

# Learning for Life Youth Protection Guidelines

As an adult leader, or a volunteer, you need to have a basic knowledge about abuse of adolescents and the youth protection policies of Learning for Life. Due to the coeducational makeup of the youth being served in Learning for Life, youth protection takes on an added dimension.

It is important to realize that, although child abuse is preconceived as a problem related more to younger children, it is not unusual for adolescents to be victims of abuse also. The most common forms of abuse are neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse all prevalent in today's society. Therefore, all adult leaders are obligated to be familiar with the Youth Protection guidelines of Learning for Life.

Youth protection is a five-point plan adopted by Learning for Life to prevent abuse. This plan includes the following five points:

- Educating volunteers, parents, and participating youth to aid in the detection and prevention of abuse
- Establishing leader-selection procedures to prevent offenders from entering Learning for Life leadership ranks
- Establishing policies that create barriers to abuse within the program
- Encouraging youth to report improper behavior in order to identify offenders quickly
- Swift removal and reporting of alleged offenders

It is important for you to remember that **any time abuse is suspected, your Learning for Life executive or designee must be contacted immediately.** Your local Learning for Life executive knows the procedures to follow to ensure that the young victim will be protected from any possible further abuse and the proper authorities to be notified.

## Background Information

The idea of what is child abuse has expanded a lot in the last 25 years. At first we thought of child abuse as parents who battered a child so bad that it caused injury. But now we think of it in a much broader way as treatment of a child or parenting practices that cause harm to the child and violate social norms or conventional practices, not the way that children should be treated. By definition child abuse is harm to a person under the age of 18 that occurs immediately or through the accumulated effects over a period of time.

Child abuse is often described in four categories, although these can overlap in a single child. These categories are

1. Physical abuse. Nonaccidental bodily injury of the youth by the parent or another adult. Indicators of physical abuse include unexplained, unusual, or repeated injuries.

2. Neglect. Caused by withholding from a child life's necessities, which are vital to his or her safety, health and general well-being. Basic food, clothing, and shelter and proper medical care are forms of neglect a child may experience.
3. Sexual abuse. Any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between children where there is an unusual distribution of power, such as when one is significantly older or larger. It involves the misuse of trust and power.
4. Emotional abuse. Occurs for example, when a youth is consistently told that he or she is not good and never will be. Denigrating name-calling is a form of emotional abuse. Because the physical signs of this form of abuse are subtle, it is difficult to substantiate but significantly harms the child's emotional status and self image.

Child abuse is also a cause of stress, as are any number of other events in life such as a family disruption, divorce, or loss of a loved one or pet, or problems in school. This stress may cause reactions such as crying for no reason, immature behavior, clinging or aggressive behavior, withdrawal symptoms, depression, and others. If any of these symptoms take place over a period of time, there is a reason to be concerned and the behavior needs to be studied.

## **Characteristics of a Child Molester**

There are a lot of misleading ideas about who child molesters are. It used to be thought that they were easily spotted, as dirty old men, deviants, or guys in raincoats. We know that is not true. Very ordinary, upstanding, and well-respected individuals in positions of authority have been found to be child molesters. Relatives or people very well-known to the children are just as likely to be abusers. Examples include males and females, public officials, clergy, school teachers, doctors, and other professionals. It is often difficult to accept that such a prominent individual was found to be a child molester. A child is more likely to be abused by somebody he or she knows or someone in the family than by a stranger.

Child abusers tend to be individuals with low self-esteem. Their own needs are so overwhelming that they are poorly equipped to meet the needs of their children. Often children who are neglected have parents who abuse alcohol or drugs. An emotional abuser might have unreal expectations of the child and maligns them when he or she fails to meet their expectations.

## **Date Rape**

A form of sexual abuse of particular concern for high school- and Explorer-age youth is "date rape" or "acquaintance rape." More than half of the rape victims reporting to police are adolescent females, and their greatest risk for sexual assault appears to be through a social relationship with a boyfriend or date. As in any form of forced sexual contact, date rape is a crime and the victim deserves emotional support and assistance. Such help is

available through agencies such as rape crisis centers and other service agencies. Your Learning for Life executive can guide you through the proper procedure.

## Youth Protection Guidelines

An important component of Learning for Life's Youth Protection guidelines is adherence to the policies, which will ensure that young people participating in any phase of the Learning for Life program are safe from abuse.

## Fraternization

**Because the high school Learning for Life and Exploring programs are designed for young adults, there are often little differences in ages of the adult leaders and the participants. It has been found that maintaining a close social relationship, such as dating, between adult leaders and participants is disruptive to the program, and therefore is not permitted by Learning for Life.**

## Creating Barriers

After selecting the best possible leaders, further protection for children is structured into the program through policies that guard against abuse and provide security for its youth participants. **The following policies have been adopted to provide security for youth; in addition they serve to protect adult leaders from situations in which they are vulnerable to allegations of abuse.**

- **Two-deep leadership.** Two Learning for Life adult leaders or one Learning for Life leader and a parent—both of whom are 21 years of age or older—are required on all trips and outings. If the activity is coeducational, leaders of both sexes must be present. The participating organization is responsible for ensuring that sufficient leadership is provided for all activities.
- **No one-on-one contact.** One-on-one contact between adults and participants is not permitted, except for authorized ride-along programs in Exploring. Personal conferences must be conducted in plain view of others.
- **Respect of privacy.** Adult leaders must respect the privacy of participants in situations such as changing into swimsuits or taking showers at activities and intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. They must also protect their own privacy in similar situations.
- **Separate accommodations.** When camping, no youth is permitted to sleep in the same tent or room with an adult other than their parents or guardians. We strongly encourage separate shower and toilet facilities for males and females, and when separate facilities are not available, posted shower schedules for males and females.
- **Proper preparation for high-adventure activities.** Activities with elements of risk should never be undertaken without proper preparation, equipment, supervision, and safety measures.

