



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES

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Category: Child Abuse Prevention

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To protect children participating in YMCA of the USA National Youth Events by providing our staff and volunteers with policies to guide their conduct. These policies will also give staff and volunteers knowledge needed to carefully and safely interact with children in our facilities and our National Event venues.

## **POLICY 1: PROHIBITING THE ABUSE OR MISTREATMENT OF YOUTH**

The YMCA of the USA will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of youth in its programs. Abuse includes, but is not limited to, the following types:

- *Physical abuse* – Injury that is intentionally inflicted upon a youth.
- *Sexual abuse* – Any contact of a sexual nature that occurs between a youth and an adult or between two youths. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult or the other youth.
- *Emotional abuse* – Mental or emotional injury to a youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the youth's growth, development, or psychological functioning.
- *Neglect* – Failure to provide for a youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a youth from harm.

Any mistreatment or abuse by a staff member or a volunteer will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer service.



## **POLICY 2: PROHIBITING THE ABUSE OR MISTREATMENT OF ONE YOUTH BY ANOTHER YOUTH**

YMCA of the USA is committed to providing all youth with a safe environment in its National Events. YMCA of the USA will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one youth by another youth.

In addition, YMCA of the USA will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior.

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:

- *Physical bullying* – when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
- *Verbal bullying* – when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names.
- *Nonverbal or relational bullying* – when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip. This type of bullying also includes intimidating another person by using gestures.
- *Cyberbullying* – the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technological tool, such as email, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or website postings (including blogs). Cyberbullying can involve:
  - Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images;
  - Posting sensitive, private information about another person;
  - Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad; and
- *Intentionally excluding someone from an online group Hazing* – an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person regardless of that person's willingness to participate.
- *Sexualized bullying* – when bullying involves behaviors that are sexual in nature. Examples of sexualized bullying behaviors include sexting, bullying that involves exposures of private body parts, and verbal bullying involving sexualized language or innuendos.



Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying. This policy applies to all youth participating in the National Events, staff and volunteers.

**POLICY 3: ANNUAL REVIEW OF CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES**

The YMCA of the USA will annually review all child abuse prevention policies for relevance and will modify or rescind as appropriate. All staff will be notified during the next available annual training session if there are changes.

**POLICY 4: DEFINING APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT**

YMCA of the USA’s physical contact policy promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting youth and staff. YMCA of the USA encourages appropriate physical contact with youth and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact. Any inappropriate physical contact by staff towards youth in the organization’s programs will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

YMCA of the USA’s policies for appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions are:

<i>Appropriate Physical Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Side hugs</li> <li>• Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs</li> <li>• Pats on the shoulder or back</li> <li>• Handshakes</li> <li>• High-fives and hand slapping</li> <li>• Verbal praise</li> <li>• Pats on the head when culturally appropriate</li> <li>• Touching hands, shoulders, and arms</li> <li>• Arms around shoulders</li> <li>• Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-frontal hugs</li> <li>• Kisses</li> <li>• Showing affection in isolated area</li> <li>• Lap sitting</li> <li>• Wrestling</li> <li>• Piggyback rides</li> <li>• Tickling</li> <li>• Allowing a youth to cling to an employee’s or volunteer’s leg</li> <li>• Any type of massage given by or to a youth</li> <li>• Any form of affection that is unwanted by the youth or the staff or volunteer</li> <li>• Compliments relating to physique or body development</li> <li>• Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas</li> </ul>



## **POLICY 5: DEFINING APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE VERBAL INTERACTIONS**

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to youth in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.

Staff and volunteers must not initiate sexually oriented conversations with youth. Staff and volunteers are not permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with youth.

