

YMCA OF THE USA  
CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION TRAINING FOR FRONT-LINE STAFF

**Handout 1 – Definitions of Child Abuse**

**Physical:** An injury or pattern of injuries that happen to a child that is not accidental. These injuries may include beatings, burns, bruises, bites, welts, strangulation, broken bones, or death.

**Neglect:** Neglect occurs when adults responsible for the well-being of a child fail to provide for or protect the child. Neglect may include not giving food, clothing, or shelter; failing to keep children clean; lack of supervision; and withholding medical care.

**Emotional:** Any chronic and persistent act by an adult that endangers the mental health or emotional development of a child including rejecting, ignoring, terrorizing, corrupting, constantly criticizing, making mean remarks, insulting, and giving little or no love, guidance, or support.

**Sexual:** Sexual abuse is the sexual assault or sexual exploitation of children. Sexual abuse may consist of numerous acts over a long period or a single incident. Children can be victimized from infancy through adolescence. Sexual abuse includes rape, incest, sodomy, fondling, exposing oneself, oral copulation, penetration of the genital or anal openings, as well as forcing children to view or appear in pornography. The perpetrator keeps the child from disclosing through intimidation, threats, and rewards.

In the United States between 1 in 3 and 1 in 4 females are sexually abused as children. At least 1 in 7 males have been sexually assaulted before they reach the age of 18 (Johnson and For Kids Sake, Inc. 1992).

In 75 percent of sexual abuse cases the child knows the offender (USDHHS, *Child Maltreatment 2000*).

Abuse crosses all socioeconomic backgrounds.

More than 3 million cases of child abuse are reported to child protective service agencies each year (USDHHS, *Child Health USA 2002*). Child abuse and maltreatment consists of several different types of behavior, including neglect (46 percent of all reported cases in 2001), physical abuse (18 percent), sexual abuse (9 percent), emotional abuse and domestic violence (4 percent), and other forms of maltreatment (23 percent). More than 1,200 children die each year as a result of being abused or neglected (USDHHS, *Child Maltreatment 2001*).

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**Handout 2 – Possible Indicators of Abuse**

**Sexual Abuse – Behavioral Indicators**

1. Is reluctant to change clothes in front of others
2. Is withdrawn
3. Exhibits unusual sexual behavior or knowledge beyond what is common for his or her developmental stage
4. Has poor peer relationships
5. Either avoids or seeks out adults
6. Is pseudo mature
7. Is manipulative
8. Is self-conscious
9. Has problems with authority and rules
10. Exhibits eating disorders
11. Is self-mutilating
12. Is obsessively clean
13. Uses or abuses alcohol or other drugs
14. Exhibits delinquent behavior, such as running away from home
15. Exhibits extreme compliance or defiance
16. Is fearful or anxious
17. Exhibits suicidal gestures or attempts suicide
18. Is promiscuous
19. Engages in fantasy or infantile behavior
20. Is unwilling to participate in sports activities
21. Has school difficulties

**Sexual Abuse – Physical Indicators**

1. Has pain or itching in the genital area
2. Has bruises or bleeding in the genital area
3. Has venereal disease
4. Has swollen private parts
5. Has difficulty walking or sitting
6. Has torn, bloody, or stained underclothing
7. Experiences pain when urinating
8. Is pregnant
9. Has vaginal or penile discharge
10. Wets the bed

### **Emotional Abuse – Behavioral Indicators**

1. Is overeager to please
2. Seeks out adult contact
3. Views abuse as being warranted
4. Exhibits changes in behavior
5. Is excessively anxious
6. Is depressed
7. Is unwilling to discuss problems
8. Exhibits aggressive or bizarre behavior
9. Is withdrawn
10. Is apathetic
11. Is passive
12. Has unprovoked fits of yelling or screaming
13. Exhibits inconsistent behavior at home and school
14. Feels responsible for the abuser
15. Runs away from home
16. Attempts suicide
17. Has low self-esteem
18. Exhibits a gradual impairment of health or personality
19. Has difficulty sustaining relationships
20. Has unrealistic goal setting
21. Is impatient
22. Is unable to communicate or express his or her feelings, needs, or desires
23. Sabotages his or her chances of success
24. Lacks self-confidence
25. Is self-deprecating and has a negative self-image

### **Emotional Abuse – Physical Indicators**

1. Has a sleep disorder (nightmares or restlessness)
2. Wets the bed
3. Exhibits developmental lags (stunting his or her physical, emotional, or mental growth)
4. Is hyperactive
5. Exhibits eating disorders

### **Physical Abuse – Behavioral Indicators**

1. Is wary of adults
2. Is either extremely aggressive or withdrawn
3. Is dependent and indiscriminate in his or her attachments
4. Is uncomfortable when other children cry
5. Generally controls his or her own crying
6. Exhibits a drastic behavior change when not with parents or caregiver
7. Is manipulative

8. Has poor self-concept
9. Exhibits delinquent behavior, such as running away from home
10. Uses or abuse alcohol or other drugs
11. Is self-mutilating
12. Is frightened of parents, going home
13. Is overprotective of or responsible for parents
14. Exhibits suicidal gestures or attempts suicide
15. has behavior problems at school

### **Physical Abuse – Physical Indicators**

1. Has unexplained\* bruises or welts, often clustered or in a pattern
2. Has unexplained\* or unusual burns (cigarettes, doughnut shaped, immersion lines, object patterned)
3. Has unexplained\* bite marks
4. Has unexplained\* fractures or dislocations
5. Has unexplained\* abrasions or lacerations
6. Wets the bed

(\* or explanation is inconsistent or improbable)

### **Neglect – Behavioral Indicators**

1. Is truant or tardy to school often or arrives early and stays late
2. Beggars or steals food
3. Attempts suicide
4. Uses or abused alcohol or other drugs
5. Is extremely dependent or detached
6. Engages in delinquent behavior, such as prostitution or stealing
7. Appears to be exhausted
8. States frequent or continual absence of parent or guardian

Source: Reprinted, by permission, from R.C Johnson, 1992. *For their sake: responding to, and reporting child abuse*. (Martinsville, IN: American Camping Association).

[www.acacamps.org/\(765\)342-8456](http://www.acacamps.org/(765)342-8456).

