

## **Child Safe Environment Handout For Parents/Guardians**

### **Our Commitment: A Child Safe Environment**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA is committed to keeping children safe in our community. This means educating ourselves and our community about child abuse and how we can work together to prevent it. Please read this document and ask us questions to learn more about what you can do to protect children from abuse.

### **Information about Child Abuse**

Child abusers can be parents, caretakers, friends, neighbors or anyone who comes in to contact with your child. They can even be other youth. Everyone has a responsibility and plays a role in preventing abuse. Below are the four types of child abuse that are recognized by most states:

1. **Emotional:** Threatening a child or using words that can hurt a child's feelings and self-esteem; withholding love and support from a child
2. **Physical:** Causing injuries to a child on purpose, such as bruises, burns, scars or broken bones
3. **Sexual:** Having sexual contact in any form with a child, including exposing, fondling, intercourse, pornography or internet solicitation
4. **Neglect:** Not providing children with enough food, clothing, shelter, medical care, hygiene or supervision

*Child abuse can happen from an adult to a child, or from one child to another (peer-to-peer abuse).*

### **Child Safe Policy**

#### *Our Staff*

The Kennebec Valley YMCA has more than 100 staff members and volunteers working with youth in the many programs we offer.

#### *Our Screening*

To keep children in our programs safe and provide multiple layers of protection, we screen our employees and volunteers through a comprehensive interview process, reference checks and criminal background record checks and fingerprinting.

#### *Our Training*

Employees and volunteers complete an extensive child abuse prevention training program to make sure they understand the problem of abuse and know the warning signs to look for. Supervisors and managers complete additional training to further promote a child-safe environment. All staff members and volunteers are mandated to report any suspected child abuse.

#### *Our Policies*

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from working one-on-one with youth, interacting with youth outside of program areas (including babysitting) and contacting youth over social media. If you observe a member of our staff or a volunteer violating these policies, please alert us.

## **Working Together for Safety**

### *Talk to Your Child*

Have an open and honest discussion with your child on a routine basis about his or her experiences in our programs, school, sports and other activities. Encourage your child to tell you or another trusted adult if anything happens to him or her.

### *Drop In*

Drop in on your child's programs. There's no need to provide advance notice. We welcome you to stop by and see how things are going.

### *Trust Your Instincts*

If something seems "strange", don't wait to report it. Please speak up and inform a staff member.

### *Warning Signs of Abuse*

- Unexplainable bruising or other physical markings
- Disturbed sleeping or eating patterns
- Abrupt changes in behavior-anxiety, clinging, aggressiveness, withdrawal or depression
- Fear of a certain person or place
- Discomfort with physical contact

### *Special Attention*

Listen and watch for signs of your child receiving special attention that other children or teens are not receiving. This may include favors, treats, gifts, rides, increasing affection or time alone, particularly outside the activities of school, child care or other activities.

### *Ask Questions*

Every once in a while, ask your child these questions:

- What does safe mean to you? How do you know when you are safe?
- Is anyone scaring or threatening you?
- Is anyone asking you to keep secrets?
- Has anyone said anything to you that made you feel bad?
- Is anyone touching you in a way that you don't like or you are not sure about?

## **Reporting Abuse**

- Report suspicion of abuse or alleged abuse to the local Child Protective Services or local law enforcement.
- If you think your child has been physically injured, seek medical attention.

