

## STEP UP AND SPEAK OUT

### A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SELECTING YOUTH SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Between soccer practice, tutoring sessions and piano lessons, your child is frequently under the care of many different adults. As a parent, you are one of the most important links in the chain of prevention.

It's important that youth serving organizations take proactive measures to prevent child sexual abuse. By stepping up and speaking out to youth serving organizations in your community, you have the power to protect your child and countless others against child sexual abuse.



### SELECTING YOUTH SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations should be ready and willing to talk about their prevention measures. Following are some proactive questions to help you start the conversation.

#### How are employees and volunteers screened?

Careful screening and selection of potential employees and volunteers is not convenient or easy, but it ensures the most qualified candidates are hired. Pre-employment screening should evaluate the candidate's qualifications, personal, and professional background. Employee screening best practices includes an in-depth application, personal and professional references, criminal background check and an extensive interview.

**Do not accept excuses. "We know and trust our staff well..." or "We do not have the time or money to screen..." simply are not acceptable answers. Don't be afraid to speak your mind. Make it clear, "I do not want any adult who has not been properly screened caring for my child."**

After an employee is hired, they should be monitored to ensure they keep in line with all protection policies and do not engage in high-risk behaviors.

#### Is there a child protection policy?

Youth serving organizations should have clearly defined child protection policies.

Staff should have advanced training for activities such as toileting, diapering, driving with children, and overnight activities.

The organization should welcome you to visit your child at any time. Make it a habit to drop in unexpectedly.

You may hear, "Sexual abuse would never happen here." But know that **1 in 10 children** will be sexually abused before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. In 90% of those cases, the families knew and trusted the perpetrator.

## Does the policy include limiting isolated one-on-one situations?

Over 80% of abuse incidents occur in one-on-one situations. One-on-one time is important to a child's emotional growth and development, but it does not have to happen behind closed doors. One-on-one interactions should take place in an open, observable, and interruptible setting.

## How do older and younger children interact?

Older or more powerful youth are perpetrators in at least 40% of all sexual abuse incidences. Supervising contact between children and older/bigger youth requires structure and adult supervision.

All teens working at the organization should undergo the same preliminary screening process and monitoring as employees. There should be separate areas and activities for different age groups. Make it clear that you would always like an adult present with your child.

## Are There Clear Procedures for Reporting Suspicions or Incidences of Abuse?

All fifty states require that professionals that work with children report reasonable suspicion of abuse. Youth serving organizations should have clear reporting procedures. Any violations of child protection policies should be taken seriously and evaluated by multiple parties. Employees should know and feel comfortable with these procedures.

Push for organizations to provide mandatory reporting training for their staff. Over half of all mandated reporters fail to report suspicion of abuse. In most cases they are simply confused or uninformed about their responsibilities. You can help by sharing this information.

If you have reason to believe abuse is occurring at an organization, trust your intuition and make a report

“AND THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T HAVE A ONE-ON-ONE TALK, BUT HAVE IT IN THE BLEACHERS WHERE THE PARENTS ARE ON THE OTHER SIDE”

MARGARET HOELZER, CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVOR



## SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS

- How are staff and volunteers selected and screened?
- Are your staff and volunteers trained in sexual abuse prevention and response?
- What type of prevention policies do you have in place and do they include a policy for limiting isolated one-on-one interactions?
- Do you have a code of conduct?
- May I have them?
- How are your policies disseminated and to whom?
- Are the children aware of the rules?
- How are older youth screened, monitored and supervised?
- How are interactions between children and teens structured?
- Do you train, allow and empower your staff and volunteers to report suspicions of sexual abuse?
- Do you have clear reporting procedures?
- If a staff member or volunteer violates the child sexual abuse prevention policy, what procedures and penalties follow?