmission to these students. Consultation with the child's parents about precautionary measures is strongly advised.

j. Ringworm can be transmitted from animals (example: guinea pigs, hamsters) to humans and from humans to animals. Proper safety precautions, such as cleaning of textiles and handwashing, should be followed.

## **VII. HANDLING AND DISPOSAL OF ANIMAL WASTES WHILE ON SCHOOL CAMPUSES**

### **a. Clean Up of Animal Wastes**

Children should not handle or clean up any form of animal waste (feces, urine, blood, etc.). Animal wastes should be disposed of where children cannot come into contact with them, such as in a plastic bag or container with a well-fitted lid or via the sewage waste system for feces. Food handlers should not be involved in the cleanup of animal wastes.

### **b. Prohibited Areas**

Animal wastes should not be disposed of and visiting animals should not be allowed to defecate in or near areas where children routinely play or congregate (e.g. sandboxes, school playgrounds).

### **c. Litter Boxes**

Litter boxes for visiting animals should not be allowed in the classroom.

## **VIII. HUMANE TREATMENT**

To avoid the intentional or unintentional abuse, mistreatment, or neglect of animals, the guidelines of the National Association of Biology Teachers and the National Science Teachers Association should be adopted (Appendix I).

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

Animals can serve as excellent teaching tools, and students love to have them visit the classroom. When using animals as an instructional aide, the objective should always be well planned in advance. By following the above recommendations, the use of animals in the classroom can be made safe and enjoyable for both the animals and the children.



# Appendix A

## Hand Washing Recommendations to Reduce Disease Transmission from Animals in Public Settings

Hand washing is the single most important prevention step for reducing disease transmission.

### How to Hand Wash:

- Wet hands with running water, place soap into palms, rub together to make a lather, scrub hands vigorously for 20 seconds, rinse soap off of hands, and then dry hands with a disposable towel.
- It is advisable to turn off the faucet using a disposable towel. Young children need assistance in washing hands.

### Hand Washing Facilities or Stations:

- Hand washing facilities should be accessible, sufficient for the maximum anticipated attendance, and configured for use by children and adults.
- Hands should always be washed after leaving animal areas and prior to eating or drinking.
- Hand wash stations should be conveniently located between animal and non-animal areas (exit transitional area) and in food concession areas.
- Maintenance should include routine cleaning and restocking of towels and soap.
- Running water should be of sufficient volume and pressure to remove soil from hands. Volume and pressure might be significantly reduced if the water supply is furnished from a holding tank. Therefore, a permanent pressured water supply is preferable.
- The design of the hand wash unit should leave the hands free for hand washing.
- Hot water is preferable, but if the hand wash stations are supplied with only cold water, a soap that emulsifies more easily in cold water should be provided.
- Communal basins do not constitute adequate hand washing facilities.

### Hand Washing Agents:

- Liquid soap dispensed by a hand or foot pump is recommended.
- When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective against many common disease agents, such as *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and *Campylobacter*.
- Hand sanitizers may be less effective if hands are grossly soiled. They are also ineffective against certain organisms (i.e., bacterial spores, *Cryptosporidium*, and certain viruses). Therefore, gross contamination and dirt should be removed to the extent possible before using hand sanitizers.

### Signs:

- Hand wash reminder signs must be posted at exits from animal areas.
- Signs should direct visitors and animal handlers to the location of hand wash stations.
- Instructional signs should be posted at the hand wash stations and at restroom lavatories to ensure proper hand wash practices.
- The placement of hand wash reminder signs at food concession areas is recommended.

<b>Hand Washing: How and When</b>	
<p><b>How:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Wet hands with running water</li> <li>✓ Place soap into palms</li> <li>✓ Rub together to make a lather</li> <li>✓ Scrub hands vigorously for 20 seconds</li> <li>✓ Rinse soap off of hands</li> <li>✓ Dry hands</li> </ul>	<p><b>When:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ After going to the toilet</li> <li>✓ After exiting animal areas</li> <li>✓ Before eating</li> <li>✓ Before preparing foods</li> </ul>