*If you have any questions or concerns regarding a member of our staff, please contact us immediately. If you are not comfortable sharing this information directly with us, please make a report to one of the resources below.*

## **Resources**

**National Child Abuse Hotline:** 1-800-422-4453

**Local Resources:** 1-800-452-1999

**Organization's Contact Information:** Cristina Chaplin, Sr. Director of Human Resources  
207-707-4764 [cristina@kvymca.org](mailto:cristina@kvymca.org)

## How to Protect Yourself from Abuse

### (A guide for children and consumers)

- You are special and important.
- Your body is your own.
- You have the right to say "NO" if someone wants to touch you in any way that makes you feel uncomfortable, afraid or confused.
- There are parts of your body that are private. You have the right to say "NO" to anyone who wants to touch your vagina, penis, breasts or buttocks. You have my permission to say "NO" even if that person is an adult ... even if it's a grown-up you know.
- Pay attention to your feelings. Trust your feelings about the way people touch you.
- If someone bothers you, I want you to tell me. I promise that I will believe you.
- If someone touches you in a way that does not seem right, it is not your fault.
- If someone touches you, tell an adult such as a parent, guardian, trusted adult.

### Reading Resources for Children:

- A Better Safe than Sorry Book: a Family Guide for Sexual Assault Prevention, by Sol Gordon and Judith Gordon. (1992). Prometheus Books.
- It Happens to Boys Too, by Jane Santullo and Russell Bradway. (1987). Elizabeth Freeman Center.
- It's My Body: a Book to Teach Young Children How to Resist Uncomfortable Touch, by Lory Freeman. (1984). Parenting Press, Inc.
- My Body Is Private, by Linda Walvoord Girard and Rodney Pate. (1992). Albert Whitman & Co.
- No More Secrets for Me, by Oralea Wachter and Jane Aaron. (2002). Little Brown & Company.
- Secrets that Hurt: Sexual Abuse Activity Book, by Jim Boulden and Joan Boulden. (1993). Boulden Publishing.

- Something Happened and I'm Scared to Tell: a Book for Young Victims of Abuse, by Patricia Kehoe and Carol Deach. (1987). Parenting Press, Inc.

# Child Abuse Prevention Plan

At The Kennebec Valley YMCA, safety is our number one priority. The Kennebec Valley YMCA understands that child abuse and the inappropriate contact of youth is a pervasive problem that must be managed in a pro-active manner if we are to protect those in our care. The Kennebec Valley YMCA's leadership and Board of Directors have enacted the following plan to manage our programs and minimize the potential for an abuse incident to occur. If an allegation or incident does occur we will pro-actively work with the authorities and the family to respond in a prompt and empathetic manner.

The Kennebec Valley YMCA believes the following policies are vital to the protection of youth in our care and will be shared with and applied to all staff, volunteers, partner organizations and guardians.

## 1) Hiring Practices and Screening

### a. Applications

All prospective staff and volunteers will complete an application to work or volunteer that includes questions in the following areas: criminal conviction, past work history and education. The application will include a statement that the Kennebec Valley YMCA, has a zero-tolerance standard for abuse and inappropriate behavior by staff members. All applications will be signed by the individual and maintained in their personnel file.

### b. Interviews

Prospective staff and volunteers will be interviewed by at least two separate staff members. All interviews will be documented on an approved interview form that ensures consistency of questions asked. During all interviews, the prospective staff member will be asked to read the Kennebec Valley YMCA's statement on abuse prevention (appendix 1) and verify that they are in agreement with its purpose and that they will abide by its standards if hired.

### c. Criminal Record Checks

The Kennebec Valley YMCA will conduct a search for criminal activity by any prospective staff member. This search may be through law enforcement agencies or through entities that provide such service and may include: examining local, county, state records throughout the entire country; and searching various registered sex offender lists. Applicants who are returning staff will receive a new check if they have been away from Kennebec Valley YMCA for more than 90 days.

The Kennebec Valley YMCA is strongly committed to protecting its members and the children in their care from all harm. However, a conviction does not automatically generate a rejection of the application—all cases are individually evaluated. The Kennebec Valley YMCA does maintain a barrier crimes list that includes items such as felonies, violence acts such as assault, domestic violence and child abuse.

### d. Reference Checks

The Kennebec Valley YMCA will contact at least three references for all prospective staff. At least one reference must be a *close family member* to the applicant. The reference's responses will be documented on a Kennebec Valley YMCA approved form that specifies questions for uniformity of evaluation. Past employers will be asked if the person is eligible for rehire. Written and electronic references will be accepted. All reference forms must include the date and the printed name and signature of the staff member who completed it.

