

## Child Abuse Recognition and Prevention

### **I. Introduction**

Each child brings his own behavior, personality and history to the outing. As Sierra Club leaders, you really don't know (or can't be expected to know) each participant that well. It is important, however, to be aware of some indications that a participant might be a victim of abuse. It is also important to realize how one's own behavior as a leader in a position of authority could affect a participant in general, especially one who may come from an abusive background.

Due to Sierra Club Insurance requirements, all leaders leading trips with youth will need to complete and sign off on the Child Abuse Recognition and Prevention training annually. By the end of this training, you should:

- a. Understand the Sierra Club policy and procedures for child abuse recognition and prevention.
- b. Heighten your awareness of your own behavior as a leader in a position of authority and how it could affect a youth participant.
- c. Understand how to recognize and report suspected abuse.

Early versions of this curriculum were written by Paula Mitchell-Glore (ICO National Steering Committee member) and Debra Asher (ICO Administrator). This current curriculum is based on these Sierra Club curricula in addition to similar, well-established curricula from the American Camping Association (the organization that certifies summer camps) and the YMCA of San Francisco.

### **II. Sierra Club Policies and Procedures**

A youth-oriented outing is an outing whose primary focus is to serve youth under the age of 18 who are participating without the supervision of a parent or guardian. Youth-oriented outings not run by Inner City Outings (ICO) groups are treated as "restricted" outings and must meet the approval process defined at the National level. The Inner City Outings program is structured and managed to meet the requirements below and this policy imposes no additional requirements on the ICO program. To learn more, visit the [Official Policies of ICO](#) and/or the [Youth Outings Policies](#) pages on the outings extranet.

#### **a. Leader Screening and Training**

Leaders of ICO and youth-oriented outings are subject to additional leadership requirements. These requirements include:

<b>ICO</b>	<b>Youth Outings</b>
ICO Volunteer Application	Youth Outings Leadership Application (should be resubmitted every 4 years)
ICO Code of Ethics and Volunteer Agreement	Code of Ethics Agreement (should be resubmitted every 4 years)
Criminal background check (every 4 years)	
Motor Vehicle check if driving (every 4 years)	
Child Abuse Recognition and Prevention Training	

(annually)

b. **Rules for Reporting**

The Sierra Club insurance company requires that all Sierra Club leaders who suspect child abuse must notify the proper state authority. The Sierra Club leader has the responsibility to:

- i. Immediately report the suspected child abuse to the National Sierra Club Office 1-888-OUTINGS to begin the reporting process.\* The national office will work with the leader to determine the next steps in contacting the state authorities.
- ii. Immediately complete a Sierra Club Incident Report Form and submit to the National Sierra Club Office within 24 hours.

The National Sierra Club Office staff-person has the responsibility to:

- i. Determine and then provide the leader with the state/county-specific Child and Protective Services (CPS) phone number, paperwork and reporting requirements.
- ii. Provide leader with any additional guidance, support, follow up or debrief that they may need.

\*The 1-888-OUTINGS number goes to an answering service that connects to:

- i. Office staff during office hours (8:30am-5pm PST).
- ii. Program directors/managers after hours (this includes home and cell numbers for 5 staff).

You will receive a call back from staff with next-step information within 24 hours.

**III. Leader Recognition of Abuse**

Child abuse is not always easy to identify and it is not expected that you *decide* that a child is abused or neglected. Recognizing a child in need of protection is an accumulation of everything you know and sense about a child or a situation. Your interaction with children and your innate sense of a child's well-being, gives you the ability and responsibility to protect children from abuse and neglect.

This section highlights the four different types of abuse and their characteristics. It is important to note, however, these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone. (e.g. a physically abused child, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child also may be neglected.)

