

YMCA of the Twin Tiers - Child Abuse Prevention Policy

A foundational commitment of the YMCA of the Twin Tiers is to provide a healthy atmosphere for the growth and development of youth. Child abuse and the resulting severe effects are of primary concern to the Y.

Child abuse is the mistreatment or neglect of a child resulting in injury or harm. Because of our concern for the welfare of youth, the Y has developed standards, guidelines, and training to aid in the detection and prevention of child abuse. The YMCA of the Twin Tiers (henceforth "The YMCA") has **zero tolerance** for abuse and will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of youth in its programs. Any mistreatment or abuse by an employee or volunteer will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer service. Further, the YMCA will fully cooperate with law enforcement and child protective services throughout the investigation and resolution of mistreatment or abuse incidents.

The YMCA runs a criminal history and sex offender registry check on all employees and high access volunteers. The results of these checks may result in one's inability to become a Y employee, volunteer, or member, consistent with New York Corrections Law Article 23-A and applicable Office of Child and Family Services regulations. Staff members receive training upon hiring, and annually thereafter, in recognizing, reporting, and preventing child abuse.

The following policies are intended to assist staff in making decisions about interactions with youth. For clarification of any guideline, or to inquire about behaviors not addressed here, contact your supervisor or Human Resources.

The Y provides all youth with the highest quality services available. We are committed to creating an environment for youth that is safe, nurturing, empowering, and that promotes growth and success.

No form of abuse will be tolerated and confirmed abuse will result in immediate dismissal from our organization. All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youth, or allegations of abuse, will be taken seriously and investigated. Our organization will fully cooperate with authorities if allegations of abuse are made that require investigation.

The YMCA will review all abuse prevention policies annually and modify when appropriate as defined in the YMCA of the Twin Tiers Child Abuse Prevention Handbook.

The Child Abuse Prevention Code of Conduct for Employees and High Access Volunteers:

Note: Youth and/or child refers to anyone under the age of 18. This includes minor employees under the age of 18. For further guidance on working with minor employees, please refer to the YMCA of the Twin Tiers Child Abuse Prevention Handbook.

- 1. Youth will be treated with respect at all times.**
- 2. Youth will be treated fairly** regardless of race, color, religion, creed, sex (which includes but is not limited to gender identity or expression and the status of being transgender), national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, age, predisposing genetic characteristics, status as a victim of domestic violence, familial status, disability, family's military status or marital status, or any other dimensions of diversity.
- 3. Staff members must always be with at least two other people when with youth.** This could be two (2) staff members and one (1) youth or two (2) youth and one (1) staff member. This is known as the "rule of three."

One-on-one interactions with youth should only occur during programming under pre-authorized circumstances. The purpose of this policy is to ensure the YMCA clearly communicates expectations for employees and volunteers and gives examples of appropriate behavior when authorized one-on-one interactions occur. In those situations where one-on-one interactions are authorized, employees and volunteers should observe the following guidelines to limit the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

- Meet youth in a public place where you are in full view of others.

- Avoid physical interactions and/or affection during one-on-one interactions. If physical interactions occur, ensure appropriate physical and verbal interactions align with the YMCA's established policies and are limited to the task at hand. Immediately share the nature and extent of physical interactions that occurred during the one-on-one interaction with your supervisor after the interaction has ended.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- Inform other employees, volunteers, and/or parents/guardians that you are alone with a youth and encourage them to randomly drop in or pass by the interaction.
- To the extent possible, ensure one-on-one interactions occurring behind closed doors are scheduled in advance, take place in a room with windows or glass in the door, and/or are communicated to your supervisor.
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including physical interactions, disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted or that made you uncomfortable.

4. Staff shall not abuse or mistreat youth in any way, including, but not limited to:

- a. Physical abuse—hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints, bullying;
- b. Verbal abuse— degrading, threatening, cursing, humiliating, isolating, bullying;
- c. Sexual abuse— inappropriate touching or physical sexual contact, exposing oneself, sexually-oriented conversations;
- d. Mental abuse—shaming, humiliation, withholding kindness, isolating, bullying, being cruel;
- e. Neglect—withholding food, water, shelter, basic care, or appropriate medical attention.

No type of child abuse will be tolerated. Any abuse by a staff member will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

5. Staff members may not transport youth in their own vehicles.

6. Employees and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to youth in a way that is or could be construed by the youth or any observer as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.

Employees and volunteers must not initiate sexually oriented conversations with youth. Employees and volunteers are not permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with youth.

Any inappropriate verbal interactions by employees or volunteers towards youth is prohibited and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. The YMCA's policies for appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions include, but are not limited to:

Appropriate Verbal Interactions:

Inappropriate Verbal Interactions:

• Positive reinforcement • Appropriate jokes • Encouragement • Praise	• Name-calling • Discussing sexual encounters or showing sexual materials • Involving youth in the personal problems or issues of employees and volunteers • Flirting • Secrets • Cursing • Off-color or sexual jokes • Shaming, belittling • Oversharing personal history/stories • Derogatory or discriminatory remarks • Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate youth • Derogatory remarks about the youth or their family • Compliments relating to physique or body development
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7. Staff will not stare at or comment on youth's bodies.