### **Neglect – Physical Indicators**

1. Is frequently dirty, unwashed, hungry, or inappropriately dressed
2. Engages in dangerous activities (possibly because he or she generally is unsupervised )
3. Is tired and listless
4. Has unattended physical problems
5. May appear overworked or exploited

## **Family Characteristics –**

1. Extreme paternal dominance, restrictiveness, or over protectiveness
2. Family isolated from community and support systems
3. Marked role reversal between mother and child
4. History of sexual abuse for either parent
5. Substance abuse by either parent or by children
6. Other types of violence in the home
7. Absent spouse (through chronic illness, depression, divorce, or separation)
8. Severe overcrowding
9. Complaints about a “seductive” child
10. Extreme objection to implementation of child sexual abuse curriculum

Source: Family Characteristics excerpted from “What Do I Do Now?” Indicators of Child Sexual Abuse and Guidelines for Mandated Reporters” by Tracy Flynn, M.Ed., 2002 Committee for Children, Seattle, WA.

Note: These indicators can also suggest emotional dysfunctions that merit investigation for having emotional problems or being the victim of abuse.

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### **Handout 3 – Strategies Used by Child Molesters**

Source: Adapted, by permission, from J. Patterson and B. Oliver, 2002, *Season of hope: a risk management guide for youth-serving nonprofits*. (Washington, DC: Nonprofit Risk Management Center), 61.

## **Seduction –**

- Molester may begin by offering the child an usual amount of attention
- Initial overtures may be totally nonsexual in nature such as an invitation to a movie or a sporting event
- Molesters may become friends of the child’s parents with the parents becoming unknowing accomplices in the sexual molestation of their children.
- Molesters may befriend the staff, becoming the “special volunteer” who really cares.
- Over time, the molester’s attentions become more sexual in nature, until eventually abuse occurs.
- Child abuse involving the use of seduction typically results in long-term relationships with repeated incidents of sexual abuse.

Note: Children may not realize that the activity is sexual abuse until after it occurs, sometimes years later.

## **Trickery –**

Child molester may use a ploy to trick the child into a situation conducive to sexual abuse such as the following scenario:

- Molester offers a child a chance to be a movie star but requires the child to complete a screen test.
- Once the child is in the “studio” (perhaps a hotel room with an inexpensive video camcorder) and after the molester takes photos of the child in clothes and swimming suits, the molester tells the child that the only thing between him or her and a Hollywood career is having some nude pictures taken.
- After taking the photos, the molester uses them as leverage for further sexual abuse.
- Child molesters using trickery may place the child in an isolated situation, such as asking a young child to help find a lost puppy near a playground. Trickery may be used in conjunction with seduction or with force.

Note: the molester may be known or unknown to the child; trickery can result in a continued sexually abusive relationship with the child or a one-time occurrence.

## **Force – Physical or Psychological**

Physical force is most common when the abuser doesn't know the child and commits the abuse on a single occasion (although there may be several occurrences over a short period). This is the stereotypical “stranger danger” scenario, and it's the least likely to occur.

Psychological force may be used with seduction or trickery, usually to ensure the silence of the victim and maintain secrecy. Psychological force may involve threats against the child, the child's loved ones, and even the child's pets.

Psychological force may also be used to ensure continued access for additional sexual molestation of the child.

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**Handout 4 – Choosing Curriculum**

**Critical Elements of Child Abuse Prevention Programs for Children and Teens –**

1. The program provides behavior rehearsals for children: role playing, what-if questions, acting out, and practicing skills.
2. The program is developmentally balanced, age appropriate, and culturally relevant. Different programs are offered for different ages.
3. The presentation is varied and stimulating. Materials are colorful and interesting. The presentation emphasizes interaction, and children are actively involved. For young children, dolls, puppets, videos, and discussion are used to present the message.
4. The program focuses on building broad life skills such as self-esteem, respect, decision making. Problem solving, assertiveness, communication, and conflict negotiations.
5. The program is straightforward, not confusing. The pictures are of children, not personified animals.
6. The curricula and message points are integrated into the programs. For example, a prevention skill such as mutual respect is evident in the way that adults interact with children. The adults in the child's life are good role models. They manage their lives by the same message points that are part of the curriculum, for example, assertive skills, understanding the difference between surprise (surprises are good) and secrets (secrets that are never revealed may not be an appropriate expectation for young children), positive self-esteem, owning and protecting their own bodies, and so on.
7. The program has expanded materials or opportunities for families and other staff to use when working with children. Other follow-up options are available.
8. Ways are available to expand the materials, programs, and efforts when working with children who have special needs, especially those who might be developmentally delayed and vulnerable to adult influence.
9. The program has a follow-up component and lends itself to being introduced repeatedly over time. The program is not a one-time-only presentation.
10. The program addresses or discusses the following: bullies, sexual abuse in families (not just by a stranger), touch continuum, children's rights, secrets versus surprises, telling measures, and disclosure.

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**Handout 5 – How to Handle Inappropriate Sexual Behavior and  
Child – on – Child Abuse**

The 1994 YMCA of the USA Child Abuse Prevention Training notebook helped generate an awareness of potential staff – to – child abuse, resulting in many YMCAs taking great measures to minimize this risk. In many YMCAs these efforts have paid off. But a second category of abuse, child-on-child abuse, may be on the increase. Some YMCA staff speculates that the cause may be that children come to the YMCA with more problems than ever before. These problems might include living in a household where children are sexually abused or exposed to controlling, violent role models. Other possibilities? In some homes, inappropriate sexuality and promiscuity may be prevalent, or children may be watching television shows or movies that depict sexuality in ways that might be confusing to them. This might lead children to act out those perplexing images in inappropriate, unacceptable ways.

Research conducted by Friedrich, Fisher, Broughton, Houston, and Shafran, published in Pediatrics, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, April 1998, found a relationship between child and family variables and the total number of sexual behaviors exhibited by a child. For example, children from violent families sometimes have a problem with personal boundaries, one of the sexual behavior categories. In addition, children of families under stress have been implicated in psychosocial and behavior problems, including sexual behavior. As another example, parents reported higher levels of sexual behavior in their children who had opportunities to look at adult movies or magazines and witness intercourse. These behaviors, although more frequent, may not always be inappropriate and could fall within the range of normal sexual behaviors. The behavior may be unsuitable in a YMCA setting, however, and staff may be to intervene and redirect.

**Supervision –**

First, good supervision is required. Staff responsible for children in YMCA programs needs to know where children are and what they are up to at all times. When sending older youth to the rest room, send them in groups of at least three and carefully track how long they are out of the room. If they are gone for too long, send someone to check on them. In child care or day camp, make sure there are no blind spots in the program environment where children can play or interact unobserved by an adult or other children. Keep in mind, however, that children in group settings do need private areas within the program space where they can collect their thoughts and enjoy quiet time. Just make sure that staff checks on them frequently.