### e. File Documentation

All applications, reference checks, Criminal Record Checks and interview notes will be

kept in the individual's personnel file that is maintained in The Kennebec Valley YMCA's Human Resources department. If the original must be housed at an off-site location because of licensing requirements, a full duplicate copy will be maintained at the corporate HR office.

## **2) Training and Education**

### **a. Code of Conduct**

Staff and volunteers will sign and date a copy of the Code of Conduct (or a similar document adapted by the organization) prior to performing any work duties. The Code of Conduct will be maintained in the personnel file. All new staff will have the Code of Conduct reviewed with them at the time of signing; the signature line should state "I have read and understand the above as explained to me; I agree to abide by all of its conditions."

All departments will review the Code of Conduct during April, if applicable each year and will have all staff reconfirm that they understand their expectations as a Kennebec Valley YMCA staff member and agree to abide by those expectations.

### **b. Child Abuse Prevention Training**

All staff members will participate in the child abuse prevention training that includes training on sexual abusers. Any staff member who does not complete the training as required will be suspended or terminated.

### **c. Electronic Communication Policy**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA has adopted the electronic communication policy attached in appendix 3. The policy will be reviewed with all staff and volunteers before their regular duties begin and annually thereafter. The purpose of this policy is to eliminate the potential for outside contact with program participants via electronic means. The Kennebec Valley YMCA understands that certain communication is needed as part of program operation; the policy addresses how and when it is permitted.

### **d. Reoccurring Training**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA requires that all staff working with children participate in an annual review of the abuse prevention training. The Kennebec Valley YMCA may perform additional training with staff on identification and prevention of child abuse throughout the year.

## **3) Staff Expectations**

### **a. Reporting of Red-Flag and Inappropriate Behavior and/or Violations of the Code of Conduct**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA staff and volunteers are mandated to report any suspicion of child abuse to the jurisdiction having authority. The Kennebec Valley YMCA staff will report to their supervisor any indication of or warning signs concerning abuse involving a child and any instances of staff violating the Code of Conduct. The Kennebec Valley YMCA staff who identify suspicious behavior or a violation of policy by a fellow staff person should report the event to their supervisor immediately.

The Augusta Maine DHHS intake hotline's phone number is (207) 215-0800.

b. **Being Alone with Children**

At no time should Kennebec Valley YMCA staff or volunteers be in a situation where they are alone with a child or children and cannot be observed by others. The Kennebec Valley YMCA will make every attempt to design and structure its programs to eliminate the potential for a staff member to be in a one-on-one situation. Kennebec Valley YMCA staff or volunteers are not to have children enter closets or storage areas to retrieve equipment.

c. **Hugging and Touching of Children**

Appropriate physical contact is important in the emotional development of all youth in our care. Examples of appropriate physical touch include high five, fist bumps and side hugs. Kennebec Valley YMCA staff members should not perform frontal hugs of children—hugs should be from the side. Staff and volunteers should get down to the child's physical level when possible. Staff members should not pick-up school-aged children (to reduce potential for both abuse allegations and physical injury) and should not allow children to sit on their laps. Staff and volunteers should also not wrestle with or tickle youth.

The Kennebec Valley YMCA's childcare and preschool programs have adopted specific guidance regarding physical contact for staff members. Please refer to the childcare staff manual for details of the plan.

d. **Babysitting and Outside Contact**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA staff and volunteers shall not provide care (babysit) or instruction or develop/maintain relationships with any children or families they meet through programs. If the staff member has a pre-existing relationship, e.g., for babysitting, a Kennebec Valley YMCA executive must be notified of the relationship and the relationship may continue. The family will be required to sign a waiver acknowledging the family's pre-existing relationship with the staff member and relieving the Kennebec Valley YMCA of any responsibility for the actions of the staff member with regard to that relationship. Kennebec Valley YMCA staff may not have contact, beyond incidental, with children they meet in Kennebec Valley YMCA's programs outside of the Kennebec Valley YMCA. This includes but is not limited to:

