

Some Suggested Best Practices for Youth Safety and Protection: Guidelines for Camps and Clinics

THINGS TO KNOW:

- Know the coaches and volunteers. All clinic and camp coaches and volunteers should undergo annual background checks, including a review of criminal history. Consideration should be given to background checks for vendors (drivers, for example) who will have the opportunity for unmonitored contact with campers, and in some states this will be required.
- Know your facilities. Know where the camps will operate, what facilities will be used, be clear about those areas and facilities where counselors and campers should not be and prepare the in-use facilities for transparency by keeping doors and windows uncovered.
- Know the risks. Certain situations, like overnight stay or the need for travel, create opportunities for potential predators to isolate campers away from other adults. Be aware of situations that allow campers to be separated from others and limit those situations by restricting one-on-one interactions. Campers should only be released to pre-authorized adults at the end of each day.
- Know the law. Each state has various laws on mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect, child endangerment, and potentially even regulations specific to supervising camps for minors. Laws often require that specific agencies of law enforcement or child welfare regulators must be informed within certain time periods after an incident is discovered. Note that in some states reports are required even if the alleged perpetrator is not an adult. Typically, reporting is required on the basis of a “reasonable suspicion” or “reasonable belief,” meaning that far less than conclusive proof will trigger reporting obligations.

THINGS TO PREPARE:

- Prepare a Reporting Policy. A policy should be established and distributed to all staff, for each camp or clinic, clearly describing what needs to be reported, what to look for to spot child abuse and neglect, and to whom and how reports should be made.
- Prepare an Investigation Policy. Every incident should be taken seriously and should be investigated. Camp investigations often need to be coordinated with law enforcement or child welfare agencies and must avoid interfering in any law enforcement or regulatory investigation. The Investigation Policy should make clear that a staff member who has been accused of wrongdoing will likely be placed on leave until the investigation can be completed.
- Prepare a Code of Conduct. Each camp should have a detailed Code of Conduct that outlines the policies and procedures that govern the interaction between coaches and camp or clinic participants. For example, each Code of Conduct should cover when physical contact is acceptable; whether coaches are ever allowed to be alone with camp participants; why gifts from coaches are not acceptable; and, that coaches may not offer participants a ride in private transportation. Every coach, volunteer, and participant should receive a copy of the Code of Conduct and the Code should be explained at the beginning of camp.

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THINGS TO TEACH:

Teach the Reporting Policy and the Investigation Policy.

- Before each camp, every coach

and volunteer should be trained on the mechanics, and the importance of, the Reporting Policy and the Investigation Policy, and should be reminded of their personal responsibility in connection with each policy.

- Teach the Code of Conduct. Every coach, volunteer, and participant should receive a copy of the Code of Conduct, the expectations set forth in the Code should be discussed, and any questions about the Code should be answered at the start of each session.

- Teach Open Reporting. Camp and clinic participants should be reminded that, despite what a coach or volunteer might tell them, they should not hesitate to tell other campers or adults if they feel threatened or harmed in any way, or if they are aware that a violation of the Code of Conduct (even involving someone else) has occurred. Camp and clinic participants should know that this is not “tattling,” but instead is what is expected of every member of the camp or clinic team.