## **Teach Children Personal Safety –**

The most important personal safety skill is assertiveness training. Staff should teach, practice, and model assertiveness and conflict resolution skills. Make sure children know that they own their own bodies and that no one has a right to touch them in ways that make them feel uncomfortable. Several curriculum resources relating these messages are listed in appendix E.

## **Staff Support and Training –**

Supervisors are responsible for making sure their staff understands child growth and development, particularly normal behaviors related to sexuality. For example, young children will often imitate, explore, act out, or ask questions, when they engage in sexual behavior deemed inappropriate, adults must provide guidance, not punishment. Stop the behavior, explain why it is not appropriate, offer alternatives, or redirect to another activity.

Chances are that if staff works with children over an extended period, they will eventually confront children whose sexual behavior is not appropriate in a group setting. How should they respond when an incident occurs?

### *Don't lose perspective –*

A child's behavior should be seen in context of his or her age rather than interpreted using adult standards. Adults have preconceived notions about sexuality. Disregard these adult standards and evaluate the situation for what it is.

### *Consider what is normal –*

Weigh what you have observed or what has been reported to you with what you know about normal sexual development in children, for example, sex play and masturbation, use of obscenities, or undressing with another child. Is the behavior simply exploratory? Does the behavior suggest sexual knowledge or acts that are not age appropriate? Does it seem relatively innocent? When two children are involved, does it appear consensual or forced? Who initiated the activity? Was the other child manipulated into consenting?

### *Is it likely that one or both children could be victims?*

Has either of the children exhibited other behaviors that might suggest that they are victims of adult-to-child or other child-on-child sexual abuse? If it appears likely, staff must follow YMCA child abuse reporting policies.

*Provide guidance –*

Even if the behavior is deemed exploratory or typical, children need guidance. Stop the behavior, explain why it isn't appropriate in this setting, answer questions to help eliminate the confusion, and work with children to develop social skills that are more appropriate. Complete and file a YMCA non medical incident report.

*Don't take adult circumstances and apply them to children –*

When adults try to apply adult thinking and adult circumstances to incidents involving children, it just doesn't fit. Remember the incident a few years ago when a six year old boy was expelled from school for kissing a female student on the playground? Children are children. They have limited experiences to draw from and do not understand societal norms that later will help guide their judgment. Developing social skills, morals, and values are learned behaviors. Don't assume that "they know better" – they may not. It's up to adults to teach children what is acceptable and what is not.

*Involve the family in making recommendations –*

Because we promote family-staff partnerships, families should be consulted when staff observes behaviors that raise a red flag. Depending upon the severity of the situation, a casual conversation with a parent or significant family member at the end of the day may be all it takes. If you suspect abuse, if the behavior was manipulative, or if it wasn't consensual, then it would be wise to schedule a parent- staff meeting to sort through the details and develop a plan of action. After sorting out the facts with parents, if staff feels there is reasonable cause to suspect that child has been abused, you have a legal mandate to report this suspicion to the appropriate authorities. Document everything. If you sense a potential conflict, contact your YMCA legal counsel.

*Follow up-*

Again, make sure to document all observations and interviews. Continue to observe and work closely with children to help ensure that incidents do not continue. If it becomes necessary, refer the child or family for counseling. Continue to consult with parents in a caring and empathetic manner as a way to diffuse some of the embarrassment or anger.

## **Understanding Normal Sexual Behavior in Children –**

Children exhibit a broad range of sexual behaviors that are part of normal development. Although some YMCA staff, volunteers, and parents may be uncomfortable with explicit information, it is important for them to understand what is within a normal or acceptable range so that, on one hand, they do not overreact when they observe such behaviors and, on the other hand, they do not miss obvious clues that might suggest that a child has been sexually abused. To better understand what constitutes normal behavior, review the findings outlined below taken from the article “Developmentally Related Sexual Behaviors” published in *Pediatrics*, the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, April 1998. These behaviors, categorized as adherence to personal boundaries, exhibitionism, gender role behavior, self-stimulation, sexual anxiety, sexual interest, sexual intrusiveness, sexual knowledge, and voyeuristic behavior, were repeatedly observed by parents and caregivers, thus allowing the researchers to conclude that the behaviors fell within the normal range of behavior. These typical behaviors include the following:

### ***Two-to-Five Year Old Boys and Girls:***

- Stand too close to people
- Touch self (private parts) when in public places
- Touch or try to touch their mother’s or other women’s breasts
- Touch self (private parts) when at home
- Try to look at people when they are nude or undressing

### ***Six-to-Nine Year Old Boys and Girls:***

- Touch self (private parts) when at home
- Try to look at people who are nude or undressing

### ***Ten-to-Twelve Year Old Boys and Girls:***

- Are very interested in the opposite sex

Following are lists from the YMCA of the USA’s courses on working with 11 to 14 year olds and 15-18 year olds from the YMCA of the USA’s course on adolescent sexuality. The following are considered typical adolescent behaviors:

### ***Preteens:***

- Preteens want privacy: they close the door when they get dressed
- Girls who mature early are likely to be self-conscious about changes in their bodies and are sometimes embarrassed if they become the object of sexual attention
- Physically mature boys share some of the same feelings

***Adolescents:***

- The average age of first menstruation is 12; the onset of fertility (first ejaculation) in boys typically occurs between 12 and 13.
- Teens feel tremendous pressure to have sex and may feel vulnerable because they haven't had sex yet or think it is wrong to feel sexual.
- Teens struggle to define their attractiveness through personal appearance.
- Masturbation is a normal part of adolescent development.
- A teen explores his or her "sex appeal".
- Sexual experimentation with peers may occur.

In the book *Straight Talk: Sexuality Education for Parents and Kids 4-7*, published by Planned Parenthood of Westchester, Inc., authors Marilyn Ratner and Susan Chamblin identified these typical child behaviors that relate to sexuality:

***Four and Five Year Old Children:***

- Undress with another child
- Participate in creative play dramatizing "doctor", "hospital", and "birth"
- Masturbate
- Engage in verbal play about elimination and interest in bathroom activities
- Verbalize romantic attachment toward parent – "I'm going to marry you"
- Imitate adult behavior
- Use obscenity and repeat curse words
- Express an interest in babies, pregnancy, and the birth process

***Six and Seven Year Old Children:***

- Engage in sex play and masturbation
- Show an increased awareness of differences between the sexes in body structure
- Are sensitive to differences between the sexes
- Have strong same-sex friendships and increased self-consciousness
- Have strong interest in male- female roles
- Show some exhibitionism in play situations or in school bathrooms
- Demonstrate exaggerated modesty and desire for privacy
- Need uniformity with peers in dress, speech, and so forth
- Use obscenities, giggle, engage in name-calling, and make remarks about elimination and bathroom functions
- Ask searching questions about pregnancy, birth and babies; may ask about the father's role in reproduction; and show an interest in comparing human and animal behavior.