- a. **Physical abuse** is characterized as non-accidental injuries of a child as a result of hitting, kicking, biting, harmful restraint (choking), beating (repeated excessive blows), or use of weapon or instrument. Physical and behavioral indicators of physical abuse include:

- i. Unexplained abrasions and lacerations to mouth, lips, gums, eyes or external genitalia.
- ii. Unexplained bruises and welts on face, lips, mouth, torso, back, buttocks, and thighs. These may be in various stages of healing (different colors) and/or clustered forming patterns reflecting the shape of the inflicting article. These may regularly appear after a prolonged absence, e.g. a weekend or vacation.

- iii. Unexplained burns may be due to cigarettes/cigars (typically found on soles, palms, backs or buttocks), immersion burns from water (typically look like socks/gloves), or electrical appliances (e.g. electric burner or iron).
- iv. Unexplained fractures or dislocations. There may be multiple in varying degrees of healing.
  - v. A wariness of adult contact and frightened of caretakers.
  - vi. Behavioral extremes such as aggression and withdrawal. May display anti-social behavior and have an inability to relate to peers.
- b. **Neglect** occurs when there is a failure or lack of prudent care for a child's well-being through inadequate supervision, food, clothing, shelter, education or medical care. Neglect may be physical and/or emotional in nature and may not produce visible signs. Neglect usually occurs over a period of time. Physical and behavioral indicators of neglect include:
  - i. Consistent hunger (e.g. begging or stealing food; collecting leftovers).
  - ii. Unattended medical care (e.g. dental, immunizations, glasses).
  - iii. Poor hygiene especially with severe body odor.
  - iv. Inadequate or unsuitable clothing (e.g. underwear, socks, or shoes).
  - v. Prolonged exposure to the elements (e.g. excessive sunburn, insect bites, colds).
  - vi. Assumption of adult responsibilities (e.g. caretaker of other children).
  - vii. Alcohol or drug abuse.
  - viii. Absence from school.
  - ix. Delinquent behavior (e.g. stealing).
  - x. Constant fatigue, listlessness or falling asleep.
- c. **Sexual abuse or exploitation** includes voyeurism (watching a child in a state of undress, bathing or urination), exhibitionism (exposing genitals to minors), pornography (photographing a minor nudity or acts, or showing pornography to a minor), kissing, fondling (adult touching child or vice versa), masturbation (either minor or adult), oral-genital contact or digital/penile penetration (vaginal or rectal). Physical and behavioral indicators of sexual abuse include:
  - i. Physical signs such as bruising, swelling or bleeding in genital or rectal areas; pain or itching in genital area; vaginal or penile discharge; or pain when urinating.
  - ii. Difficulty walking or sitting.
  - iii. Torn, stained or bloody underclothing.
  - iv. Pregnancy and/or signs or symptoms of venereal disease.
  - v. Self mutilating and/or suicidal gestures.
  - vi. Bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior (i.e. promiscuous).
  - vii. Nightmares or bedwetting.
  - viii. Eating disorders (experiences a sudden change in appetite).
  - ix. Drug and/or alcohol abuse.

- x. Delinquency or running away.
  - xi. Victim of inappropriate communications (e.g. email, text-messages, phone and mail).
  - xii. Sexual abuse by caregiver
  - xiii. Poor peer relationships.
  - xiv. Refusal to change clothing for gym or participate in physical activities.
  - xv. Other behaviors may include: being withdrawn, pseudo-mature, self conscious, problems with authority and rules, exhibits extreme compliance or defiance, and is fearful or anxious.
- d. **Emotional abuse** includes mental abuse, emotional maltreatment, verbal assault, verbal abuse, and psychological abuse. It may be defined as “chronic and persistent act by an adult that endangers the mental health or emotional development of a child. It is a series of acts or lack of action that deprives the child of needed love, affection, support and encouragement to grow into a healthy adult” (San Francisco Child Abuse Council). Physical and behavioral indicators of emotional abuse include:
- i. Sleep disorders, bedwetting, developmental lags (in physical, emotional and/or mental growth), hyperactivity, and eating disorders.
  - ii. Drug and alcohol abuse.
  - iii. Impatience and an unwillingness to discuss problems.
  - iv. Rationalization of abuse.
  - v. Attempted suicide.
  - vi. Extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression.
  - vii. Inappropriately adult (e.g. parenting other children) or inappropriately infantile (e.g. frequently rocking or head-banging).
  - viii. Delayed in physical or emotional development.
  - ix. Lack of attachment to the parent.