- **No secret organizations.** There are no secret organizations recognized in Learning for Life. All aspects of Learning for Life programs are open to observation by parents and leaders.
- **Appropriate attire.** Proper clothing for activities is required. Skinny-dipping is not appropriate as part of a Learning for Life program.
- **Constructive discipline.** Discipline in Learning for Life should be constructive and reflect the program's underlying values. Corporal punishment is never permitted.
- **Hazing prohibited.** Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any Learning for Life activity.
- **Youth leader training and supervision.** Adult leaders must monitor and guide the leadership techniques used by youth leaders.

Adherence to these policies not only enhances the protection of participants but also ensures the values of Learning for Life are preserved. It helps to protect volunteer adult leaders from situations that are deemed at risk by creating barriers to abuse.

## Disclosure

Considering the prevalence of abuse and the educational programs that increase adolescents' awareness of sexual molestation, you might someday have a participant tell you that someone has molested him or her. If this happens, you must be prepared to help. Follow the guidelines below:

- Do not panic or overreact to the information disclosed to you by the youth.
- Do not criticize the youth.
- Do respect the youth's privacy. Take him or her to a private place in sight of others and reassure them that you are concerned about what happened and that you would like to help. You might want to ask if they have talked to their parents about this—if parents are not the alleged abuser.
- Do not promise to keep the victimization secret, as it will be necessary to make a report to the Learning for Life office. Learning for Life will advise you of your responsibility to report to child protective services or to a law enforcement agency.
- Do encourage the participant to tell the appropriate authorities. You may do this by making sure the youth feels that he or she is not to blame for what happened. Tell the youth that no one should ask him or her to keep a secret and that it is OK to talk about what happened with the appropriate adults.
- Do keep it strictly confidential. Take your guidance from Learning for Life or the child protection agency; discussing allegations of abuse with others is not helpful to the child.

## Reporting Requirements

**Anytime you suspect child abuse in the Learning for Life program, you are required to inform the Learning for Life executive.**

Each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories has different reporting requirements. Many of these require child-care professionals to report suspected child abuse, and some states require reporting by adults in volunteer child-care positions. You should be aware of your reporting responsibilities in the state or community where you live. **No state requires the person making the report to have proof that abuse has occurred only that it is suspected.** The intent of the law is clear—they expect suspected child abuse should be reported as soon as it is suspected. Failure to do so can result in civil or criminal penalties.

Concern is often expressed over the potential of criminal or civil liability if a report of abuse is made and subsequently is found to be unsubstantiated. All states provide immunity from liability to those who report suspected child abuse. The only requirement is that the report is made in good faith. Some states make the presumption that a reporter is making the report in good faith.

As a volunteer in the Learning for Life program, you are cautioned that you are not an investigator. The investigation of abuse allegation is best left to the trained investigator. Action on reports of suspected child abuse may be facilitated by working through the Learning for Life executive who has established a working relationship with the administrators of child protective services and law enforcement agencies.

**Learning for Life will not tolerate any form of child abuse in its program and will take all necessary steps to remove any offenders from participation in Learning for Life.**

All people responsible for youth safety must understand and appreciate Learning for Life's position of zero tolerance for child abuse or victimization in any form. **Adult leaders must report any suspected abuse to the local Learning for Life executive.**

## Learning for Life Youth Protection Training

A PowerPoint training presentation is available on the Learning for Life Web site. **Youth Protection training is required for one adult leader on all overnight Learning for Life activities.** This training may be presented by the Learning for Life local office or may be taken individually via the Web site. A certificate is available in the appendix. **A copy of this certificate will be required with all outing permits if it is an overnight experience.**

Adult leaders can learn more from the following materials:

- *Super Safe* CD-ROM. Learning for Life's interactive game on CD-ROM is designed for students in the third through sixth grades. The game teaches students how to deal with Internet safety, bullies and protection against sexual abuse. Found in all new elementary teacher guidebooks.
  - *It Happened to Me*. This training program has been developed for the 6- to 9-year-old male audience. It is designed to educate them, through five scenarios, about sexual abuse and the trickery involved in luring young victims. Available through your local Learning for Life office.
  - *A Time to Tell*. This award-winning youth protection program dramatizes three abuse situations and what to do about them. It was designed to be viewed by 11- to 14-year-old boys and can be used by community groups and organizations. Available through your local Learning for Life office.
  - *Youth Protection: Personal Safety Awareness*. For male and female youth ages 14 to 20, the video addresses acquaintance rape, Internet safety, stalking, and peer sexual harassment. It can be viewed as a class or as a meeting program. Available through your local Learning for Life office.
  - *Learning for Life Youth Protection Training*. **This training is required for all overnight Learning for Life activities.** A PowerPoint presentation is available on the Learning for Life Web site. Contact your local office for details or log onto the Web site for individual instruction.
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