

## Introduction

SEA programs must take seriously their responsibility to prevent and address sexual harassment and abuse of students. According to the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be the victim of abuse before they reach age 18. Our programs must make every reasonable effort to prevent abuse from occurring in our programs, and must prepare staff members to identify and report suspected abuse that occurs within and outside of our programs. This guide offers information on what organizations can do to prevent and address harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse in their programs.

## Overview

Below is a list of the five actions programs can take to help protect their students from sexual harassment and abuse by staff and volunteers.

- Have a robust screening process
- Have clear organizational policies and procedures
- Train staff and volunteers
- Ensure adequate supervision
- Report suspicions and knowledge of abuse

This guide expands on these actions in the following section.

## Organization Responsibilities

### Have a Robust Screening Process

Organizations should have a multi-faceted screening process when hiring staff members.

- Conduct a criminal and sexual offender background check
- Conduct at least three reference checks
- Conduct at least one personal interview
- Include a voluntary disclosure statement in the application
- Verify previous work history
- Do not make exceptions for people known by staff employees or with whom staff employees have worked in the past

All volunteers, should also undergo a screening process. Depending on their level of interaction with students and the level of supervision by other staff members, volunteers may need to undergo the same level of screening as staff members. At a minimum, for volunteers who only work with groups under the full-time supervision of staff members, the organization should:

- Conduct a criminal and sexual offender background check
- Include a voluntary disclosure statement in the application

In addition to this screening, staff members and volunteers should be trained and supervised. See below for more details.

### **Have Clear Organizational Policies and Procedures**

Organizations should have a written policy that clearly states that inappropriate conduct with students is not allowed, and explains how the organization will prevent and address it.

This policy should:

- Define sexual misconduct (e.g., sexual assault or violence, stalking including cyberstalking, etc.)
- Explicitly identify inappropriate behaviors, including general bullying and hazing
- Identify to whom and how staff members, students, and parents can report suspicions or knowledge of abuse or harassment. Provide multiple avenues for complaint
- Outline state laws and organizational procedures for reporting abuse
- Outline procedures for investigating claims of abuse, such as placing a staff member on leave of absence during an investigation (Do not conduct your own investigation)
- Clarify that attempts by staff members to mediate or solve situations on their own involving adult harassment or abuse of students are not appropriate.

Organizations should be thoughtful when creating their policies. For example, organizations should consider what their policies are regarding the following situations.

Are these situations acceptable? If so, are there guidelines to help staff navigate appropriate boundaries in these situations?

- Staff interactions with students outside of regular programming
- Staff phone and text conversations with students
- Staff contact with students on social media
- Staff transportation of students
- Staff one-on-one interactions with students
- Staff physical contact with students (hugs, pats on back, physical touching when coaching, etc.)
- Staff making comments about a student's attire, body, or physical attributes

### **Train Staff and Volunteers**

Organizations should train employees in organizational policies and procedures regarding inappropriate behavior, how to identify signs of abuse and neglect, and how to address or respond to such situations when they occur.

- All staff members and volunteers should review the organization's policy annually, and should sign a statement saying that they have received and reviewed the policy.

- ❑ All staff members should be trained in how to identify and report signs of harassment and abuse.

- ❑ All staff member should receive training on mandatory reporting obligations.

Trainings should be interactive, with an opportunity for participants to ask questions, and should be tailored to a review of the organization’s relevant policies and practices.

### **Ensure Adequate Supervision**

Many allegations of harassment and abuse come from times when students are not directly engaged in structured program time, such as in the locker rooms, during individual coaching or tutoring sessions, on overnight trips and homestays, and when traveling. Below are some ways your organization can be vigilant during these vulnerable times.

- ❑ Be aware of high-risk times and locations, and have policies and procedures to reduce your risk.

- ❑ Ensure the ratio of staff to students is age appropriate (See [American Camping Association](#) guidelines for adequate supervision of day and overnight activities)

- ❑ Encourage all staff and volunteers to actively engage with students in public spaces during unstructured program times to help ensure adequate supervision.

- ❑ Ensure that supervisory staff conduct program observations and enforce program policies and procedures.

### **Report Suspicions and Knowledge of Abuse**

All SEA member program staff and volunteers are mandated reporters. While state mandated reporting laws vary, a federal law passed in February 2018 ([S.534 - Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017](#)) mandates that amateur sports organizations which participate in an interstate or international amateur athletic competition and whose membership includes any adult who is in regular contact with an amateur athlete who is a minor, must:

- Comply with the reporting requirements of the Victims of Child Abuse Act

- Establish reasonable procedures to limit one-on-one interactions between an amateur athlete who is a minor and an adult

- Offer and provide consistent training to adult members who are in contact with amateur athletes who are minors

- Prohibit retaliation

The reporting requirements of the [Victims Child Abuse Act](#) require that any adult who is authorized by an amateur sports organization to interact with youth must report child abuse and neglect.

## Additional Resources

- ❑ [Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-Serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures](#) - A guide by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- ❑ [34 USC Ch. 203: Victims of Child Abuse](#) and [S.534 - Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017](#) - Federal laws that mandate that amateur sports organizations must have training and policies to prevent, and must report, child abuse.
- ❑ [SafeSport Fact Sheet](#) - A document that outlines the changes to federal law made by the SafeSport Authorization Act of 2017.
- ❑ [Sexual Harassment: It's Not Academic](#). A guide by the U.S. Department of Education and the Office of Civil Rights that defines sexual harassment and outlines steps for responding to it.
- ❑ [Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect](#). The US Department of Health and Human Services website with information about how to report suspected child abuse and neglect.
- ❑ [Developing Criminal Background Thresholds](#). A guide by the American Camping Association designed for camps and youth-serving organizations.
- ❑ [Child Abuse Prevention Resources](#). Guidance and resources from the American Camping Association.
- ❑ [Safe to Compete](#). A summary by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children for how to create a cohesive and effective child sexual abuse prevention program.