



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# PROTECT YOUR CHILD FROM ABUSE

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS AWAY  
FROM HOME

**YMCA OF GREATER SEATTLE**



# CREATING A CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The YMCA of Greater Seattle works in partnership with parents and guardians of children in Y programs to protect children from abuse. Our youth participate in a wide variety of programs, including child care, camping, sports, aquatics, mentoring, leadership and more. The Y's programs follow the principles of youth development, which includes the belief that children need to be physically and emotionally safe in order to learn and thrive. Open, ongoing communication helps.

We believe that all kids deserve the opportunity to discover who they are and what they can achieve. That's why, through the Y, millions of youth today are cultivating the values, skills and relationships that lead to positive behaviors, better health and educational achievement.

## **ABUSE DOESN'T HAVE TO HAPPEN**

The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide you with information and guidance on how to talk about child abuse and personal safety with your child, and how to respond. Children are often faced with choices affecting their development and safety. It is our job as the Y and as parents to prepare children and ourselves for what could happen and to protect them from abuse. There are policies to keep your child safe at the Y, but there are also simple rules you can teach and steps you can take to help keep your child safe when your child is not with you.



# SAFETY STEPS AT THE Y

The YMCA of Greater Seattle has over two thousand staff members and volunteers working with youth in the many programs we offer. **We want all children and youth to be safe.**

**Fact:** While rare, every major youth-serving organization in the country has had incidents or allegations of abuse by a staff member, volunteer, or program participant.

## The Y takes these steps to keep your child safe:

- We thoroughly screen staff and volunteers, including completing criminal background checks.
- We train staff and volunteers in abuse prevention, and, in particular, how to recognize inappropriate favoritism or “grooming.”
- We carefully supervise and monitor our programs.
- We ensure that staff understand their responsibility to report abuse.
- We teach children about appropriate and inappropriate touching through our personal safety talks.
- We have policies to limit circumstances in which staff and volunteers are alone with a child or teen where others cannot observe them.
- We have policies that limit staff contact with children and teens outside of YMCA programs.

## KNOW THE POLICIES

Know the policies of programs and organizations, such as organized sports, faith centers, camps, after school programs, clubs and schools, before allowing your child to participate in any program.

If your child is in a YMCA program, read our staff **Abuse Prevention Rules**. If it’s not posted at your Y, ask to see it. If someone breaks a rule, let us know immediately.

## PROGRAMS WITH ONE-ON-ONE CONTACT

When your child is in a program with one-on-one contact, ask program staff or volunteers about the specifics of the planned activity before the youth leaves your care and make sure outings are in public.

- Talk with your child after the activity.
- Ask specific questions, such as:
  1. “Has anyone asked you to keep a secret?”
  2. “Did anyone make you feel uncomfortable?”
- Keep in contact with the program coordinator.

**It takes everyone’s help to stop abuse.**

# INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD ABUSE

## KNOW THE FACTS

Child abuse can take many different forms:

- **Emotional abuse** is the use of threats or words that can harm a child's feelings and self-esteem and the withholding of love and support. Examples include ridicule, rejecting, blaming, or communicating unrealistic expectations.
- **Physical abuse** is the deliberate injury of a child by any person, including by another child.
- **Sexual abuse** is any sexual activity between an adult and a minor, and between two minors when one exerts power over the other. It includes genital touching, inappropriate hugging or kissing, playing sexually oriented games, and sexual intercourse. It also includes non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, taking nude photos, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or Internet.
  - **1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys** is sexually abused before their 18th birthday.
  - **30%** of children who are sexually abused are abused by **family members**.
  - **60%** of children who are sexually abused are abused by **a person the family trusts**.
- **Child neglect** is a form of abuse that occurs when a person responsible for the care of a child fails to provide necessary food, clothing, medical care, education, affection, shelter or supervision.

### REMEMBER

Most abuse happens by people that youth know and trust. Abusers can be caretakers, friends, neighbors, activity leaders, parents, relatives, and even other youth.



# SIGNS OF ABUSE

## STAY ALERT

### Watch for warning signs of child abuse:

- Abrupt changes in behavior, anxiety, clinging, aggressiveness or withdrawal.
- Discomfort with physical contact.
- Fearfulness or depression.
- Abuse or bullying of other children.
- Avoidance of a particular person or place, or refusing to go to a friend's or relative's home for no apparent reason.
- Sexual language or behavior that is not age-appropriate.
- Unexplained bruises, welts, burns.
- Unkempt or malnourished appearance.
- Disturbed sleeping or eating patterns.
- Sexually transmitted diseases and infections.

