



YOUTH PROTECTION GUIDELINES

As a Venturing leader, you need to have basic knowledge about abuse of adolescents and the Youth Protection policies of the Boy Scouts of America. Due to the coeducational membership of Venturing, youth protection takes on added dimensions.

It is important to realize that, although child abuse is preconceived as a problem related to younger children, it is not unusual for adolescents to be victims of abuse—especially emotional, physical, and sexual. Therefore, Venturing leaders are obliged to be familiar with the Youth Protection emphasis of the Boy Scouts of America.

Guiding the Youth Protection emphasis is the five-point strategy adopted by the Boy Scouts of America to prevent abuse. This strategy includes the following points:

1. Educating volunteers, parents, and Venturers themselves to aid in the detection and prevention of abuse
2. Establishing leader-selection procedures to prevent offenders from entering the BSA leadership ranks
3. Establishing policies that create barriers to abuse within the program
4. Encouraging Venturers to report improper behavior in order to identify offenders quickly
5. Swift removal and reporting of alleged offenders

It is important for you to remember that **any time abuse is suspected in the Venturing program, the Scout executive must be contacted immediately.** The Scout executive in every council has established contacts with the law enforcement and child protective agencies within the council, and knows the proper procedures to follow to ensure that the young victim will be protected from any possible further abuse.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON ABUSE

By definition, child abuse is harm to a person under the age of 18 that occurs immediately or through accumulated effects over a period of time. When the harm is caused by withholding life's necessities from a child,

it is classified as neglect. The ability to provide such necessities as food, clothing, education, and medical care, but failing to do so, is the factor separating neglect from the effects of poverty.

Three additional kinds of child abuse are caused by commission of acts against a child—emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse.

Emotional abuse occurs when a youth is consistently told that he or she is no 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 emotional abuse.

Physical abuse is the bodily injury of the youth by the parent or caretaker. Indicators of physical abuse include unexplained, unusual, or repeated injuries.

Sexual abuse is 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. Indicators of sexual abuse include pain in the genital area, sexually transmitted diseases, and difficulty in walking or sitting down. There also are some specific behaviors that are associated with sexual abuse such as age-inappropriate understanding of sex; preoccupation with sex; inappropriate sex play; sleep disturbances; wearing lots of clothing, especially to bed; and fear of being left alone with a particular person.

Child abuse is also a cause of stress, as are any number of other events in a child's life, such as family disruption and divorce, loss of a pet, and problems in school. This stress may cause reactions such as bed-wetting, crying for no apparent reason, immature or regressive behavior, clinging behavior, aggressive behavior, withdrawal, substance abuse, inability to concentrate, unexplained aches and pains, running away, and depression. If any of these persists over a prolonged period, there is reason to be concerned and the behavior needs to be looked into.

CHILD ABUSERS—WHO ARE THEY?

By far, most child abuse occurs within the victim's family. While abusers tend to defy any kind of orderly profile that would facilitate their easy identification, there are some general factors associated with various kinds of abuse. 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. Ignorance about children and children's needs is also a factor in some child abuse cases. Often children who are neglected have parents who abuse drugs or alcohol. An emotional abuser might have unreal expectations of the child and maligns the child when he or she fails to meet those expectations.

Physical abuse can occur when the pressures experienced by the caretaker or parent seem to be insurmountable and the child does something that "triggers" physical violence—the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Physical abuse can also happen when physical punishment becomes extreme or exaggerated. Often, physical abuse can be avoided when the individual realizes the need for time out and has someone to provide respite care of the children for a brief period.

CHILD MOLESTERS

Individuals who sexually abuse children are known as child molesters. Just as with other kinds of abusers, child molesters do not fit any convenient profile. Most child molesters are ordinary-appearing people. It is not unusual for a child molester to occupy a position of respect in the community. Child molesters may be professionals, such as physicians, schoolteachers, members of the clergy, or public officials. It often is very difficult to accept the notion that such prominent individuals violate society's taboos and engage in sexual activity with children.

DATE RAPE

A form of sexual assault of particular concern for Venturing-age young women 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 the rape crisis centers in nearly every community. If the alleged offense occurred during an Venturing event, the Scout executive must be contacted immediately.

YOUTH PROTECTION POLICIES OF THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

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

LEADERSHIP

The Boy Scouts of America takes great pride in the quality of its adult leadership. There have been many instances in which the standards for adult registration have been challenged, and each time these standards have been upheld. Being a registered leader in the BSA is a privilege, not a right.