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**Handout 6 – Justification for Policies Limiting YMCA Staff Contact with Program Participants outside Working Hours**

YMCA's across the country have enthusiastically embraced and implemented the practices in the YMCA of the USA Child Abuse Prevention Training. However, YMCAs have questioned the rationale and legality of the policy in the Staff Code of Conduct. The item reads:

Staff may not be the lone adult, adult being defined as anyone over the age of 16, with children they meet in YMCA programs outside the YMCA. This includes babysitting, sleepovers and inviting children to their homes. Any exceptions require the completion of an Unsanctioned Child Care Waiver before the fact, failure to do so will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Some YMCA supervisors question their authority to restrict what staff can and cannot do on their own time. However, this policy was reviewed and supported by the YMCA of the USA's legal counsel and risk managers. In response to concern over the YMCA's legal right to require employees not to have contact with YMCA program participants outside those programs, the conclusion of the legal counsel for the YMCA of the USA (you may want to have your own legal counsel review this also) is the following:

YMCA employees are generally employees at will. That is, they work at the YMCA until such time as a YMCA opts not to continue their employment. Such employees at will are subject to conditions of employment, including a rule, which denies them the right to baby-sit or otherwise meet with program participants's outside of YMCA programs. This would also apply to ongoing employees of a local YMCA even though a local YMCA may now just be imposing the rule. There is no requirement of an employee at will that would prevent a local YMCA from requiring this of current employees, as well.

This policy is also consistent with recommendations made by the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and many child-care licensing consultants across the country. The policy is recommended and has been adopted by many YMCAs for several solid reasons:

1. YMCAs can be liable for the actions of their employees even when the employees are not clocked in or working for the YMCA. In several incidents YMCAs have been challenged when their staff or former staff was accused of molesting children. The premise is that the YMCA introduced the perpetrator (staff) to the family, the relationship developed in a YMCA program, and therefore that YMCA should assume some responsibility.

To understand why this happens, examination of the legal system is helpful. Families look for resource or retribution when their child is molested. The perpetrator usually does not have money. Therefore, families look for the proverbial deep pockets. They name the YMCA in the lawsuit. Because it becomes expensive to take a case to trial, YMCAs may settle the case before it goes to trial. Although YMCA are not admitting guilt, they still incur the costs of attorneys and the agreed-upon settlement and may have their reputations tarnished as well. They can avoid this risk if they maintain a no-babysitting policy.

2. YMCA staff need to understand that they are vulnerable when they spend one-on-one time with children outside YMCA programs, especially if they do not know the family well. They run the risk of being falsely accused of molestation or other incidences. They run the risk of both a civil and a criminal lawsuit, either of which could have severe consequences. Again, it is a risk that we should encourage our employees to avoid.

3. Our employees' loyalty should be to their employer. If staff members are developing close relationships with families outside the YMCA, their confidentiality, loyalty, and fairness could become issues. YMCA staff in the Midwest once cited a case where they felt that one of their employees, with misplaced loyalties, cleared out the file of a child for whom she baby-sat. The files contained documentation related to an injury the child had sustained in the program. The YMCA was later named in a lawsuit related to the injury, and none of the documentation could be found.

4. Examples have been cited in which young staff who baby-sit and develop close friendships with parents may not have the maturity level necessary to keep their personal and professional lives separate. Personality conflicts, disagreements, and petty arguments can occur between the staff and parent, which create an uncomfortable environment for everyone else involved.

5. Some parents have voiced concern over whether staff who baby-sits favors the children for whom they baby-sit. If this is the case, parents may wonder if the staffs disproportionately give their time to the children for whom they baby-sit at the expense of other children.

6. Employees put themselves at risk when they drive children to or from YMCA events or do one-on-one mentoring with children and youth. They are subject to unfounded accusations, including but not limited to sexual abuse, yet leave the YMCA with little ground to protect or defend them.

YMCAs may argue that they cannot be responsible for their staff after hours and have no means to monitor their activities. If rules are job related, which in this case they are, the after-hours rule does not apply; YMCAs can require no one-on-one contact.

Some YMCAs have found alternatives to allowing staff to baby-sit outside the YMCA. A program called Parents' Night Out is gaining popularity across the country. Periodically (weekly, biweekly, monthly), the YMCA offers an opportunity for parents to go out and leave their children at the YMCA. Parents get a break and have an opportunity to dine shop, run errands, and spend time together while feeling confident that their child is safe with the YMCA staff. YMCA staff has an opportunity to supplement their daytime hours with evening hours and take home extra money in their paychecks. This is a positive situation for everyone.

Some YMCAs have modified this policy to exclude staff who have relationships with children and families that predate employment or involvement in the YMCA. A modified policy might read as follow:

Staff may not be the lone adult, adult being defined as anyone over the age of 16, with children you meet in YMCA programs outside the YMCA. This includes babysitting, sleepovers, and inviting children to your home unless one of the following conditions exists:

- a. You and the child's family or guardians have a relationship that predates your employment or volunteer position at the YMCA.
- b. You and the child's family or guardians have a relationship that predates the child's enrollment in a YMCA program.
- c. You and the child or the child's family or guardian is related.

In all of these cases, the YMCA must hold a release signed by the child's parents or guardians.

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**Handout 7 – General YMCA Guidelines for Showing Affection  
To Children on the Job**

The YMCA encourages staff that interacts with children to be affectionate with those children in a manner that is safe for both the children and the employee.

**Guideline 1: “Grandma” Standard**

Imagine the child’s grandmother (or other authority figure) walking into a room at that moment. If you would now be uncomfortable about what is happening, you need to change the situation immediately. This guideline emphasizes the unfortunate importance of how things look in today’s society.

**Guideline 2: Child Initiated**

A child may choose to do something that a staff person never would. In some circumstances, that makes the behavior acceptable. Examples include a child choosing to hold hands with the staff person or climbing into a staff person’s lap. Other circumstances remain unacceptable. An older child spontaneously kissing a staff person, for example, is to be discouraged, and staff should respond only briefly (although warmly) to full frontal hugs. Forcing affectionate behavior on a child is never acceptable. Even asking for a hug can be considered force when you are discussing young children who are easily influenced by adult expectations.