8. Staff will not access, display, produce, possess, or distribute any sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, on our organization's property, equipment, or during any organization-associated program or activity.

The YMCA of the Twin Tiers is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and professional environment for all participants, members, employees, volunteers, and visitors. Employees and volunteers are prohibited from accessing, displaying, producing, possessing, or distributing pornography or other sexually explicit material while:

- On YMCA property or using YMCA-owned or YMCA-issued equipment, devices, or networks.
- Participating in any YMCA-sponsored or YMCA-associated program, activity, event, or business.

This prohibition applies regardless of whether the material is accessed, stored, or shared in print or electronic form, including on computers, mobile devices, tablets, or other electronic media. Employees and volunteers are expected to comply with this policy at all times. Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer service, and may be reported to law enforcement when required by law.

The YMCA of the Twin Tiers will communicate this policy to all employees and volunteers during onboarding and through ongoing training and policy acknowledgments. Employees and volunteers are responsible for understanding and complying with this policy.

9. Outside of the Y, staff members may not have relationships or be alone with youth whom they meet in Y programs. This includes babysitting, sleepovers, driving or riding in cars, and inviting youth to their homes.

The YMCA of the Twin Tiers strongly encourages employees and volunteers to refrain from contact with youth outside of YMCA programs, activities, and approved organizational communications. The YMCA recognizes, however, that some employees and volunteers may have legitimate pre-existing familial, social, educational, religious, or community relationships with youth and their families.

Any outside contact with youth must be appropriate, transparent, and consistent with YMCA policies and expectations regarding professional boundaries.

Permissible Outside Contact

Outside contact may occur when:

- It is part of an approved YMCA program, activity, or responsibility;
- A pre-existing familial or social relationship exists independent of YMCA participation; or
- The interaction is otherwise unavoidable and serves a legitimate purpose.

Employees and volunteers must not use their YMCA position to initiate, develop, or expand personal relationships with youth outside of approved YMCA activities. Refer to the YMCA of the Twin Tiers Child Abuse Prevention Handbook for further guidance and detail.

10. Staff will not engage in any inappropriate electronic communication with youth.

Electronic Communication and Social Media Policy Pertaining to Youth

The terms “electronic communications” and “social media” or “social network” refer to activities that integrate technology, telecommunications, and social interaction using words, images, video, or audio tools. Examples include, but are not limited to: social websites, blogs, message boards, wikis, podcasts, image- and video-sharing sites, text and voice chat platforms for gaming, live webcasting, and real-time web communities. Additionally, sending text messages between two or more mobile phones or fixed or portable devices over a phone or wireless network is included within these definitions.

Employees and volunteers are expected to abide by the following guidelines regarding electronic communication:

- Employees and volunteers are prohibited from sending text messages to youth and/or replying to text messages from a youth. If a youth attempts to communicate with an employee or volunteer via text, a supervisor must be notified immediately.
- All e-mail communications with youth who are minors must be directed to the youth’s parents/guardians and should be done using an organizational email instead of a personal email. The YMCA may also designate an employee to be copied on all electronic communication with youth. Employees and volunteers are prohibited from all other forms of electronic communications and instant messaging with youth.
- Employees and volunteers are prohibited from communicating with youth using social networks, including direct messaging through social media and gaming platforms.
- Personal social media accounts and blogs of employees and volunteers are encouraged to be private and inaccessible to youth. Employees and volunteers with profiles on social media sites may not request to be friends with or follow youth or approve friend/follow requests from youth.

11. Staff will not have secrets with youth.

12. Staff members may not single out youth for favored attention or gift giving. Staff members may only give gifts to youth or their parents or guardians under limited circumstances as defined in the YMCA of the Twin Tiers Child Abuse Prevention Handbook.

13. Staff will only display appropriate forms of physical contact which must be observed by others. Program rules and boundaries must be followed, including appropriate touch guidelines. Any inappropriate physical contact by employees or volunteers towards youth is prohibited and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Appropriate Physical Interactions:

Inappropriate Physical Interactions:

Contact initiated by the youth such as: • Side hugs • Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs • Pats on the shoulder or back • Handshakes • High-fives and fist bumps • Pats on the head when culturally appropriate • Touching hands, shoulders, and arms • Arms around shoulders • Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations) • Asking for permission before touching or guiding in how to do an activity (such as fastening safety equipment or showing how to swing a golf club)	• Full-frontal hugs • Kisses • Showing affection in isolated areas or while one-on-one • Lap sitting • Wrestling • Piggyback rides • Tickling • Allowing a youth to cling to an employee’s or volunteer’s leg • Allowing youth, older than 5 years of age to sit on an employee or volunteer’s lap • Any type of massage given by or to a youth outside of accepted and documented medical treatment • Any form of affection that is unwanted by the youth or the employee or volunteer • Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas that is outside authorized and documented personal care assistance
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14. Youth may not be disciplined by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.

15. Staff members may not date or become romantically involved with youth.

16. Staff will not use or be under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or inappropriately used prescription drugs in the presence of youth.

17. Under no circumstances should staff members release youth to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other adult authorized by the parent or guardian (authorization on file with the Y).