- Extra practices, coaching or tutoring
- Special occasions such as graduation, family reunions, etc.
- Community events such as living in the neighborhood or attending the same religious institution
- Visits to any residence

e. **Diapering Policy**

- When diapering a child, staff will have another staff member in the room and be in a visible area of the room. When assisting a young child with bathroom duties, staff members will not close doors to the bathroom or stall so they can be observed.

f. **Supervision Standards**

All youth who are registered into programs will be supervised by Kennebec Valley YMCA staff at all times. This includes bathrooms, locker rooms and changing areas during day camp or after school. At no time should one staff member have direct care of a single child. If a staff member becomes alone with a child, he/she should promptly move to a location where he/she can be observed by other Kennebec Valley YMCA staff member.

#### 4) Program Operation

a. **Bathroom & Locker Room Policy**

Youth who are participating in Kennebec Valley YMCA programs are not to be sent to bathrooms without a Kennebec Valley YMCA staff member present. For single stall bathrooms the Kennebec Valley YMCA staff will be positioned outside of the bathroom to make sure no one else enters the restroom. At minimum, when multiple children are in the bathroom or locker room, Kennebec Valley YMCA staff members will be standing in the doorway so they can have at least auditory supervision of the children. Staff members can and are encouraged to be inside the facilities so they can be easily seen by the children and so they are able to immediately stop any inappropriate activity. This is best done with multiple staff members so individual staff are not subjected to unwarranted allegations. Protocols that address the variety of unusual circumstances possible during outdoor or off-site activities shall be established and made part of that program/activity's operating guidelines. Counselors in training, Jr Staff and volunteers should never supervise bathrooms.

b. **Program Audits**

Announced and unannounced audits will be conducted of all Kennebec Valley YMCA programs. These audits will look directly at abuse prevention practices. The audits will be performed by individual organizations and organizational leadership with all programs audited by Kennebec Valley YMCA leadership at least twice yearly.

c. **Regular Computer Audits**

The Employee Handbook should clearly outline the access that the Kennebec Valley YMCA will have to all messages, email, internet usage and the like. It should also clearly specify those internet sites that are unacceptable and let the employee know that they will be terminated if they are visiting those or similar sites. The Kennebec Valley YMCA should have systems in place to monitor and record all Internet usage and should audit this regularly to assure compliance with the standards.

d. **Special Needs Participants**

Special needs program participants are, indeed, more at risk than others and need to be more closely supervised to prevent peer-to-peer abuse and the staff supervising them needs to be more closely supervised to prevent a predator from taking advantage of their impairment to abuse them. All youth with special needs will be evaluated against our organization's eligibility requirement to determine if a youth and family can be safely served at the Kennebec Valley YMCA.

e. **Adult Member Expectations Around Children**

Adult Members are expected to use decent language and act in a positive manner. Members who talk in a sexual manner, perform sexual gestures, sexual acts, or attempt inappropriate contact with a child will have their membership suspended or terminated depending on the degree of the offense. The police may be contacted, if warranted. No use of cameras or cell phones is allowed by members in the locker room areas. *Note: Member records can be run automatically against child abuse and sex offender registries for each state, if your organization's software vendor has such capability.*

f. **Safety Committee**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA has established a safety committee that is responsible for a wide range of topics including child abuse prevention. This committee consists of staff as well as board volunteers. The committee meets a minimum of quarterly to set goals and will report annually to the board on their progress.



g. **Departing Program**

- Youth will only be released to guardians listed on the approved pick up list. Youth may not leave programming or walk home.