### Why are children afraid to tell?

- The abuser tells the child that his or her parents will be angry.
- The abuser confuses the child about what is right and wrong.
- The abuser tells the child that they will hurt a family member if they tell.
- The abuser tells the child it is a game or a secret.
- Children think it was their fault, or that they should have done something to prevent it.
- The abuser may encourage the child to break rules set by their parents, causing the child to fear punishment if they tell.

**A child may tell pieces of what happened or pretend it happened to someone else to see how you will react.**



# OPEN COMMUNICATION

## WHY SHOULD I TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child molesters count on children not knowing the names of their body parts or the rules about their bodies. They count on children not knowing about sexual abuse. Teaching the right information to children when they are young helps them recognize when something isn't right or when someone may be taking advantage of them or doing something illegal. **The more open communication you have with your child on serious topics like abuse and personal safety, the more likely your child will come to you for help and be able to say NO to potential abuse.**

## TEACH YOUR CHILD THREE RULES TO STAY SAFE

Your language would of course be different for a 3-year-old than it would be for an 11-year-old.

- 1. The names of their body parts.** You want them to know the names of their body parts so they have the words to tell you if something is wrong. When you start teaching your child names of body parts like eyes, ears, nose, elbows, and knees, include private parts like breast, bottom, penis and vagina. Talking with children when they are young helps keep the lines of communication open when they get older.
- 2. Rules about their body.** Once they know the rules, they can tell you if anyone tries to break them. Children understand the idea of rules. We teach them rules about crossing the street and not poking people in the eyes. In the same way, we can also teach rules about their private parts. For example, don't touch them in front of other people and don't let other people touch them unless Mommy or Daddy knows about it. Teach them to not touch other children's private parts either. Model the rule: if they touch your private parts, gently remind them of the rule that other people are not allowed to touch your private parts. Teach them it's not OK for someone to try to get them to do things they aren't supposed to do, things that scare them, or things that make them feel uncomfortable.
- 3. What to do if someone tries to break the rules about their body.** If someone tries to break the rules about their body, they should tell you right away. Let them know that they will not get in trouble for telling you and that you are proud of them for following the rules about their body. Teach them that if someone tries to break the rules about their body, they can tell that person to STOP. Also, teach them it's not OK for someone to ask them to keep secrets from you.

**Children should not be made to feel bad for not getting help.  
We are simply encouraging them to get help to be safe.**

# PERSONAL SAFETY TALK

## THE Y ENCOURAGES YOUTH TO TELL AND GET HELP

Y staff have occasional discussions with children and youth about appropriate touching and personal-space limits. These personal safety talks are incorporated into our programs so that youth will learn skills that may help them avoid a potentially abusive situation. Here's the Y's **Personal Safety Talk**.\*

**My body belongs to me.  
If someone makes me feel  
uncomfortable, scared or hurt,  
or touches my private areas,  
I will yell "STOP"  
and GO TELL an adult who listens.  
I have a right to be safe.  
I deserve respect.**



## PERSONAL SAFETY TALK DISCUSSIONS AT HOME

**You may find the Y's Personal Safety Talk to be an easy way to discuss personal safety with your child too.**

- Recite the Personal Safety message with them.
- Ask them what is respectful (OK) touch and what is not respectful (not OK) touch.
- Use correct language for body parts.
- Tell them to check first with you or another trusted adult before going anywhere, changing plans, or accepting gifts from anyone.
- Teach them it's not okay to keep secrets from you and that they can tell you the truth.
- Tell them they can always tell a trusted adult if someone touches them or makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Have them identify a trusted adult they can talk to.

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\* A copy of a sample discussion format of the Personal Safety Talk is available at your Y. If you have any questions or would like to see the discussion materials, please feel free to contact your Y Program Director or the YMCA of Greater Seattle Risk Management Director at 206 382 5085.

# HOW OFFENDERS BUILD TRUST WITH YOUTH

Listen and watch for signs that your child is receiving special attention that other children or youth are not receiving.

## GROOMING BEHAVIOR

- Spends time building a friendship with the child and slowly gains the trust of the family.
- Gives gifts or treats to the child and/or gives the child special favors.
- Does things for the child that the parents may not be able to do.
- Lays the foundation for future sexual secrets by encouraging harmless secrets.
- Breaks down physical boundaries over time by playing physical contact games, giving backrubs, tickling, or wrestling.
- Gives youth opportunities to break rules such as using alcohol or drugs or viewing pornography. This discourages the child from telling parents when abuse occurs, and pornography initiates sexual interest.
- Takes pictures and videos of the child.
- Increases affection or time alone, particularly outside the activities of school, sports, child care, and other activities.