**Guideline 3: Age Appropriate**

Consider the age and developmental stage of the child involved. Is this behavior typical of that group or cause for concern? Children who display over affectionate or inappropriate touching behavior may be victims of child abuse.

**Guideline 4: Gentle Limits**

Gentle yet firm limits are the way to make children’s spontaneous affectionate behavior safe for you. There are many natural ways to move on to another activity without making the child feel rejected. For instance, after a minute of hand holding or lap sitting, ask the child to sit next to you, distract the child with something to do, or encourage him or her to return to an interrupted activity.

**Guideline 5: Have Witnesses**

When a situation merits having unusual physical contact with a child, make sure that you have witnesses to verify your appropriate actions and responses. This circumstance comes up frequently when a young child needs help with clothing or in programs where

physical contact is part of the instruction, like aquatics, youth fitness, gymnastics, and other selected sports. The key here is to balance your need for corroboration with the child's need for dignity in front of an audience.

As human beings we use affection to enhance our relationships. Remember that some children will only be comfortable with a pat on the shoulder and anything more will make them uneasy. So make note of which affectionate behaviors each individual initiates with you and respond accordingly and appropriately.

### **Ways People Touch Children:**

Think about which ways are appropriate at work (answers on **Handout # 8: Touching Policy**):

- Holding hands
- Child sitting on your lap
- Buttoning a child's pants
- Pat on the shoulder
- Hugging
- High fives
- Secret handshake
- Resting head on your shoulder
- Squeezed together on a couch
- Applying sunscreen to a child
- Caressing
- Kiss (on the cheek, mouth, top of head)
- Piggyback rides
- Backrub
- Wrestling or roughhousing
- Playing mercy or uncle
- Carrying a child on your hip
- Shoulder rides
- Touching where swimsuits cover
- Spider swing
- Touching the neck
- Child hanging on your body
- Playing airplane

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**Handout 8 – Touching Policy**

The following considerations can help you develop or review your policy on touching:

- Touching should be in response to the need of the child and not the need of the adult.
- Touching should be with the child's permission; resistance from the child should be respected
- Touching should avoid breasts, buttocks, and groin.
- Touching should be open and not secretive.
- Touching or other physical contact should be governed by the age and developmental stage of the child (see examples below).

**Examples of On-the-Job Age Appropriateness:**

*Holding hands.* Most children past the age of eight will not want to hold your hand. The developmental shift that happens around this age usually brings a greater need for independence and the appearance of maturity. The essential guideline you should remember is that the older children are, the less time you should spend holding hands. Remember to use gentle limits that help the child feel valued while enforcing a safe working relationship.

*Child sitting on your lap.* Most children over the age of eight will not want to initiate this activity in a YMCA group setting, so if one does you should make note of it. Preschoolers, kindergartners, and some first graders will still want to crawl up into your lap, especially if it is quiet or reading time, if they don't feel well, or if they are excited to tell you something. Setting gentle limits here may include asking them to sit next to you after a minute or giving them a difficult surface on which to be comfortable (sloping your lap), which gently encourages them to find another seat on their own. Children, no matter their age, should be discouraged from "hanging out" by sitting on your lap; sitting next to you is a wonderful alternative if it's going to last more than a minute or two. The exceptions might in early childhood centers when staff work with children who are ill or in need of comfort.

*Buttoning a child's pants.* Unless children have special needs, they will not require your assistance with this activity past the age of seven. If an older child asks for this kind of help, you need to explore the situation in conversation with the child, your supervisor, or the family. Unfortunately, some other motivation may be at work.

**Additional ways that people may touch children:**

**Appropriate at work:**

Pat on shoulder	A great way to show affection
Hugging	Use a sideways hug if you initiate
High Fives	A great way to be affectionate at work
Secret Handshake	Great team builder if used wisely
Resting head on your shoulder	Use guidelines 1,2, & 4 from Handout 7
Squeezed together on a couch	Use guideline 1 and think about safety
Applying sunscreen to a child	Only if you have parent's permission (and only in areas described in trainings; let child apply sunscreen elsewhere)

**Inappropriate at work:**

<b>Caressing</b>	<b>Too intimate</b>
<b>Kiss (on cheek, mouth, top of head)</b>	<b>Tell child, "kisses are for family"</b>
Piggyback rides	Too much contact and favoritism
<b>Back rub</b>	<b>Too intimate</b>
Wrestling or roughhousing	It's not safe
Playing mercy or uncle	Games that injure are not fun
<b>Carrying a child on your hip</b>	<b>Too much contact and favoritism</b>
Shoulder rides	Too much contact and favoritism
Touching where swimsuits cover	Too intimate
Spider swing	Too much contact and favoritism
Child hanging on your body	Unsafe; you need to be able to move in a crisis
Playing airplane	Unsafe

\*Note: Items in bold are OK for infants, toddlers, and young preschoolers but not older children.

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**Handout 9 – YMCA Code of Conduct for Older Youth and Teens**

Source: Adapted, by permission, from J. Patterson and B. Oliver, 2002, *Season of Hope: a risk management guide for youth-serving nonprofits*. (Washington, DC: Nonprofit Risk Management Center), 70-71.

The YMCA is a youth-serving, community-based membership organization dedicated to providing strong kids, strong families, and strong communities. Participation in the organization's program is subject to the observance of the organization's rules and procedures. The activities outlined in the following list are strictly prohibited. Any program member, staff, or volunteer leader who violates this code is subject to discipline, up to and including removal from the program:

- Abusive language toward a staff leader, volunteer, or another program member
- Possession or use of alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs on the Treasure Valley Family YMCA property or reporting to the program while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Bringing onto YMCA property dangerous or unauthorized materials such as explosives, firearms, weapons, or other similar items.
- Discourtesy or rudeness to a fellow program member, staff leader or volunteer.
- Verbal, physical, or visual harassment of another program member, staff leader, or volunteer.
- Actual or threatened violence toward any individual or group.
- Conduct endangering the life, safety, health or well-being of others.
- Failure to follow any agency policy or procedure.
- Bullying or taking unfair advantage of any program member.
- Failing to cooperate with an adult supervisor, leader, or mentor.
- Not demonstrating the YMCA values of honesty, caring, respect, and responsibility.

I have read and I understand the YMCA Code of Conduct for Older Youth and Teens. I agree to abide by the rules described above and understand that I may be removed as a participant if I violate any of these rules.

