

Camp Leadership— Youth Protection Begins With You

A Guide for Camp Staff and Unit Leaders



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

An abused or neglected child is a child who is harmed, or threatened with physical or mental harm, by the acts or lack of action of a person responsible for the child's care.

Unit leaders and camp staff must accept the responsibility to provide a safe and healthy camp setting where Scouts are free from the worries of child abuse. Youth protection begins with caring leaders and staff who above all else pledge to uphold the Boy Scouts of America policies regarding Youth Protection. These policies protect youth members from abuse by creating barriers to abusive situations. These same barriers protect leaders and staff from false allegations and provide a framework to interact with youth members in positive, nurturing settings.

Barriers to Abuse in Scouting

The Boy Scouts of America believes that its top priority is to protect the safety of our children. We have developed effective policies that create a safe environment for young people involved in Scouting activities. Youth Protection policies and training are essential for all leaders and staff.

- Two-deep leadership
- No one-on-one contact
- Respect privacy
- Separate accommodations
- Proper preparation for high-adventure activities
- No secret organizations
- Appropriate attire
- Constructive discipline
- Hazing is prohibited
- Youth leader training and supervision
- Member responsibility
- Unit responsibilities

Physical contact between adults and youth should be kept to a minimum. Using common sense, it is acceptable to shake hands, pat a boy on the back, touch while demonstrating/teaching a skill such as first aid, or taking action to prevent an accident. Long hugs, wrestling, or giving a massage are examples of inappropriate contact with a child.

All members are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the principles set forth in the Scout Oath and Law. Physical violence, hazing, bullying, theft, verbal insults, ethnic slurs, crude or sexual jokes, pornography, demeaning behavior, and drugs and alcohol have no place in Scouting and may result in discipline up to and including revocation of membership.

Cameras and Imaging Devices

While most campers and leaders use cameras and other imaging devices responsibly, it has become very easy to invade the privacy of individuals. It is inappropriate to use any device capable of recording or transmitting visual images in shower houses, restrooms, or other areas where privacy is expected by participants.

Digital Privacy

A key ingredient for a safe and healthy Scouting experience is the respect for privacy. Advances in technology are enabling new forms of social interaction that extend beyond the appropriate use of cameras or recording devices (see "Barriers to Abuse within Scouting"). Sending sexually explicit photographs or videos electronically or "sexting" by cell

phones is a form of texting being practiced primarily by young adults and children. Sexting is neither safe, nor private, nor an approved form of communication and can lead to severe legal consequences for the sender and the receiver. Although most campers and leaders use digital devices responsibly, educating them about the appropriate use of cell phones and cameras would be a good safety and privacy measure.

Camp Staff Conduct

Serving on camp staff is one of the most rewarding experiences available to young adults. Few employment settings offer such a unique opportunity to serve in a responsible position, teaching Scouts important skills while having tremendous personal growth experiences. Staff members are often only slightly older than campers, yet they must conduct themselves in an appropriate manner at all times. Still, you are a role model for young and impressionable campers.

Technology also affects how staff interacts with campers. Text messages, e-mail, and community and personal Web sites and blogs are all popular forms of communication. However, as a staff member and a representative of the BSA, you must be especially careful how you use these and other forms of communication. Under no circumstance should you discuss or exchange personal or inappropriate information with a camper, leader, or staff member. These forms of communication can be misinterpreted and can be widely dispersed. It is even possible that such postings will resurface many years later, resulting in embarrassment.

Staff are also members of a "community" for the summer and must adhere to a code of conduct that promotes a safe and healthy environment for all. This applies on or off duty. The Scout Oath and Scout Law are excellent guidelines for conduct in all settings.

Staff members will receive specific training in the following topics:

- Policies for reporting alleged abuse
- Guidelines for personal behavior, including the appropriate use of technology
- Policies for fraternization and proper relationships with campers
- Expectations for social relationships between staff when on or off duty

Child Abuse: Basic Information

There are several forms of abuse: neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse.

■ Neglect

A child is neglected if the person(s) the child depends on does not provide food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, or supervision. When these basic needs are deliberately withheld, it is considered neglect. Often, parents or caregivers of neglected children are so overwhelmed by their own needs that they cannot recognize the needs of children in their care.

■ Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any act that results in non-accidental injury to the child and usually involves physical violence in which the parent or other person responsible for the care of the child is out of control. Such abuse may be due to severe and unreasonable corporal punishment. It could also occur as a result of physical hazing and initiations.