One tool that has been provided to chartered organizations is the adult leader application. The application requests background information that should be checked by the unit committee or chartered organization before accepting the applicant for unit leadership. We all realize that there is no sure way to detect a child molester—or any kind of child abuser—in advance of attempted or actual abuse. We can minimize the risk by learning all we can about an individual seeking a leadership position—his or her experience with Venturing-age youth; what motivates the individual to want to be an Venturing leader; and, how he or she would handle discipline. We also can convey the message that the Venturing program is a hostile environment for individuals who want to abuse children. By getting this message across, would-be abusers will be discouraged from trying to participate in Venturing.

Our system of preventing ineligible leaders from participating in Venturing requires that unit leader selection committees notify the Scout executive any time they turn down an applicant due to questionable conduct discovered through their background check. In this way the individual can be prevented from becoming involved in another unit.

FRATERNIZATION

Because the Venturing program is designed for young adults, there often is little difference in the ages of the crew Advisors and the crew members. It has been found that maintaining a close social relationship, as in dating, between registered adult leaders and registered Venturers is disruptive to the crew's program and, therefore, is not permitted by the Boy Scouts of America.

CREATING EXTERNAL BARRIERS

After selecting the best possible leaders, further protection for children can be structured into the program. The following policies have been adopted to provide additional security for youths in the program. In addition, they serve to protect adult leaders from situations in which they are vulnerable to allegations of abuse.

- *Two-deep leadership.* Two registered adult leaders or one registered adult leader and a parent of a participant, both of whom must be 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 chartered organization is responsible for ensuring that sufficient leadership be provided for all activities. This requirement applies to the activities of the Order of the Arrow as well as provisional unit activities.
- *No one-on-one contact.* One-on-one contact between adults and Venturers is not permitted, except for authorized ride-along programs. Personal conferences must be conducted in plain view of others.
- *Respect of privacy.* Adult leaders must respect the privacy of Venturers in situations such as changing into swimsuits or taking showers at camp, 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 tent of an adult other than his or her own parent or guardian. Councils are strongly encouraged to have separate shower and latrine facilities for females, and when separate facilities are not available, separate shower schedules for males and females should be posted.
- *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 by the Boy Scouts of America. All aspects of the Venturing program are open to observation by parents and leaders.
- *Appropriate attire.* Proper clothing for activities is required. Skinny-dipping is not appropriate as part of the Venturing program.
- *Constructive discipline.* Discipline in Venturing 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 Venturing activity.
- *Junior leader training and supervision.* Adult leaders must monitor and guide the leadership techniques used by Venturing leaders and see that BSA policies are followed.

Adherence to these policies not only enhances the protection of our membership, but also ensures that the basic values of Venturing are preserved. Local councils are prepared to help units develop strategies for implementing these policies; for example, sharing leadership between units if two-deep leadership for campouts is a problem. All of these policies are designed to create barriers to abuse within the Venturing program.

DISCLOSURE

Considering the prevalence of abuse and the educational programs that increase adolescents' awareness of sexual molestation, you might someday have a member of your crew tell you that someone has molested him or her. If this happens, you must be prepared to help the Venturer. Follow the guidelines below if a Venturer indicates that he or she might have been the victim of abuse or exploitation.

Don't panic or overreact to the information disclosed by the young person.

Don't criticize the youth.

Do respect the youth's privacy. Take him or her to a private place away from others, yet still in view. Reassure the victim that you are concerned about what happened and that you would like to help. You might want to ask if the youth has talked with his or her parents about the abuse—if a parent was not the alleged abuser.

Do not promise to keep the victimization secret, as it will be necessary to make a report to the Scout executive. The Scout executive will advise you of your responsibility to report to child protective services or to a law enforcement agency.

Do encourage the youth 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 special secret, that it is okay to talk about what happened with the appropriate adults, and that the youth will not be blamed.

Do keep it strictly confidential. Take your guidance from the Scout executive or the child protection authorities to whom you reported. Discussing allegations of abuse with others is not helpful to the child.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Anytime you suspect child abuse in the Scouting program, you are required to inform the Scout executive.

Each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the United States territories have different reporting requirements. Many of these jurisdictions require child care professionals to report suspected child abuse, and in some states, reporting laws have been interpreted to require reporting by adults in volunteer child care positions. You should be aware of your reporting responsibilities. This information is available from your local council.

No state requires the person making the report to have proof that abuse has occurred—only that it is suspected. The intent of most state laws is clear—they expect suspected child abuse to 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 for criminal or civil liability if a report of abuse is made that subsequently is found to be unsubstantiated. All states provide immunity from liability to those who report suspected child abuse. The only requirement that states make 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 Venturing program, you are cautioned that you are not an investigator. The investigation of abuse allegations is best left to the trained investigator. Action on reports of suspected child abuse may be facilitated by working through the Scout executive, who has established a working relationship with the administrators of the child protective services program and law enforcement agencies in the council.

The Boy Scouts of America will not tolerate any form of child abuse in its program and will take all necessary steps to remove any offenders from membership in the BSA.