Youth Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\* Note: this form may be adapted to use with preteen or teenage participants in your program. You may wish to make the language less formal or the vocabulary less sophisticated, depending on the developmental stage of the young people in your programs. You might also wish to add or subtract components to the code. You may find that you get more buy in if the participants are part of the development process. If you use a "contract" such as this, you must be willing to enforce the consequences if the code is broke; otherwise, the "contract" has no meaning for its participants. Including youth and staff together in one code strengthens the notion that rules are part of life that both you and adults have to follow.

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**Handout 10 – Code of Conduct**  
**(For YMCA Staff and Volunteers)**

1. To protect YMCA staff, volunteers, and program members, at no time during a YMCA program may a staff person be alone with a single child where he or she cannot be observed by others. As staff supervise children, they should space themselves in such a way that other staff can see them.
2. Staff shall never leave a child unsupervised.
3. Rest-room supervision: Staff will make sure the rest room is not occupied by suspicious or unknown individuals before allowing children to use the facilities. Staff will stand in the doorway of the rest room while children are using the rest room. This policy allows privacy for the children and protection for the staff (not being alone with a child). If staff is assisting younger children, doors to the facility must remain open. No child, regardless of age, should ever enter a bathroom alone on a field trip or at other off-site location. Always send children in threes (known as the rule of three), and whenever possible, with staff.
4. Staff should conduct or supervise private activities in pairs – diapering, putting on bathing suits, taking showers, and so on. When this is not feasible, staff should be positioned so that they are visible to others.
5. Staff shall not abuse children in any way including:
  - i. Physical abuse – striking, spanking, shaking, slapping, and so on;
  - ii. Verbal abuse – humiliating, degrading, threatening, and so on;
  - iii. Sexual abuse – touching or speaking inappropriately;
  - iv. Mental abuse – shaming, withholding kindness, being cruel, and so on;
  - v. Neglect – withholding food, water, or basic care.

No type of abuse will be tolerated and may be cause for immediate dismissal.

6. Staff must use positive techniques of guidance, including redirection, positive reinforcement, and encouragement rather than competition, comparison, and criticism. Staff will have age-appropriate expectations and set up guidelines and environments that minimize the need for discipline. Physical restraint is used only in predetermined situations (when necessary to protect the child or other children from harm), administered only in a prescribed manner, and must be documented in writing.

7. Staff will conduct a health check of each child upon his or her arrival each time the program meets, noting any fever, bumps, bruises, burns, and so on. Questions or comments will be addressed to the parent or child in a non-threatening way. Staff will document any questionable marks or responses.
8. Staff will respond to children with respect and consideration and treat all children equally, regardless of sex, race, religion, culture, economic level of the family or disability.
9. Staff will respect children's rights not to be touched or looked at in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say no. other than diapering; children are not to be touched on areas of their bodies that would be covered by a bathing suit.
10. Staff will refrain from intimate displays of affection toward others in the presence of children, parents, and staff.
11. Staff is not to transport children in their own vehicles or allow youth participants old enough to drive to transport younger children in the program.
12. Staff must appear clean, neat, and appropriately attired.
13. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs during working hours is prohibited.
14. Smoking or use of tobacco in the presence of children or parents during working hours is prohibited.
15. Possession or use of any type of weapon or explosive device is prohibited.
16. Using YMCA computers to access pornographic sites, send e-mails with sexual overtones or otherwise inappropriate messages, or develop online relationships is not allowed.
17. Profanity, inappropriate jokes, sharing intimate details of one's personal life, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children, parents, volunteers, or other staff is prohibited.
18. Staff may not be the lone adult, adult being defined as anyone over the age of 16, with children they meet in YMCA programs outside the YMCA. This includes babysitting, sleepovers and inviting children to their homes. Any exceptions require the completion of an Unsanctioned Child Care Waiver before the fact, failure to do so will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

19. Staff must be free of physical and psychological conditions that might adversely affect children's physical or mental health. If in doubt, an expert should be consulted.
20. Staff will portray a positive role model for youth by maintaining an attitude of loyalty, patience, courtesy, tact, and maturity.
21. Staff should not give excessive gifts (e.g., TV, video games, jewelry) to youth.
22. Staff may not date program participants who are under the age of 18.
23. Under no circumstances should staff release children to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other adult authorized by the parent or guardian (written parent authorization on file with the YMCA).
24. Staff will adhere to the YMCA's character values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility when blogging on personal web pages. There are legal liabilities, privileged information is off limits, information on blogs must adhere to the Treasure Valley Family YMCA code of conduct, and any press inquiries must be directed to your branch director.
25. Staff is to report to a supervisor any other staff or volunteer who violates any of the policies listed in this Code of Conduct.
26. Staff is required to read and sign all policies related to identifying, documenting, and reporting child abuse and attend trainings on the subject, as instructed by a supervisor.
27. Staff will act in a caring, honest, respectful, and responsible manner consistent with the mission of the YMCA.

I understand that any violation of this Code of Conduct may result in termination.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee / Volunteer Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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**Handout 11 – Child Abuse Reporting Procedures**

The YMCA promotes a positive guidance and discipline policy with an emphasis on positive reinforcement, redirection, prevention, and the development of self-discipline. At no time will the following disciplinary techniques be tolerated: physical punishment, striking, biting, kicking, squeezing, shaming, withholding food or rest-room privileges, confining children in small locked rooms, or verbal or emotional abuse.

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

In the event of an accusation of child abuse, the YMCA will take prompt and immediate action as follows:

1. At the first report or allegation that child abuse has occurred, the employed staff person it has been reported to will notify the program director, who will then review the incident with the YMCA executive director or his or her designate. If the program 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 that all teachers and child-care providers report information they have learned in their professional roles regarding suspected child abuse. In most states, mandated reporters are granted immunity from prosecution.
2. The YMCA 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. (Note: YMCA staff should find out about reporting requirements before the occurrence of any incident.)
3. In the event of the reported incident involves a program volunteer, employed staff, or YMCA member, the executive director will immediately, without exception, suspend the volunteer or staff person from the YMCA until an investigation is complete. Accused should be suspended immediately and removed from the program in which the allegation occurred.
4. The parents or legal guardian of the child or children involved in the alleged incident will be promptly notified in accordance with the directions of the relevant state or local agency. If more than one set of parents is involved (e.g., child-on-child abuse), the YMCA's responsibility is to keep the names and contact information of those involved confidential. People may learn that information some other way, such as through other children, but YMCA staff and volunteers should not provide it. The YMCA needs to protect itself from disclosing information on a minor.