#### **IV. Awareness of Leader Impact on Youth Participants**

Leading youth-oriented outings is one of the most rewarding opportunities within the Club. It is a privilege to provide opportunities for personal growth and development by linking participants from different cultures, fostering respect of self and others, and providing participants with outdoor skills training and leadership opportunities. It is important for leaders to understand how their own behavior as a leader in a position of authority impacts youth participants.

##### **a. Appropriate Behavior**

Here are steps you can take to set a positive and proactive tone and to deter any false allegations:

- i. Follow the youth-oriented outings or ICO Code of ethics.
- ii. Remember that children (and adults) learn by example and that we should model appropriate behavior.
- iii. Supervise private activities in pairs; always be in view of others.
- iv. Establish clear boundaries with youth and fellow leaders.

- v. Keep adult-child (and adult-adult) communication patterns open, clear, positive, and consistent. Avoid swearing, telling of off-color jokes, and discussing your personal sex life around youth.
- vi. Watch for signs of stress in yourself as a leader and in other leaders as a way of maintaining a safe environment on the outing.
- vii. Don't show favoritism.
- viii. Avoid gift-giving (especially if it excludes some in the group).
- ix. Don't have secrets with children or youth.
- b. Appropriate touch can be a powerful tool to convey friendship and concern; however, it is imperative to clearly differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate touch.
  - i. Appropriate touch may include:
    1. Sitting beside a child.
    2. Lightly (and briefly) patting a child's arm or back.
    3. Holding hands/interlocking arms.
    4. Gentle ruffling of a child's hair.
    5. Combing, brushing or braiding hair.
    6. Hugging from the side if requested.
    7. Placing arm around the shoulder.
  - ii. Inappropriate touch includes:
    1. Playing rough (e.g. tickling or wrestling, pulling arms, pinching or hitting).
    2. Placing hand on the back of child's neck, genitals, chest or buttocks.
    3. Full body contact (consensual or forced) that involves the contact of a leader's body to the genital, chest or buttocks of a participant (piggy-back rides, full body hugs, a child sitting in your lap or lying down beside you are considered inappropriate touch due to the potential for contact between a leader's body and a participant's genital, chest or buttocks).
    4. Back rubs and massages.
    5. Any form of unwanted affection.
    6. Games involving inappropriate touch.

A good way to visualize this is to avoid touching anywhere that is covered by a one-piece bathing suit.

## **V. How to Interact with Youth when Reporting**

If you suspect abuse (or have a child disclosing abuse to you), you should:

- a. Immediately report the suspected abuse to the National Sierra Club office.
- b. Be calm and don't express shock or outrage.
- c. Listen and don't ask leading questions.
- d. Be honest; assure privacy but not confidentiality.
- e. Assure the child the abuse was not his/her fault and that it was right to tell you.
- f. Get the facts, but don't interrogate.
- g. Write down exactly what was said.

- h. Don't threaten alleged perpetrator.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Leading safe, happy and inspiring outings takes a lot of preparation and hard work, especially for youth-oriented and ICO trips. Child abuse recognition and prevention is a very important tool for you to have when working with youth (even though this may not be the most enjoyable or exciting topics). By the end of this training you should:

- a. Understand the Sierra Club policy and procedures for child abuse recognition and prevention.
- b. Heighten your awareness of your own behavior as a leader in a position of authority and how it could affect a youth participant.
- c. Understand how to recognize and report suspected abuse.

### References:

- *Child Abuse Education*, Sierra Club ICO Leader Handbook (2005).
- *Child Abuse Prevention (Basic)*, YMCA of San Francisco (2002).
- *For Their Sake – A Staff Training Handbook About Child-Abuse Awareness*, American Camping Association (1994).
- *Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect*, Paula Mitchell-Glore (2006)