YMCA of the USA's policies for appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions are:

<b><i>Appropriate Verbal Interactions</i></b>	<b><i>Inappropriate Verbal Interactions</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive reinforcement</li><li>• Appropriate jokes</li><li>• Encouragement</li><li>• Praise</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name-calling</li><li>• Discussing sexual encounters or in any way involving youth in the personal problems or issues of staff and volunteers</li><li>• Secrets</li><li>• Cursing</li><li>• Off-color or sexual jokes</li><li>• Shaming</li><li>• Belittling</li><li>• Derogatory remarks</li><li>• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate youth</li><li>• Derogatory remarks about the youth or his/her family</li></ul>



## **POLICY 6: MANAGING THE RISK WHEN ONE STAFF MEMBER IS ALONE WITH ONE YOUTH**

In those situations, where one-on-one interactions are approved, staff and volunteers should observe the following additional guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

### ***Additional Guidelines for One-on-One Interactions***

- When meeting one-on-one with a youth, always do so in a public place where you are in full view of others
- Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high-fives, and handshakes
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by
- Inform other staff and volunteers that you are alone with a youth and ask them to randomly drop in
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted

### ***TUTORING/ PRIVATE COACHING***

One-on-one situations, such as tutoring and private coaching sessions, introduce additional risks for false allegations. Staff and volunteers should be aware of our policies regarding tutoring and private coaching:

1. Staff and volunteers must have supervisor approval for any tutoring or private coaching sessions.
2. Tutoring and coaching sessions with YMCA of the USA's youth may not occur outside of the organization.
3. Supervisors must keep a schedule of private tutoring and coaching sessions, which should include times, youth involved, and location of sessions.



## **POLICY 7: MANAGING INTERACTIONS BETWEEN STAFF AND YOUTH OUTSIDE OF REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

Many cases of organizational abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. This contact outside of regularly scheduled activities may put staff, volunteers, and YMCA of the USA at increased risk.

YMCA of the USA strongly recommends that staff and volunteers do not have outside contact with youth from the organization. However, if off-site contacts are unavoidable, YMCA of the USA has determined that the following forms of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate:

<b><i>Appropriate Outside Contact</i></b>	<b><i>Inappropriate Outside Contact</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking groups of youth on an outing</li><li>• Attending sporting activities with groups of youth</li><li>• Attending functions at a youth's home, with parents present</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking one youth on an outing without the parents' written permission</li><li>• Visiting one youth in the youth's home, without a parent present</li><li>• Entertaining one youth in the home of staff or volunteers</li><li>• A lone youth spending the night with staff or volunteers</li></ul>

In addition, when outside contact is unavoidable, ensure that the following steps are followed:

1. Supervisors should identify for staff and volunteers what types of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate.
2. Ensure that staff or volunteers have the parents' permission to engage in outside contact with the youth. Consider requiring the parents to sign a release-of-liability statement.



**POLICY 8: GOVERNING ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STAFF AND YOUTH**

Any private electronic communication between staff and youth, including the use of social networking websites like - Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, instant messaging, texting, etc. is prohibited.

All communication between staff and youth must be transparent. The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate electronic communication.

<i>Appropriate Electronic Communication</i>	<i>Inappropriate Electronic Communication</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sending and replying to emails and text messages from youth ONLY when copying in a supervisor or the youth’s parent</li> <li>• Communicating through “organization group pages” on Facebook or other approved public forums</li> <li>• “Private” profiles for staff and volunteers which youth cannot access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating comments</li> <li>• Sexually oriented conversations</li> <li>• Private messages between staff and volunteers with youth</li> <li>• Posting pictures of organization participants on social media sites</li> <li>• Posting inappropriate comments on pictures</li> <li>• “Friending” participants on social networking sites</li> </ul>

In addition, provide this information to your participant’s parents so that they know what is appropriate and inappropriate from your staff.

**POLICY 9: ADDRESSING STAFF CELL PHONE USE DURING PROGRAM HOURS**

While assigned to work with youth, staff are not permitted to use electronic communications device except during approved breaks and emergency situations. Internet use, text messaging and/or emailing pictures while assigned to work with youth is strictly prohibited regardless of the type of device used and whether for business or personal reasons. Employees need to ensure that friends and family members are aware of this policy.

Use of personal electronic communication devices to contact (via voice, text, or pictures/video) organization members and/or program participants for personal and/ or inappropriate reasons shall be grounds for discipline up to and including termination of employment.