5. Whether the incident or alleged offence takes place on or off YMCA premises, it will be considered job related (because of the youth-involved nature of the YMCA).
6. Reinstatement of the program volunteer, employed staff person or YMCA member will occur only after all allegations have been cleared to the satisfaction of the executive director or his or her designate.
7. All YMCA staff and volunteers must be sensitive to the need for confidentiality in the handling of this information and therefore should discuss the incident only with the executive director or his or her designate.
8. All full-time and part-time employees and program volunteers must read and sign this policy.

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

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**Handout 12 – Documentation**

**Types:**

- Accident Reports
- Incident Reports
- Unusual Observation Reports
- Protective Services Reports
- YMCA Child Abuse Report Form

**How to Document:**

- Record the following:

Who: Who is completing the report?  
Who reported the observation?  
Who is involved in this incident?  
Who else witnessed the incident or who else can verify information?

What: Stay with the facts  
What caused you to become concerned or to document the information?  
What did you observe? Take photographs if possible (without violation child's right to privacy)  
What happened before, during, and after the incident or accident?  
Be specific when listing what you observed – don't surmise or speculate  
List only what you know  
What are the signs or symptoms that you observed?

When: Day  
Time  
Activity  
Fill out the report immediately while the details are still fresh

Where: Facility  
Program area  
Specific place in the room  
Where on the child's body did you observe signs?

**Other Relevant Information:**

Note: avoid making a judgment, diagnosis, or accusation in your report. That is not your responsibility; it is the job of the investigating agency or medical personnel.

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**Handout 13 – Disclosure by a Victim and Tips for Your Response**

Children may disclose abuse in a variety of ways. They may come to you in private and tell you directly and specifically what is going on. Unfortunately, this is one of the less common ways for children to disclose. Ways that are more common include the following:

- *Indirect hints.* For example, the child may say, “My brother wouldn’t let me sleep last night”, “Mr. Jones wears funny underwear”, “Daddy doesn’t like me”, or “my babysitter keeps bothering me”. A child may talk in these terms because he or she hasn’t learned specific vocabulary, feels too ashamed or embarrassed to talk more directly, has promised not to tell, or for a combination of these reasons. Gently encourage the child to be more specific, within the limits of her or his vocabulary, but bear in mind that to make a report you do not need to know exactly what form the abuse has taken.
- *Disguised disclosure.* The child may say, “I know someone who is being touched in a bad way”, or “what would happen if a girl told her mother that she was being molested, but her mother didn’t believe her?” Here the child might be talking about a friend or sibling but is just as likely to be talking about himself or herself. Encourage the child to tell you what she knows about the “other child”. It is probably that the child will eventually tell you whom they are talking about.
- *Disclosure with strings attached.* “I have a problem, but if I tell you about it you have to promise not to tell anyone else”. Most children are all too aware that some negative consequences will result if they break the secret of abuse; the offender often uses the threat of these consequences to force the child to remain silent. Let the child know you want to help him or her and that the law requires you to make a report if the child discloses abuse; just as abuse is against the law, so too it would be against the law for you not to report. Assure the child you will respect his or her need for confidentiality by not discussing the abuse with anyone other than those directly involved with the legal process, which might include the school nurse or counselor, school principal, or the child prosecution services investigator.

If you are on the receiving end of a child disclosing abuse, here are some suggestions for responding to disclosure:

Step 1: Find a place to talk with the child (a private place visible to other staff).

Step 2: Do not panic or express shock.

Step 3: Express your belief that the child is telling the truth.

Step 4: use the child’s vocabulary.

Step 5: Reassure the child that it is good to tell the truth.

Step 6: Reassure the child that it is not her or his fault and that she or he is not bad.

Step 7: Determine the child’s immediate need for safety and help secure it.

Step 8: Let the child know that you will do your best to protect and support him or her.

Step 9: Let the child know what you will do with the information.

Step 10: Report to the proper authorities.

If the child discloses during an activity where other children are involved, acknowledge the child's disclosure and continue the activity. Afterward, find a place where you can talk with the child alone. Although the YMCA recognizes how difficult it is for a child to disclose abuse, the YMCA feels that staff or volunteers should not be alone with the child or where others cannot observe them during this time. A room with a window or a quiet area apart from the group (but still visible to others) is recommended.

Remember, your role is not to investigate the situation. It is your responsibility to report the abuse, set in motion the process of getting help for the child, and be supportive of the child.

Source: "Responding to Disclosure" from *Talking About Touching: A Personal Safety Curriculum* 2001 Committee for Children. Reprinted with permission from Committee for Children, Seattle, WA.

### **Guide for Responding to the Abused Child:**

Feelings of anger, guilt, denial, confusion are normal reactions to have. The way we respond to children will affect them. The best response is to go slowly, not to ask for too much information too quickly, and to keep the focus on the child's needs. This means that the adult responding should not focus on revenge toward the abuser or his or her own guilt. Such a response will only frighten the child.

### **Believe the Child:**

Experience in treatment and reporting indicates that children seldom make up stories about abuse. Even if the story is false or exaggerated, there may still be serious family problems.

### **Be a Good Listener:**

Allow the child an opportunity to talk freely with you if he or she is comfortable but also remember to respect the child's right to silence.

### **Reassure the Child:**

Let the child know that sharing this information with you was the right thing to do. Let the child know that you will try to keep him or her safe and help the family. Be honest with the child regarding your responsibility to report the incident. Do not promise not to tell. Be careful not to make any promises about what may or may not happen.

**Help Relieve the Child of Guilt:**

Children often believe they are to blame for the abuse. Explain that what happened was the responsibility of the adult or the bigger child.

**Be Available to the Child:**

For some children, the abuse may not have been traumatic, but the subsequent intervention was. The child may need your support and understanding during this family crisis.

**Protect the Child's Right to Privacy:**

You may assume the special role of advocate for the child by reminding his or her peers or staff about the child's right to privacy.

**Follow-Up:**

Mandated reporting sources usually wonder about the results of having made a report. They can call child protective services and find out if the case has been opened, the name of the assigned worker, and if the child has been placed in a foster home. They can also ask for a report on the child's progress. Because the family's right to privacy is very important, however, the child protective services worker may not be able to give certain information.

The ways in which adults respond to the abused child influences the level of anxiety that the child feels. Our goal is to lessen the trauma for the child. The decision to report may pose personal and family conflicts. Regardless of the situation, failing to report allows the problem to continue. By reporting suspected child abuse, we not only protect the child but also may make the difference between a lifetime of guilt and one of healthy family relationships.

Source: Adapted from a handout developed by Child Abuse Prevention Services, Inc., Lansing, MI.