**5) Guardian Education**

a) **Organization Child Protection Policy**

At the start of every program, the Kennebec Valley YMCA will provide its child protection policy to guardians. The child protection policy provides guardians with the babysitting policy, outside contact policy, electronic communication policy and information on child abuse. Staff contact information will be on the document in case a guardian has questions, concerns or observes a violation.

b) **Contact Information for Violation of Policies**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA will provide both male and female staff contacts that guardians can call in case of concern. Staff will receive training on responding to an allegation, child abuse warning signs, and Kennebec Valley YMCA's policies so they can effectively respond to concerns and questions. Staff will provide guardians with important questions to ask children on a regular basis in order to detect abuse concerns, e.g.

- Is anyone scaring or threatening you?
- Is anyone asking you to keep secrets?
- Has anyone said anything to you that made you feel bad?
- Is anyone touching you in a way that you don't like?

c) **Youth Education**

Youth participating in day camp, after school, teen programs, early childhood education, after school care, etc will be informed of the policies staff have agreed to follow regarding physical contact, gift giving and outside contact. Youth will also be required to sign the Member Code of Conduct.

**6) Responding to an Allegation**

a) **Reporting Suspicious Behavior to a Supervisor**

All staff members have received specific training concerning the requirement to report violations of Kennebec Valley YMCA's policies immediately to their supervisor. If the supervisor does not effectively respond, the staff members have been trained to notify the next level supervisor. The Kennebec Valley YMCA staff are expected to observe other staff members' behaviors, including that of supervisors, and to report any suspicions to that a supervisor.

b) **Mandated Reporter**

All Kennebec Valley YMCA staff members are mandated reporters with regard to child abuse. Any evidence of potential child abuse or observation of inappropriate contact by a parent, staff member or other child will be reported to DHHS intake Hotline at 207-215-0800.

c) **Suspension of Staff or Youthful Offender**

Any Kennebec Valley YMCA staff member who is alleged to have abused a child will be suspended with pay pending the outcome of an investigation by the Kennebec Valley YMCA and appropriate authorities. If the allegation is substantiated, the staff member will be terminated. If the allegation is against a program participant, he/she will be suspended

pending the outcome of the investigation. Depending on the severity of the incident, the participant may be terminated from the program.

d) **Incident Investigation**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA will perform an investigation following any allegation of child abuse by a staff member, participant or member. The Kennebec Valley YMCA may utilize its insurance company, The Redwoods Group, or other agencies to interview staff, witnesses and/or children.

e) **Insurance Company Contact**

Immediately after an allegation of abuse the Kennebec Valley YMCA will notify its insurance company, The Redwoods Group. Redwoods will be asked to render assistance with the investigation and other items. The following individuals are approved to contact The Redwoods Group. Only in the absence of all of the above identified staff members should initial contact be made by any other Kennebec Valley YMCA staff member.

The phone number for The Redwoods Group is 800-463-8546. Redwoods' after hour crisis hotline number is 877-590-4678.

f) **Record Retention**

Following an allegation against a staff member, their personnel file will be sealed and locked in the Human Resources office. The file will have no items removed or added. It will only be moved from the locked location at the direction of the CEO.

g) **Working with the Media**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA has enacted the media plan outlined in Appendix 5. When the plan is enacted, only the individuals identified in the plan should speak with members of the media. The Kennebec Valley YMCA will develop a media statement.

## **Appendix**

### **1) Appendix 1**

**Statement on Abuse Prevention (share this with the candidate)**

The Kennebec Valley YMCA has a policy that we explain to each of our candidates. The Kennebec Valley YMCA is aware that there may be people who want to work or volunteer here for the wrong reasons. To prevent access to the youth we serve, we check every applicant's criminal history and speak with applicants about their character as well as job skills. We structure our programs so that no staff member or volunteer is ever left alone with a youth. We take all allegations, including those from youth, very seriously. We refer all allegations to the authorities for investigation, and we cooperate fully with any investigation. This thorough process not only protects the people in our care, but it also minimizes the potential for false allegations against staff members and volunteers. Do you have any questions about our policy?