# **Appendix B**

## **NSTA Position Statement: Guidelines for Responsible Use of Animals in the Classroom**

### **Introduction**

NSTA supports the decision of science teachers and their school or school district to integrate live animals and dissection in the K–12 classroom. Student interaction with organisms is one of the most effective methods of achieving many of the goals outlined in the *National Science Education Standards (NSES)*. To this end, NSTA encourages educators and school officials to make informed decisions about the integration of animals in the science curriculum. NSTA opposes regulations or legislation that would eliminate an educator's decision-making role regarding dissection or would deny students the opportunity to learn through actual animal dissection. NSTA encourages districts to ensure that animals are properly cared for and treated humanely, responsibly, and ethically. Ultimately, decisions to incorporate organisms in the classroom should balance the ethical and responsible care of animals with their educational value.

While this position statement is primarily focused on vertebrate animals, NSTA recognizes the importance of following similar ethical practices for all living organisms.

### **Including Live Animals in the Classroom**

NSTA supports including live animals as part of instruction in the K-12 science classroom because observing and working with animals firsthand can spark students' interest in science as well as a general respect for life while reinforcing key concepts as outlined in the *NSES*.

NSTA recommends that teachers

- Educate themselves about the safe and responsible use of animals in the classroom. Teachers should seek information from reputable sources and familiarize themselves with laws and regulations in their state.
- Become knowledgeable about the acquisition and care of animals appropriate to the species under study so that both students and the animals stay safe and healthy during all activities.
- Follow local, state, and national laws, policies, and regulations when live organisms, particularly native species, are included in the classroom.
- Integrate live animals into the science program based on sound curriculum and pedagogical decisions.
- Develop activities that promote observation and comparison skills that instill in students an appreciation for the value of life and the importance of caring for animals responsibly.
- Instruct students on safety precautions for handling live organisms and establish a plan for addressing such issues as allergies and fear of animals.
- Develop and implement a plan for future care or disposition of animals at the conclusion of the study as well as during school breaks and summer vacations.
- Espouse the importance of not conducting experimental procedures on animals if such procedures are likely to cause pain, induce nutritional deficiencies, or expose animals to parasites, hazardous/toxic chemicals, or radiation.
- Shelter animals when the classroom is being cleaned with chemical cleaners, sprayed with pesticides, and during other times when potentially harmful chemicals are being used.
- Refrain from releasing animals into a non-indigenous environment.

### **Dissection**

NSTA supports each teacher's decision to use animal dissection activities that help students

1. develop skills of observation and comparison,
2. discover the shared and unique structures and processes of specific organisms, and
3. develop a greater appreciation for the complexity of life.

It is essential that teachers establish specific and clear learning goals that enable them to appropriately plan and supervise the activities.

NSTA recognizes science educators as professionals. As such, they are in the best position to determine when to use—or not use—dissection activities. NSTA encourages teachers to be sensitive to students' views regarding dissection, and to be aware of students' beliefs and their right to make an informed decision about their participation. Teachers, especially those at the primary level, should be especially cognizant of students' ages and maturity levels when deciding whether to use animal dissection. Should a teacher feel that an alternative to dissection would be a better option for a student or group of students, it is important that the teacher select a meaningful alternative. NSTA is aware of the continuing development and improvement of these alternatives.

Finally, NSTA calls for more research to determine the effectiveness of animal dissection activities and alternatives and the extent to which these activities should be integrated into the science curriculum.

Regarding the use of dissection activities in school classrooms, NSTA recommends that science teachers

- Be prepared to present an alternative to dissection to students whose views or beliefs make this activity uncomfortable and difficult for them.
- Conduct laboratory and dissection activities with consideration and appreciation for the organism.
- Plan laboratory and dissection activities that are appropriate to the maturity level of the students.
- Use prepared specimens purchased from a reputable and reliable scientific supply company. An acceptable alternative source for fresh specimens (i.e., squid, chicken wings) would be an FDA-inspected facility such as a butcher shop, fish market, or supermarket. The use of salvaged specimens does not reflect safe practice.
- Conduct laboratory and dissection activities in a clean and organized work space with care and laboratory precision.
- Conduct dissections in an appropriate physical environment with the proper ventilation, lighting, furniture, and equipment, including hot water and soap for cleanup.
- Use personal safety protective equipment, such as gloves, chemical splash goggles, and aprons, all of which should be available and used by students, teachers, and visitors to the classroom.
- Address such issues as allergies and squeamishness about dealing with animal specimens.
- Ensure that the specimens are handled and disposed of properly.
- Ensure that sharp instruments, such as scissors, scalpels, and other tools, are used safely and appropriately.
- Base laboratory and dissection activities on carefully planned curriculum objectives.

