



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# CREATING A CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENT

PREVENTING ABUSE WHEN  
YOUR CHILD IS NOT WITH YOU

YMCA OF GREATER SEATTLE



## The YMCA of Greater Seattle commitment to abuse prevention

We want all children and teens to be safe. Unfortunately, child abuse does exist, including physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect.

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

**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.

### We take these steps to keep your child safe:

- ✓ We thoroughly screen staff and volunteers, including completing criminal background checks.
- ✓ We train our staff in abuse prevention.
- ✓ 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.

*We believe that quality programs for youth require open, ongoing communication between families and staff.*

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

## Here's how we can work together to keep your child safe

**Talk to your child** about his or her experiences in YMCA programs, school, sports and other activities.

### Drop in on your child's programs.

**Trust your instincts.** Don't wait to tell us if something seems "strange." Speak up!

### Watch for warning signs of abuse:

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

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

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

- 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?

**Encourage your child to tell** you or another trusted adult if anything happens to him or her.

**Read our staff Abuse Prevention Rules.** If it's not posted at your YMCA, ask to see it. If someone breaks a rule, let us know immediately.

## We encourage youth to tell and get help

Staff have occasional discussions with children and teens 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. We encourage children to tell an adult if someone is bothering them or touching them in a way they don't like. The main message is about respect, one of the YMCA's core values. Children and teens are taught to respect themselves and give respect to others.

## The YMCA of Greater Seattle Personal Safety Message

**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.**

A copy of a sample discussion format of the Personal Safety Talk is available at your YMCA. If you have any questions or would like to see the discussion materials, please feel free to contact your YMCA program director or the YMCA of Greater Seattle risk management director at 206-382-5085.

## Responding to a child or teen who discloses abuse to you

Your child or teen may share a past or current situation of abuse with you. Here is a good way to respond.

**Stay calm.** Avoid overreacting or expressing shock or outrage.

**Listen.** Allow him or her to talk freely. Be sensitive to vague disclosures.

**Be supportive.** Let your child know you believe him or her. Tell your child he or she was right to tell you. Express your love in words and gestures.

**Assure your child** the abuse was not his or her fault. Avoid questions that could make your child feel responsible, such as "Why didn't you tell me before?"

**Reassure your child** that you will do everything you can to keep him or her safe.

### Steps to take

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Talk to your YMCA Program Director for assistance.
- ✓ Call Child Protective Services (CPS) or the police to report any abuse.

### Local CPS office numbers are:

1-866-END-HARM

or

1-866-363-4276

## If you have questions or concerns about preventing abuse, contact the YMCA of Greater Seattle risk management director, human resources department, 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
Human Resources	206-382-5035

Auburn Valley YMCA	253-833-2770
Bellevue Family YMCA	425-746-9900
YMCA Camping Services	206-382-5009
Coal Creek YMCA	425-282-1500
Dale Turner YMCA	206-363-0446
Downtown Seattle YMCA	206-382-5000
Lake Heights Family YMCA	425-644-8417
Matt Griffin YMCA	206-244-5880
Meredith Mathews East Madison YMCA	206-322-6969
Metrocenter YMCA	206-382-5013
Northshore YMCA	425-485-9797
Sammamish Family YMCA	425-391-4840
University Family YMCA	206-524-1400
West Seattle & Fauntleroy Family YMCA	206-935-6000
YMCA Youth & Government	360-357-3475

YMCA of Greater Seattle  
909 Fourth Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98104  
206-382-5003 Fax 206-382-7283  
www.seattleyymca.org

**YMCA Values:**  
**Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, and Caring...Everyday!**

*Special thanks and credit to Praesidium, Inc. a nationally recognized abuse prevention consulting company.*



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
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# CREATING A TEEN SAFE ENVIRONMENT

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## WHAT A TEEN CAN DO TO PROTECT AGAINST ABUSE

You deserve respect. You have the right to only be touched in ways that are acceptable and respectful to you. You have the right and responsibility to protect yourself and to be safe.

- ✓ Report—don't retaliate
- ✓ Ask for help from an adult when you need it
- ✓ Educate yourself about abuse
- ✓ Participate in setting group norms
- ✓ Stay together—do not change the ratio of the group
- ✓ Be honest, be open—communicate about your own needs and boundaries
- ✓ Help monitor group norms between peers.

## WHAT A PARENT CAN DO TO HELP PROTECT A TEEN AGAINST ABUSE

Teen sometimes harass and abuse their peers. Teens who are different from their peers are more likely to be targeted for this treatment. The YMCA works to create an atmosphere of acceptance and celebration of all differences.

Ask about the YMCA's rules. Question if what you see or hear happening is not consistent with these rules.

Be aware of the following possible signs of abuse:

- ✓ Sudden dissatisfaction with the program
- ✓ Sudden change of friends, daily routine, eating habits, dress or language
- ✓ Significant decline in performance
- ✓ Vague disclosures, such as not wanting to be with someone or being treated differently by peers, staff or volunteers
- ✓ Servitude—serving or doing things for others outside of normal limits
- ✓ Unexplained injuries
- ✓ Loss of possessions to someone, or receiving gifts from someone.

Talk with your teen. Young people are six times more likely to report abuse if you ask a specific question. We encourage you to ask questions like those listed in the YMCA's abuse prevention brochure for families.

## WHAT THE YMCA DOES TO PREVENT ABUSE

The YMCA creates an environment that is safe and works to prevent social, physical and emotional peer-to-peer abuse. To do this, we:

- ✓ Structure activities to minimize potential opportunities for peer-to-peer abuse
- ✓ Set ground rules for appropriate group behavior
- ✓ Work with teens to develop appropriate group norms
- ✓ Discourage exclusive relationships
- ✓ Structure activities around YMCA core values
- ✓ Follow program standards
- ✓ Require staff and volunteers to attend trainings specifically designed for those working in teen programs
- ✓ Discourage bullying
- ✓ Encourage youth to set personal boundaries
- ✓ Monitor program quality
- ✓ Ask specific questions of teens to check for potential abuse situations
- ✓ Document injuries, accidents and incidents
- ✓ Prohibit drugs, alcohol, tobacco or pornography in our programs
- ✓ Discourage public displays of peer-to-peer intimate affection
- ✓ Balance supervision while allowing independence
- ✓ Provide multiple avenues for teens to report abuse or harassment.

## RESOURCES FOR HELP

Teen Link, 206-461-4922, a confidential helpline for teens, 6:00-10:00pm every night

24-Hour Crisis Line, 206-461-3222 or toll-free 1-866-4CRISIS, for immediate help at any time

Community Information Line, 206-461-3200 or 1-800-621-4636, Mon-Fri, 8:00am-6:00pm, for information and referrals for community resources in King County.