

# Child Abuse Prevention

As a staff member at The Summer Camp, you are a mandated reporter through the State of Maine. As a mandated reporter, you are required to report any alleged abuse that is reported or suspected to the Department of Health & Human Services. There are 4 categories of Child Abuse: Physical, Sexual, Emotional, and Neglect.

Staff members must participate in a STATE SANCTIONED Mandated Reporter Training at least every 4 years. A copy of your course completion will be kept in your file, and must be sent to the Camp Director or Assistant Director. This training must be completed prior to the 1 hour Child Abuse & Mandated Reporter training during Pre-Camp Staff Training.

## **TSC Guidelines for Staff:**

- Ask for help when you need it~even if you are unsure about a situation. Talk to a key staff member or director.
- Set rules and guidelines for your cabin and your activity area. This will help create a positive, fun, and safe environment.
- Set clear boundaries with campers from day 1.

## **TSC Guidelines for Camper-Staff Contact:**

Camper contact is always at the discretion of the child. Know your boundaries, ask permission, read verbal and non-verbal cues and keep the following in mind:

- A comforting touch on the arm, shoulder, or upper back is allowed with the child's consent
- Hugs must be camper initiated with brief, limited contact; side hugs are preferable
- Any physical contact should be in the presence or line of sight of other staff members
- Contact should never be in a place on a child's body that is normally covered by a bathing suit, unless for a clear medical necessity, and then only by the Camp RN.

## **TSC Guidelines for the Physical, Mental, Emotional and Social Protection of Campers & Staff:**

The following interventions can be used in a variety of camp settings. Whether you are working on setting consequences for negative behavior, discussing a conflict between campers, or working on setting boundaries with campers.

1. **Consequences:** Should be natural and logical. Relatable, recognizable, relevant, adjustable and achievable. ***Basic comforts such as food, water, bathroom, sleep, and self-worth may not be denied.***
2. **Tone:** Non-threatening, compassionate, understanding, authoritative. *Ask yourself, how would you like to be treated?*
3. **Words:** Positive, calming, truthful. Sarcasm, exaggerations and scary stories are discouraged. Swears, yelling, cursing, and saying "Shut-Up" to campers and staff is prohibited.

4. Boundaries: Enforce personal space and avoid tickling, back rubs, lap sitting, piggy back rides, persistent clinging, wrestling, pillow fighting, sharing of clothes, sharing of beds, romantic fantasies and crushes.
5. Child-First: Play nice, hazing/bullying, unnecessary interventions, harassment or targeting of one child for selfish amusement or power should not be initiated or encouraged.

### **Reporting to TSC Staff:**

Please *immediately* share with key staff or a director:

- Interactions, discussions, or conversations that you observe or are made aware of that violate any of the above guidelines by staff or campers.
- Interactions, discussions, or conversations that are overheard or disclosed to you by a child about themselves or someone else that involve any of the information on abuse.
- Interactions, discussions, or conversations that you observe or are made aware of that seem strange, suspicious, uncomfortable, or unsafe for campers or staff.

*If you ever have a question about whether or not to report, talk with your supervisor and we can help. You are **always doing the right thing** by bringing it to our attention.*

### **TSC Procedure for Child-Abuse Complaints**

1. Any actions you observe that are not acceptable behavior according to the above guidelines and through the Mandated Reporter Training should be reported as soon as possible to the camp director (within 24 hours). Feel free to write down the interactions, discussion or conversation to help you remember it. Camp staff are required to report any incidents of child abuse to the camp director of that camp, in accordance with its licensing requirements and training.
2. The camp director or designee is then required to report suspected child abuse to DHHS Mandated Reporter Hotline (1-800-452-1999), in accordance with 22 MRS § 4011-A (1)(A)(14). This mandated reporter hotline is the intake line at DHHS Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS). OCFS Intake then forwards those reports from a youth camp director to the OCFS Out of Home (OOH) Investigation Unit, when any abuse is reported to take place outside of the home. (If inside the home, then the Intake would refer to DHHS Child Protective Services.) The DHHS Out of Home Investigation Team (OOH Unit) will conduct child abuse investigations at youth camps, in accordance with 22 MRS Chapter 1071, Subchapter 18. In accordance with 22 MRS §§ 4099-K(4) and 4099-L (2)(C), OOH will coordinate with licensing agencies like the Maine CDC Health Inspection Program, in performing its investigation when the setting is licensed. Upon receipt of notification from OOH, HIP will perform follow-up steps and work to ensure that the camp is not in violation of licensing rules related to this reported incident, like hiring of staff, ratios of staff to campers, appropriate age of staff, training of staff, and confirmation that camps are establishing and training staff on policies to protect campers from child abuse and to report incidents, should the staff observe anything.