—Adopted by the NSTA Board of Directors, June 2005

Revised: March 2008

## Appendix C

### References for Animals in the Classroom

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**APPENDIX D**  
**Administrative Permission for Students**  
**to Have Exposure to Animals in the Classroom or School**

(School retains one copy for records AND teacher retains one copy for records)

Sarasota County School Board Guidelines require that Administrators (Principal or Assistant Principal) must receive written information when exposure to animals will occur in the school or classroom. Administrators have the option to limit or reject the housing or visit of an animal in a classroom or the school.

Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Room # \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject Area: \_\_\_\_\_

Animal(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Florida Standard Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation of correlation or application to the Curriculum:

Length of time that the animal will be present:

\_\_\_\_\_ For the following school year: \_\_\_\_\_ (Housed Animals)

\_\_\_\_\_ On the following date(s): \_\_\_\_\_ (Visiting Animals)

\_\_\_\_\_ **YES**, Teacher may house this animal or allow this animal to visit in the classroom or school.

\_\_\_\_\_ **NO**, Teacher may not house this animal or allow this animal to visit in the classroom or school.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Administrator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX F**  
**Parent Notification for Students to Have Exposure to**  
**Animals in the Classroom**

(Teacher retains copies for records)

Sarasota County School Board Guidelines require that parents must receive written information when exposure to animals will occur in the school/classroom. Parents have the option to limit their child's participation and inform the teacher. A copy of Guidelines for Visiting/Resident Animals in Sarasota County Schools is available at each school and may be reviewed upon request.

Teacher's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Room Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade / Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Florida Standard Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

The correlation/application to the curriculum is:

The following animal(s) will be in your child's classroom: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ For the following school year \_\_\_\_\_ (Housed)

\_\_\_\_\_ On this date(s): \_\_\_\_\_ (Visiting only)

I give my permission for my child to have exposure to the animal(s) listed above for the time frame given. I have listed below any animals in which my child should not be exposed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent / Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have concerns about your child being in the classroom while this animal is visiting/residing, please write them here, or contact your child's teacher.

## APPENDIX G

# Parent Notification of Housed Animals and Student Handling in a High School Science Classroom

(Teacher retains copies for records)

Sarasota County School Board Guidelines require that parents must receive written information when exposure to animals will occur in the school/classroom. Parents have the option to limit their child's participation and inform the teacher. The teacher will discuss proper handling and safety procedures before students are allowed to handle any animals. A copy of Guidelines for Visiting/Resident Animals in Sarasota County Schools is available at each school and may be reviewed upon request.

Teacher's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

The correlation/application to the curriculum is:

The following animal(s) will be in your child's classroom:

In addition to the possibility of bites from any animals with jaws, reptiles and amphibians (i.e. frogs, snakes, lizards, etc.) can carry Salmonella, which is often associated with food poisoning. Salmonella (and other zoonotic pathogens) can easily be passed from reptiles/amphibians to humans while handling, along with having contact with their living environments and water containers. The CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov/features/salmonellafrogturtle/>) recommends the following safety procedures:

- Washing hands and other body parts that were contacted while handling reptiles/amphibians or their habitats immediately afterwards.
- Anyone with weakened immune systems, or children under 5 years of age, should be kept away from handling reptiles/amphibians or their habitats.
- Washing clothing and other materials that were touched by reptiles or amphibians.
- Disinfecting any surfaces that may have been in contact with reptiles or amphibians.
- Reptile/Amphibian habitats should be kept clean, using disposable gloves and in sinks not used for food preparation or drinking water.

I give my permission for my child to handle all of the classroom animals listed above. I have listed any animals I do not wish my child to handle. I agree to hold the teacher, school, and school board harmless for any damages that may occur as a result of handling animals in the classroom.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent / Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date