# BE PROACTIVE: YOU CAN PREVENT ABUSE

## A PARENT'S CHECKLIST

- Encourage your child to talk about any sensitive problems or experiences. Children need to be allowed to talk freely about their likes and dislikes, their friends, and their true feelings.
- Teach your child about their body and the rules for their body. Have personal safety talks with them.
- Practice safety rules. Give your child "what if" situations and ask them what they would do. It gives them an opportunity to practice the skills they have been taught.
- Talk to your child about their experiences in YMCA programs, school, sports, mentoring, and other activities.
- Drop in on your child's programs.
- Trust your instincts. Don't wait to tell the Y or any other organization if something seems "strange." Speak up.
- Watch for warning signs of abuse. Listen and watch for signs of your child receiving special attention.
- Every once in a while, ask your child these questions:
  - 1. Is anyone scaring or threatening you?**
  - 2. Is anyone asking you to keep secrets?**
  - 3. Has anyone said anything to you that made you feel bad?**
  - 4. Is anyone touching you in a way that you don't like?**
- Encourage your child to tell you or another trusted adult if anything happens to them.
- Know organizations' abuse prevention rules so you can report if anyone breaks them.

## INTERNET RULES

**The internet can place a child in danger. Set up rules before letting your child go online.**

- Talk about who they can communicate with and what sites they can visit.
- Do not allow your child to download anything without permission.
- Tell your child never to share personal information such as their name, address, telephone number, parent's work address or phone number, or the name and location of their school without parent's permission.
- Encourage them to tell a trusted adult if they receive any message or come across anything that makes them feel uncomfortable, scared, or confused.
- Tell your child they must never meet in person with anyone they meet online.

**A child is six times more likely to tell about abuse if asked a specific question.**

# WHAT IF MY CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE?

Your reaction has a powerful influence on how your child responds. Here's a good way to respond:

1. **Stay calm.** Staying calm at a time like this will be very difficult for you. Avoid overreacting or expressing shock or outrage. Try not to cry.
2. **Listen.** Listen carefully to what they tell you. Your child will be scared and may not give you many details. Ask questions like: "Can you tell me more about it?" "What did the person do?" "When did this happen?" or "How many times did this happen?"
3. **Comfort your child.** Let them know that you love them very much and that they have done nothing wrong. A big hug can work wonders. Tell them you believe them. Praise their courage in telling you. Don't ask them why they didn't tell you sooner—that will just make them feel guilty.
4. **Don't threaten or criticize the person who committed the abuse.** Although this is a natural response, avoid criticizing the person your child has identified as the abuser. Chances are, your child knows the person well and may even care very much for the person.
5. **Take action.** Trust your gut and your instincts.
  - Keep your child away from the person involved.
  - Contact Child Protective Services (CPS) or the police to report abuse.
  - If you think your child is physically injured, seek out appropriate medical attention.
  - If you see signs of distress, withdrawal or acting out, consider counseling for your child.
  - Contact the organization where the person is involved. They will want to protect other children.
  - If you are not sure there was abuse, contact one of the King County Abuse Prevention Resources or CPS.

## TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE

### LOCAL CPS OFFICE NUMBERS

OR

### OTHER RESOURCES

Harborview Center for Sexual Assault & Traumatic Stress (all King County) 206 744 1600

King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (south King County) 425 226 5062

National Parent Helpline 1 855 4AParent



1 866 END HARM

1 866 363 4276

## WHO DO I CONTACT AT THE YMCA?

If you have questions or concerns about preventing abuse, contact the YMCA of Greater Seattle Risk Management Director, Association Child Care Executive, or your Branch Program Director or Branch Executive.

**If you prefer to talk to a male or female, just ask.**

### YMCA OF GREATER SEATTLE

RISK MANAGEMENT	206 382 5085
CHILD CARE EXECUTIVE	206 382 5004

### BRANCHES

ACCELERATOR YMCA	206 382 5013
AUBURN VALLEY YMCA	253 833 2770
BELLEVUE FAMILY YMCA	425 746 9900
YMCA CAMPING SERVICES	206 382 5009
COAL CREEK FAMILY YMCA	425 282 1500
DALE TURNER FAMILY YMCA	206 363 0446
DOWNTOWN SEATTLE YMCA	206 382 5000
MATT GRIFFIN YMCA	206 244 5880
MEREDITH MATHEWS EAST MADISON YMCA	206 322 6969
NORTHSHORE YMCA	425 485 9797
SAMMAMISH COMMUNITY YMCA	425 391 4840
SNOQUALMIE VALLEY YMCA	425 256 3115
UNIVERSITY FAMILY YMCA	206 524 1400
WEST SEATTLE & FAUNTLEROY YMCA	206 935 6000
YMCA YOUTH & GOVERNMENT	360 357 3475



**YMCA OF GREATER SEATTLE**

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**YMCA Values:** Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, and Caring

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