In summary, and in tandem to any required reporting to law enforcement, a youth camp is meeting its licensing requirements for reporting suspected child abuse by contacting the DHHS Mandated Reporter Hotline. That agency will reach out to HIP, as part of its investigative work to alert licensing agencies.

### **Allegations of Abuse/Neglect at TSC**

1. At the first report of abuse or suspicion of abuse, the staff person receiving the information will notify a key staff or director, preferably the Camp Director.
2. The Camp Director or proxy will make a report in accordance with relevant state and local reporting requirements and will cooperate with any legal authority involved.
3. The staff member who reported will receive written verification that the report was filed/not filed with the State within 24 hours. If the staff member is not satisfied with the decision they may make the report themselves (unless they are a minor.)
4. The Camp Director may opt to not make a report with the State if the child has shared the information before and it has been previously reported or the camper is currently involved with the State with an active caseworker who is aware of the situation and their awareness is confirmed with the Camp Director.
5. If the reported incident(s) allege that a program volunteer or employed staff was involved in the abuse, the Camp Director will, without exception, suspend the volunteer or staff person from the camp. The parents or legal guardian of the child(ren) involved in the alleged incident will be promptly notified in accordance with the directions of the relevant state and/or local agency. If the Camp Director is reported to be involved, the Executive Director will take over these responsibilities while the Camp Director is suspended and investigated.
6. Reinstatement of the employed staff person *may* occur only after all allegations have been cleared to the satisfaction of the Camp Director and/or Executive Director.
7. All camp staff and volunteers must be sensitive to the need for confidentiality in the handling of this information and, therefore, should only discuss the incident with the designated Staff Team and any and all outside authorities.

### **TSC Grievance Procedures**

The Summer Camp has an open door policy and provides contact information to guardians during the registration/referral process, check in, and check out processes. Guardians who call or email or post on Social Media about anything related to their child's camp experience are responded to within 12 hours by the Camp Director or Proxy.

Camp staff are trained to observe best practices in Behavior Management, Child Abuse Prevention, and Sensitive Subjects and Touch Topics that specially address creating a safe and supportive environment for campers to be comfortable sharing their thoughts and challenges with a trusted individual trained as a Mandated Reporter.

# Hazing & Bullying

The Summer Camp uses the State of Maine Youth Camps Rule Chapter 208 definitions of Hazing and Bullying, which are as follows:

- “Hazing means any action or situation, including harassing behavior, that recklessly or intentionally endangers the mental or physical health of any camper or staff at a youth camp as a condition of joining or maintaining membership in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers the camper, regardless of the camper’s willingness to participate in the activity.”
- “Bullying means a written, oral or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof directed at a camper or campers that has the effect of physically harming a camper or damaging a camper’s property or placing a camper in reasonable fear of physical harm or damage to the camper’s property. Bullying includes an interference of the rights of a camper by creating an intimidating or hostile environment for the camper or interferes with the campers ability to participate in or benefit from the activities provided by the youth camp.”

The Summer Camp does not tolerate bullying or hazing of any kind by campers or staff members. Camp staff will attend multiple sessions during pre-camp around creating a safe and fun environment, behavior management, group forming, and what to do when a hazing, harassing, or bullying situation happens at camp.

## **TSC Guidelines for Staff**

- Talk to key staff or a director if you are unsure about a conversation, discussion, or situation you saw, heard or were informed of. **When in doubt, report it!**
- Make sure you are setting clear and consistent expectations for all campers; bunk and activity groups.
- Model how we want to treat one another in our community.
- “It was just a joke” comments should not be ignored, and a conversation with the camper needs to happen.

## **Steps for Camp Staff:**

1. Should a bullying or hazing incident occur, counselors will pull the affected campers aside and discuss the behavior and any consequences. Inform key staff or a director of the situation.
2. Should a camper have multiple incidents of bullying or hazing, key staff or the director will discuss the behavior and come up with a plan with the camper(s).
3. Should a camper not be able to stick with the agreed upon plan, a phone call home will be made by the Camp Director or Assistant Director.

## **Reporting to TSC Staff:**

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- Interactions, discussions, or conversations that are overheard or disclosed to you by a child about themselves or someone else that involve hazing or bullying.
- Interactions, discussions, or conversations that you observe or are made aware of that seem strange, suspicious, uncomfortable, or harmful for campers or staff.