18. Staff members are to make sure the restroom is not occupied by unknown individuals before allowing youth to use the facilities. Staff members will stand in the doorway of the restroom while youth are using the restroom. This policy allows privacy for the youth and protection for the staff members. If staff members are assisting younger youth, doors to the facility must remain open. No youth, regardless of age, should be allowed to enter a bathroom alone on a field trip or at other off-site locations. Always follow the “rule of three” (refer to number three (3) above).

19. The Y will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one youth by another youth. Conduct by youth that rises to the level of abuse, mistreatment, or sexual activity will result in intervention or disciplinary action, up to and including, dismissal from the program. In addition, the YMCA will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, the YMCA will take the necessary steps to eliminate such behavior.

20. The Y will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying either by or to a youth, and either by or to a staff member or third-party individual at the Y, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior.

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:

1. Physical bullying – when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
2. Verbal bullying – when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names.
3. Nonverbal or relational bullying – when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip. This type of bullying also includes intimidating another person by using gestures.
4. Cyberbullying – the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technological tool, including but not limited to email, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or website postings (including blogs). Cyberbullying can involve:
 - Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.
 - Posting sensitive, private information about another person.
 - Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad.
 - Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
 - Hazing – an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person regardless of that person’s willingness to participate.
 - Sexualized bullying – when bullying involves behaviors that are sexual in nature. Examples of sexualized bullying behaviors include sexting, bullying that involves exposures of private body parts, and verbal bullying involving sexualized language or innuendos.

Anyone who sees an act of bullying and who then encourages it is engaging in bullying. This policy applies to all youth, staff, and volunteers. All staff members must immediately report unresolved incidents or suspected incidents of bullying to a supervisor.

21. All staff must follow state-specific mandatory reporting requirements. Staff will be trained at the time of hiring and annually to be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse. Staff will:

1. Be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse. Staff will be trained to recognize these signs during required training.
2. Know and follow organization policies and procedures that protect youths against abuse.
3. Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state-mandated reporter laws.
4. Staff members are to report anyone who violates any part of this Child Abuse Prevention Policy or the Child Abuse Prevention Code of Conduct for Employees and High Access Volunteers to their supervisor, next level of supervision, Human Resources and/or Praesidium’s Anonymous Helpline at 855.347.0751. Staff members who observe or otherwise learn or become aware of abuse or suspected abuse, and who do not report it, will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination.

22. Staff members are required to read and sign all policies related to identifying, documenting, and reporting child abuse, and to complete annual Child Abuse Prevention Training.

23. The YMCA takes every allegation of abuse or misconduct seriously and will fully cooperate with authorities to investigate all cases of alleged abuse or misconduct. Employees and volunteers shall cooperate with any external investigation by outside authorities or any internal investigation conducted by the YMCA or individuals specifically given investigative authority by the YMCA of the Twin Tiers. Investigative authority may only be granted by the CEO of the YMCA of the Twin Tiers.

YMCA of the Twin Tiers

Child Abuse Prevention Policy & Code of Conduct Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the **YMCA of the Twin Tiers Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Child Abuse Prevention Code of Conduct for Employees and High Access Volunteers**.

I understand that the YMCA of the Twin Tiers is committed to providing a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment for all youth and maintains **zero tolerance for child abuse, neglect, mistreatment, or inappropriate behavior involving youth**.

By signing this acknowledgment, I confirm that:

- I have read and understand the Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Code of Conduct and agree to comply with all requirements, standards, boundaries, and expectations contained within them.
- I understand that these requirements apply to my interactions with youth during YMCA programs and activities, as well as to applicable interactions, communications, and relationships outside of YMCA programs.
- I understand my responsibility to maintain appropriate boundaries with youth, including requirements related to supervision, physical contact, verbal interactions, electronic communications and social media, transportation, and interactions outside of the YMCA.
- I have been informed of my **legal and ethical duty to recognize and report suspected child abuse, neglect, or mistreatment** and understand that I must follow all applicable state mandatory reporting requirements.
- I understand that I must promptly report suspected abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities when required by law and follow YMCA reporting procedures.
- I understand that I am also required to report known or suspected violations of the YMCA's Child Abuse Prevention Policy or Code of Conduct through the appropriate YMCA reporting channels.
- I understand that I must cooperate fully with any internal or external investigation involving allegations or concerns of child abuse, neglect, mistreatment, or violations of this policy.
- I understand that I am responsible for asking my supervisor or Human Resources for clarification if I am uncertain about any requirement of this policy, an appropriate boundary with a youth, or my reporting responsibilities.
- I understand that failure to comply with the Child Abuse Prevention Policy or Code of Conduct, including failure to report suspected abuse, neglect, mistreatment, or policy violations as required, may result in corrective or disciplinary action, **up to and including termination of employment or termination of my volunteer relationship with the YMCA**.

My signature below confirms my acknowledgment and agreement to comply with these requirements. I understand that signing this form does not replace my responsibility to know and follow the Child Abuse Prevention Policy, Code of Conduct, applicable YMCA procedures, and applicable mandatory reporting laws.

Employee/Volunteer Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____