

# CHILD ABUSE POLICY

Child abuse has been in the spotlight of public attention since early 1985. We have all become much more sensitized to the potential occurrence and serious implication of such at any day or resident camp.

Child abuse is legally wrong. We are required to report any alleged physical or sexual abuse that takes place at camp to the State Child Protective Services within 24 hours after the allegation is made known. Any allegation of abuse prior to a camper's arrival at camp is to be reported within 8 hours, with a written report within 72 hours.

In a camp setting, physical abuse is most likely to happen when a counselor is disciplining a rebellious or unruly camper. Anything done to inflict pain while disciplining a camper is considered child abuse. (See Behavior Management Policy.)

## Guidelines for the Discipline of Children

- Counselors may NOT, under any circumstances, hit a child.
- Counselors may not use abusive or derogatory language with campers.
- Counselors need to ask for help.
- A staff member who encounters a particularly difficult child will seek the assistance of supervisory or administrative staff.
- In all dealings with campers, counselors should strive to respond as opposed to react to children.

## Guidelines for Camper-Counselor Contact

- Staff may only touch a child on the hand, shoulder, or upper back;
- Never against a child's will (unless in the case of clear and present danger of the child);
- Never against a child's discomfort, whether expressed verbally or nonverbally;
- Preferably in the company of other adults;
- Never when it would have the effect of over-stimulating the child;
- Never in a place on a child's body that is normally covered by a bathing suit, unless for a clear medical necessity, and then only with supervision from another adult.

The physical size and strength of staff members necessitates that you use discretion and restraint in all physical contact activities with campers. Games that encourage intense competitive activities with physical contact that potentially could cause injury must be eliminated or supervised very closely by nonparticipating staff members.

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

We cannot be too careful in the area of sexual abuse. Even the appearance of wrong or a false allegation can cause irreparable damage to the reputation of the accused staff member and the camp. Therefore, all staff members must be very cautious in order to avoid doing anything that could be interpreted as sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to, any contact or interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered forced, whether or not the child has consented.

## Guidelines for Staff

- There is no 'hazing' of campers by campers or counselors
- Campers will not be subjected to 'initiation' rites that are abusive in any manner
- There will be double coverage of campers by adults during changing times
- Younger children should be encouraged to change their own clothes as much as possible
- Campers will not be alone with a counselor in his or her quarters
- A staff member will under no circumstances share a bed or sleeping bag with a camper
- Counselors will set limits with children who 'cling' or hang on them
- Counselors will not give back rubs
- Tickling or teasing a camper to the point where that camper is out of control is unacceptable

- Pillow fights or wrestling matches and the like can become over-stimulating in short order and need to be limited and carefully supervised
- Overnights need a minimum of two adult leaders and there needs to be at least one counselor present of the same gender as the campers
- Counselors sleeping together on overnights is grounds for dismissal
- Romantic lives of counselors cannot, under any circumstances, be shared with campers
- Counselors should stay out of cabins other than their own after lights out at night unless on specific camp business
- Male staff working with adolescent females need to be aware of the tendency for this group to develop hidden or secret romantic fantasies
- Whatever is done with campers should be done in broad daylight, with company

## **CHILD ABUSE REPORTING**

Affectionate touch and the warm feelings it brings is an important factor in helping a child grow into a loving and peaceful adult. However, staff and volunteers need to be sensitive to each person's need for personal space (i.e., not everyone wants to be hugged). Our camp encourages appropriate touch; however, at the same time prohibits inappropriate touch or other means of sexually exploiting children.

### **Procedures for Child-Abuse Complaints**

- Any actions you observe or that may be disclosed, that are not acceptable behavior according to the above guidelines, should be reported as soon as possible to the Camp Director.
- The Camp Director will notify the appropriate authorities and parents.
- The Camp Director will take appropriate internal action.

In the event that there is an accusation of child abuse the camp will take prompt and immediate action as follows:

At the first report of probable cause to believe that a child-abuse incident has occurred, the employed staff person receiving the report will notify the Camp Director, who will then review the incident with the executive director or a designate. However if the summer camp director is not immediately available, this review by the supervisor cannot in any way deter the reporting of child abuse by the mandated reporters. Most states mandate each child-care provider to report information they have learned in their professional role regarding suspected child abuse. In most states, mandated reporters are granted immunity from prosecution.

The camp will make a report in accordance with relevant state or local child abuse reporting requirements and will cooperate to the extent of the law with any legal authority involved.

In the event the reported incident(s) involve a program volunteer or employed staff, the executive director will, without exception, suspend the volunteer or staff person from the camp. The parents or legal guardian of the child(ren) involved in the alleged incident will be promptly notified in accordance with the directions of the relevant state or local agency.

Whether the incident or alleged offense takes place on or off camp property, it will be considered job-related (because of the youth-involved nature of the camp).

Reinstatement of the employed staff person will occur only after all allegations have been cleared to the satisfaction of the director. All camp staff and volunteers must be sensitive to the need for confidentiality in the handling of this information and therefore, should only discuss the incident with the director or executive director.

All supervisory staff must read and sign this policy.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

