

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Safe Passage Youth Foundation's top priority is creating the most secure environment possible for youth. We continually evaluate and strengthen our Youth Protection program to ensure it is in line with and, whenever possible, ahead of society's knowledge of abuse and best practices for prevention. When possible always consult with experts from law enforcement, child safety, psychology, and other relevant fields.

FIVE IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

First, most abused and neglected children are maltreated in their own homes, usually by a parent or someone who is close to the child, including siblings, relatives, neighbors, and peers.

Second, children who are abused in one way are often abused in multiple ways. For example, a child being neglected at home is also at risk of other forms of abuse, including sexual abuse. Experts call this "poly-victimization." For our purposes, it means we must pay attention to all forms of maltreatment if we want to have the best chance of protecting a child from any form of abuse.

Third, studies show that children who have been previously abused are at a higher risk of abuse by other perpetrators. This is because those who abuse children are very good at picking up on signs of previous abuse.

Fourth, our policies play an important role in significantly reducing the risks in our community. The policies you will learn about in this youth protection training are designed to limit the opportunities an offender has to abuse a child and to improve your ability to detect signs of abuse or neglect. Both of these goals require your vigilance and commitment to keep youth safe.

Fifth, building resilience—the ability to recover from adversity—can help children overcome many life challenges, including instances of abuse. Safe Passage Youth Foundation (SPYF) and you, as an adult leader, play a huge role in developing resilience in children. Providing positive role models, guidance, support, and a safe environment can tremendously help a child throughout his or her life.

HOW TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE

If you see or suspect that a child is being abused, stop the abuse immediately. Then call 911 and report to Thousand Oaks Police. All suspected incidents of abuse must be reported to any SPYF Officer or Director as soon as possible. California requires that incidents of child abuse be reported to our county department of child protective services.

Failing to report suspected child abuse may be a criminal law violation.

Sexual abuse is engaging a child in sexual activity. While this often involves physical contact, it can also include exposing a child to explicit sexual materials, gestures or activities.

Child sexual abuse is considered a public health crisis by experts and health organizations. Unfortunately, sexual abuse often goes unreported or undiscovered, but studies show that 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys will experience sexual abuse before their 18th birthday.

The majority of sexual abusers are known to the child and to the parents. While most instances of sexual abuse occur in the home by a relative or trusted adult, sexual abuse also occurs outside the home across organizations in the community.

While a majority of abusers are adults, more than a third of sexual abuse is committed by other youth. In short, sexual abuse can occur in any setting where someone could have access to a child.

TYPES OF SEXUAL ABUSE ADULT-ON-YOUTH

The most commonly known type of sexual abuse is adult-on-youth abuse. Abusers are often parents, stepparents, or other adult family members. Abusers can also be other adults known to the child such as neighbors, teachers, coaches, or youth leaders. Abusers misuse their positions of trust and authority over children to engage them through the grooming process in sexually abusive activity.

YOUTH-ON-YOUTH

A growing form of sexual abuse of children is abuse committed by other youth. Youth sexual abusers are usually older siblings, relatives such as older cousins, or family residents or trusted friends. Youth abusers are typically four to five years older but may be the same age as the victim. Youth-on-youth abuse is more likely to occur during activities where there is little or no duplicate adult supervision (2 or more leaders). Youth abusers are more likely to use some type of “game playing” activity that may begin normally but escalates into sexually abusive behavior. Youth abusers may also use pornographic materials to entice and manipulate younger youth.

CONSENSUAL AND NONCONSENSUAL ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

SPYF policy is that sexual activity and all forms of public displays of affection are prohibited. Public displays of affection include holding hands, frontal embraces, and kissing.

- It is natural for youth to create relationships and friendships.
- Supervision, monitoring, and communication by adult leaders are key elements in preventing the following:
 - Youth engaging in any form of sexual activity
 - Youth engaging in abusive or any sexual relationships
 - Youth attempting to meet up with adults

Strict adherence to preventing Abuse is key. Adult supervision during activities is critical as well as monitoring high-risk areas (e.g., restrooms and changing areas) with at least one other organizational staff member present with you. This also includes not assigning youth members more than two years apart in age to use a bathroom together.

All incidents of inappropriate activity involving sexual matters, regardless of whether it is consensual, must be investigated and reported to the program director. Abusive conduct must be reported to law enforcement.

THE ABUSER

Abusers use deception to blend into the organization they have chosen to target. It is difficult to determine just by physical appearance alone who may be harmful to children. The behavior and methods of an abuser, however, do provide red flags for other engaged adults to notice.

GROOMING AND OTHER MANIPULATIVE BEHAVIORS

Abusers don't simply groom youth. They also groom families, organizations, even entire communities. Through manipulation, charm, gifts, and favors, they slowly befriend the family to gain access to the child.

Abusers are masters at sensing and manipulating a specific child's need for love, attention, and affection. They often escalate the manipulation into physical contact by using progressive invasive touch or employing sexual game play as a method of desensitizing the child.

IDENTIFYING GROOMING BEHAVIOR

Identifying grooming behavior can be challenging. It may not appear illegal; however, it may violate an organization's policies or code of conduct or a community's expectation of behavior.

Some grooming behavior is not illegal but may violate youth protection policies. For example, it is not against the law for an adult to send a text directly to a youth without including another adult leader. However, this is discouraged and should be for official activity.

It's OK to question people's motives and actions. You can do it in a way that is not accusatory or inflammatory. As an adult youth leader, your goal is to create a safe environment for kids. Remember, youth protection begins with YOU.

NO SOLO ONE-ON-ONE CONTACT

The Barriers to Abuse also prohibit one-on-one contact between adults and youth. All Safe Passage Youth activities are to be conducted with the knowledge of and always in view of other adults and/or youth.

APPROPRIATE ATTIRE

Proper clothing is required by youth and leaders for all activities.

NO HAZING

Hazing is prohibited and may not be included as part of any activity.

NO BULLYING

All forms of bullying are prohibited in SPYF. This includes verbal, physical, and cyberbullying.

RESPONSE TO DISCLOSURE ABOUT ABUSE

Adults should recognize that talking with children about maltreatment, especially sexual abuse, is not comfortable for anyone. Remember that a child's first disclosure—and your response—may have lasting effects.

How you respond to a youth who discloses sexual abuse to you is important. Let the child know you believe them. That you care and that you want to help. Finally, remember to report the suspected abuse to the proper authorities and the organization immediately.

RESOURCES

Thousand Oaks Police Department: 804-494-8200. Or 911

If you think a child is endangered, call the 24-hour Youth Protection hotline immediately at (805) 654-3200