Some possible signs of physical abuse are:

- Bruises, cuts, or lacerations on areas of the body that are not usually injured as a part of normal childhood activities, such as the back of arms and legs. Sometimes they have distinct shapes indicating the weapon used. Bruises may be of different colors indicating injuries that occurred at different times.
- Cigar or cigarette burns, especially on the soles of the feet, palms of the hands, or back. There could also be rope burns on the wrists or ankles. Some burns may leave marks indicating the instrument used to inflict the burn, such as a steam iron.
- Injuries that are inconsistent with the story of how they occurred.

■ Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is harder to recognize but is just as harmful to a child as other forms of abuse. Emotional abuse damages a child's self-esteem and in extreme cases can lead to developmental problems and speech disorders. A child suffers from emotional abuse when constantly ridiculed, rejected, blamed, or compared unfavorably with siblings or other children.

Note: Emotional abuse at camp may be committed by adults, camp staff, or other campers. Derogatory nicknames, belittling, threatening, and bullying may constitute emotional abuse, are violations of the Scouting spirit, and are not to be tolerated.

■ Sexual Abuse or Sexual Molestation

Child sexual abuse involves any sexual act between a child and an adult or between a child and another child, one of whom is perceived to have more power based upon physical maturity, size, strength, or social status. The age of the aggressor is not a determining factor in considering whether the sexual acts are abusive. Any sexual acts that are forced, coerced, or involve pain or any kind of penetration are abusive. Even age-appropriate, mutual, peer sexual exploration to satisfy curiosity can be problematic and not appropriate in camp, even though it may not constitute sexual abuse.

Signs of possible sexual abuse include:

- Age-inappropriate understanding of sex
- Reluctance to be left alone with a particular person
- Inappropriate sex play
- Suggestive drawings
- Fear of being touched

Here are facts you should know about child sexual abuse:

- Child abuse occurs to as many as 25 percent of girls and 14 percent of boys before the age of 18.
- Boys or girls can be sexually abused at any age.
- Children are most likely to be abused by someone they know and trust.
- Eighty to 90 percent of sexually abused boys ages 7 to 13 are molested by acquaintances who are non-family members.
- Few sexually abused children tell anyone that they have been abused. Children are usually told to keep the abuse secret by a series of threats, bribes, or physical force.
- Children might feel responsible for abuse and fear an angry reaction from their parents.

Preteen and teenage boys are especially at risk for sexual abuse. The physical and hormonal changes caused by puberty and their natural curiosity about their new emotions and feelings make these youth likely targets for child molesters. The normal desire of boys this age to show their independence from their parents' control adds to the risk. This combination might keep boys this age from asking their parents or trusted adults for help when faced with sexual abuse.

Sexual Molestation by Peers

Approximately one-third of sexual molestation occurs at the hands of other children. If a child tells you about club initiations in which sexual activity is included, or if a child tells you about inappropriate (deception, pressure, or force) sexual activity by other children, this is a form of sexual abuse and you need to take steps to stop the activity. This form of sexual misconduct is serious and cannot be ignored.

Children who molest other children need professional help. They are much more likely to respond to treatment when young than as adults (who were molesters as children and received no intervention).

Signs of Sexual Abuse

The clearest indication that a child has been sexually abused is disclosure of the incident. Children often do not report their abuse, so camp leaders must be alert for the other signs, such as:

- Hints, indirect messages
- Seductive or provocative behavior
- Physical symptoms

The following are common signs that children are upset; and if present for more than a few days, these signs could indicate that something is wrong and the child needs help. They might also be signs that the child is being sexually abused:

- Self-destructive behavior
- Unhappiness
- Regression
- Difficulty at school

Three R's of Youth Protection

- **Recognize** that anyone could be a child molester and be aware of situations that could lead to abuse.
- **Resist** advances made by child molesters to avoid being molested.
- **Report** molestation or attempted molestation to authorities.

Reporting Requirements

Each state has specific reporting requirements. Camp leaders will be instructed in the proper procedures for their local council. In all cases, allegations of abuse in the program must be reported to the Scout executive.

At some point, a youth in your care may disclose that he or she has been abused.

- DON'T panic or overreact to the information disclosed by the child.
- DON'T criticize the child.
- DO respect the child's privacy.
- DO make sure the child feels that he or she is not to blame.



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