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**Handout 14 – Recommendations for Rest-Room and Locker-Room Usage**

The YMCA follows policies and practices on rest-room supervision that is based on the risk involved (e.g., the age of the children and the location of the rest room). For instance, is the rest room at the YMCA where staff members can monitor who enters it, or is it off site where strangers are likely to be present? Staff discusses the possible risks involved and designs policies accordingly. The following recommendations can provide a foundation for those discussions.

**Program and Staffing Issues:**

- In early childhood programs such as child care, the staff accompanies children to the rest rooms. In preschool aquatic or gym programs, a staff member or volunteer (screen and trained) or the child's parent accompanies children to the rest room or locker room.
- When supervising rest-room use, adult staff members and volunteers should first quickly scan the bathroom before allowing children to enter. Then the adult stands in the doorway of the room, holding the door at least partially open. If assisting young children in toilet stalls, the adult keeps the door to the stall open.
- At no time is a staff person, volunteer, or participant ever alone with a single child, teen, or vulnerable adult where others cannot observe him or her.
- To minimize the disruption of supervision, children are reminded and encouraged as a group to try to use the rest room at appropriate times – before they go outside, on a bus ride, before a long hike, on arrival at a field trip location, and so forth.
- Whenever possible, staff members and volunteers conduct or supervise private activities in pairs, for example, when diapering or helping young children change into swimsuits or shower. When this is not feasible, staff members and volunteers are positioned so that they are visible to others.
- Never allow children to enter a rest room alone. Follow the rule of three, which prescribes that two children and an adult or three children go to the rest room together. For any location, on-site or off-site (for example, field trips); staff must check the rest rooms first to make sure they are safe. If three children are sent into the rest room, staff is cognizant of the dynamics and sends together those of similar age and similar demeanor. (They do not send a bully with a shy child or an older child with a young and vulnerable child.)
- When staff send children to the rest room, they are aware of the length of time the children are gone if the time seems excessive, they take action.
- With older children in a day camp or other setting, if children are sent back to camp or into the YMCA to use a rest room, staff use a two-way communications system to make sure that the children re met by a YMCA staff or volunteer and that rest-room use and return to the program site are monitored.

- If circumstances exist that make it difficult or impossible to abide by the policies established by the YMCA, the staff person documents the incident and files the report with his or her supervisor.
- Staff and mentor camera phones are banned in YMCA rest rooms and locker rooms.

### **Facility Issues:**

- Whenever possible, program spaces are designed near restrooms for ease of use and supervision.
- In day-camp or resident-camp programs and in other programs using outdoor location, restrooms or portable toilets are accessible and, if possible, labeled for exclusive use by children enrolled in the program.
- Helping a child use toilet facilities gives an abuser an excuse to be alone with the child and dupe him or her into permitting genital contact. Bathroom design, especially for young children, should allow for privacy for the child using the toilet but permit observation by adult helpers. Young children's bathrooms should have half-height doors or doors removed totally. Doors should not lock. If the toilets have stalls, the stalls should not go all the way to the floor.
- Adults should have separate bathrooms. Adult bathrooms should have stalls around the toilets that do not reach the floor. They should not lock. Bathrooms should be located where others can easily observe traffic in and out.
- All child-care (or other youth programs) rest rooms are blocked off to the public when the program is in session.
- Children are more vulnerable to sexual abuse in situations in which they are changing clothes, showering, or otherwise unclothed. Being undressed will stop many children from running away to avoid the abuse. The risk escalates when a naked child is also isolated from other children or is alone with a single adult or older youth.
  - If the children in your programs represent a wide range of ages and developmental stages, think about scheduling showers and locker room use at different times. This approach will minimize the opportunity for older, more mature youth to molest younger children emotionally, physically, or sexually.
  - Consider separate shower facilities or shower times for staff. This plan helps protect staff privacy and avoid situations in which allegations of sexual abuse could take on added credibility.
- Locker rooms should not include nooks or crannies that are not easily observable from other areas or outside the room.

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**Handout 15 – Personal Web Page Policy**

The Treasure Valley Family YMCA believes in fostering a thriving online community and acknowledges blogging as a valuable component of shared media. The Treasure Valley Family YMCA Personal Blog Guidelines have been developed for employees who maintain personal blogs that may contain postings about YMCA's business, programs, fellow YMCA employees and the work they do, and content that violates the YMCA Code of Conduct. The guidelines outline the legal implications of blogging about our YMCA.

Those of you who blog should be aware that all the information you publish on a blog or public website (including personal pages on sites such as MySpace, Friendster, and to a degree Face book) is public accessible. Posting information on these pages is conceptually similar to sending a letter to the editor in a newspaper; once published it is openly accessible (an editor can modify or not post your letter, however). You are advised to be mindful that the information you post on the internet will likely be seen by members of the YMCA community and could reflect poorly on your character. As an organization that holds personal character in the highest regard, the Treasure Valley Family YMCA is obligated to take actions to preserve its core values of honesty, caring, respect, and responsibility. As such, the Treasure Valley Family YMCA may terminate staff members for publishing public web pages and blogs that are contrary to the YMCA's mission or are detrimental to its community.

**Legal Parameters:**

Your non-disclosure obligations and legal responsibilities are listed in the following four paragraphs. Failure to abide by these guidelines can result in serious ramifications; discipline, perhaps termination of your employment at the Treasure Valley Family YMCA, may be one of them.

1. **Legal Liability:** When you choose to go public with your opinions via blog, you are legally responsible for your commentary. Individual bloggers can be held personally liable for any commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libelous (whether pertaining to the YMCA, individuals, or any other entity). For these reasons, bloggers should exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colorful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterizations. In essence, you blog (or post on the blogs of others) at your own risk. Outside parties can pursue legal action against you for your postings.
2. **YMCA Privileged Information** – Any confidential, proprietary, or trade secret information is obviously off-limits for your blog. The YMCA logo and trademarks are off-limits per Treasure Valley Family YMCA and Y-USA's brand guidelines. Anything related to YMCA members, programs, policy, strategy, financials, products, etc. that has not been made public cannot appear in your blog under any

circumstances. Disclosing confidential or proprietary information can negatively impact the Treasure Valley Family YMCA and may result in regulatory violations for the YMCA.

3. **YMCA Code of Conduct** – All of our employees are required to sign the YMCA Code of Conduct. Blogs that violate the YMCA Code of Conduct will result in disciplinary action potentially including suspension and termination of employment.
4. **Press Inquiries** – Blog postings may generate media coverage. If a member of the media contacts you about a YMCA-related blog posting or requests YMCA information of any kind, contact your branch director. You should also contact Human Resources for clarification on whether specific information has been publicly disclosed before you blog about it.