### **ACCEPTABLE USE OF CELL PHONES DURING PROGRAM HOURS**

There are occasions in which staff will need to use personal or organizational issued electronic communication devices. In these cases, staff will have explicit direction from supervisors governing use. Situations which may require use of organizational issued or personal electronic communication devices include:

1. Field Trips
2. Off-site Programs
3. Emergencies

### **POLICY 10: EVERY ALLEGATION OF ABUSE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AND THERE IS COOPERATION WITH AUTHORITIES**

All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youth or allegation of abuse will be taken seriously. The YMCA of the USA will fully cooperate with authorities if allegations of abuse are made and investigated.

### **POLICY 11: MANDATORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

Staff should be trained to be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse. Staff will:

1. Be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse;
2. Know and follow organization policies and procedures that protect youth against abuse;
3. Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws as soon as possible, in no event later than 24 hours; and
4. Follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken.

### **POLICY 12: CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS – EMPLOYEES**

Because we are a youth-serving organization and the safety of children is of the utmost importance, YMCA of the USA requires a criminal background check for all full-time, part-time and temporary employees\* upon hire, once a conditional offer of employment has been extended by the hiring manager or a representative of the Human Resources. Thereafter these employees will receive the screening every other year. These criminal background checks will be conducted in accordance with applicable law.

YMCA of the USA shall ask applicants and employees to complete a **Background Check, Disclosure and Authorization\*** form authorizing it to conduct a criminal background check. Applicants and employees are required to complete the authorization as a condition of continued consideration for a position or continued employment with YMCA of the USA.



A criminal record will not automatically disqualify an applicant from employment or an employee from continued employment with YMCA of the USA. A variety of factors, such as the nature of the conviction, the relevance of the crime to the position, and the time that has elapsed since the conviction, will be taken into consideration.

If an applicant attempts to withhold information or falsify information pertaining to previous convictions, the applicant will be disqualified from further employment consideration with YMCA of the USA due to falsification of an application.

An offer of employment may be extended to an applicant prior to the completion of the criminal background check. However, the applicant's first day of work in the position cannot begin prior to the satisfactory completion of the criminal background check.

**\*Excludes temporary employees represented by an agency. All employees responsible for contracting with temporary employee agencies shall ensure that the contract requires that a criminal background check has been completed on the temporary employee within the last two years prior to the temporary employee beginning work with YMCA of the USA.**

### **POLICY 13: CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS – VOLUNTEERS**

For our National Youth Events, Volunteers working directly with children and youth will be required to have passed a criminal background check prior to participating in the Event. The term "Volunteers" in this instance does not include those who come in contact with children and youth in a public location for a limited period of time, as long as YMCA of the USA approved safeguards are in place for ensuring these individuals are never left alone with children or youth.

### **POLICY 14: CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION TRAINING**

YMCA of the USA requires all YMCA of the USA employees take certain child abuse awareness and prevention training within 30 days after hire. YMCA of the USA may require additional child abuse prevention and reporting training of some or all staff from time to time. Refusal or failure to take such training shall lead to disciplinary action up to termination of employment. No staff member shall attend a National Event without first taking the required child abuse prevention training.

Prior to participating in a National Event, staff and volunteers shall take certain child abuse prevention and mandated reporter training required by YMCA of the USA. This child abuse prevention training must have been taken within a year prior to the date of the National Event. Those staff members and volunteers who refuse or fail to take such training shall lose their right to participate in the National Event. The term "Volunteers" in this instance does not include those who come in contact with children and youth in a public location for a limited period of time, as long as YMCA of the USA approved safeguards are in place for ensuring these individuals are never left alone with children or youth.



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## **POLICY 15: CODE OF CONDUCT FOR NATIONAL EVENTS**

Staff and volunteers participating in a National Event shall read and sign a Code of Conduct documenting their understanding YMCA of the USA policies of the legal and ethical duty to prevent and to report suspected mistreatment or abuse of youth.



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