

# PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE PARENT EDUCATION GUIDE



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## THE Y'S COMMITMENT

The YMCA OF GREATER RICHMOND serves thousands of youth each year in youth development, aquatics, health and fitness, and various community outreach programs in the Richmond and surrounding communities.

The Y offers an environment where children learn values and positive behaviors that build strong building blocks to becoming successful adults. Our core values – caring, honesty, respect and responsibility – are part of everything we do. At the Y, children develop a community of friends and have fun in a safe, nurturing environment.

The Y understands that children today are faced with situations that may affect their safety and well-being. It is our job as a community organization to educate ourselves, our children and their parents and guardians about potential dangers in our community and to protect them from these dangers. At the Y, we ask our parents and guardians to be our partners in child abuse prevention. This Parent Education Guide seeks to equip you to be informed about child abuse and to protect your child from abuse.

## INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse and neglect can endanger or impair a child's physical or emotional health or development. We have the power to stop it and understanding the issue is the first step.

### TYPES OF ABUSE (as defined by the Virginia Department of Social Services)

- **NEGLECT** Neglecting or refusing to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, health care, or adequate supervision in relation to a child's age and level of development; knowingly leaving a child alone with a caregiver that is not related by blood or marriage to the child, and who is a registered sex offender; or abandoning a child.
- **PHYSICAL** Causing or threatening to cause a non-accidental physical or mental injury or having a child present during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a controlled substance or during the unlawful sale of such substance.
- **EMOTIONAL** A pattern of verbal assaults towards a child and/or a pattern of ignoring and indifferent behavior towards a child; or constant family conflict.
- **SEXUAL** Committing or allowing to be committed any illegal sexual act, including incest, rape, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allowing a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.
- **BULLYING** Unwanted, aggressive behavior of a peer towards another child that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

Parents have a fundamental right to raise their children, and the YMCA and the community presume that parents will act in their children's best interests. When parents do not protect their children from harm and put them at risk of abuse or neglect, the YMCA



## LOCATIONS

### Chesterfield County

CAMP THUNDERBIRD  
OUTDOOR CENTER  
CHESTER FAMILY YMCA  
MANCHESTER FAMILY YMCA  
MIDLOTHIAN FAMILY YMCA  
SWIFT CREEK FAMILY YMCA

### City of Petersburg

PETERSBURG FAMILY YMCA

### City of Richmond

10th STREET YMCA  
DOWNTOWN YMCA  
NORTHSIDE FAMILY YMCA

### Goochland County

GOOCHLAND FAMILY YMCA

### Hanover County

ATLEE STATION FAMILY YMCA  
PATRICK HENRY FAMILY YMCA

### Henrico County

CHICKAHOMINY FAMILY YMCA  
FRANK J. THORNTON YMCA  
AQUATIC CENTER  
JOHN ROLFE FAMILY YMCA  
SHADY GROVE FAMILY YMCA  
TUCKAHOE FAMILY YMCA

### Powhatan County

ELIZABETH RANDOLPH LEWIS  
POWHATAN YMCA

and the community have a right and a responsibility to intervene to protect the health and welfare of children.

**ABUSE WARNING SIGNS** Physical injuries and severe neglect are more readily detectable than the subtle, less visible injuries which result from emotional and sexual abuse and bullying. Most child abuse and neglect is not a one-time event, but more often occurs in a pattern over time. Abused children are often subject to more than one form of abuse.

### Signs common to all forms of abuse

- Fear of parents, other adults, or other peers; fear of going to a certain place
- Withdrawal, depression, anxiety, phobias, sleep disorders/problems
- Emotional and behavior extremes, including acting out or aggression toward peers, pets, other animals
- Immaturity or delays in development
- Poor peer relationships
- Poor self-image and self-care, lack of confidence
- Sudden absenteeism, decline in school performance
- Self-destructive behavior or attitudes, including suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, running away, recklessness
- Unexplainable/unidentifiable illnesses

### Signs of Neglect

- Hygiene problems and body odor as well as clothing that is the wrong size, in disrepair, dirty, or not right for the weather
- Often hungry, stockpiles food, seeks food, may even show signs of low body height and weight and even malnutrition
- Often tired, sleepy, listless
- Talks about caring for younger siblings, not having a caregiver at home
- Untreated medical and dental problems, incomplete immunizations
- Truancy, frequently incomplete homework, frequent changes of school

### Signs of Physical Abuse

- Visible and severe injuries on different surfaces of the body, unexplained or explained in a way that doesn't make sense, after weekends, vacations, school absences
- Injuries of a distinctive shape, occurring frequently, or are at different stages of healing
- Wearing long sleeves out of season

### Signs of Sexual Abuse

- Difficulty sitting or walking; bowel problems or bleeding; bruises, pain, swelling, itching of genital area; frequent urinary tract

## Sexual offenders are:

- Family members: 30%
- Someone the child knows and trust: 60%
- Another juvenile: 70%



infections or yeast infections; and/or any sexually transmitted disease or related symptoms

- Refuses to talk about a secret he/she has with an adult
- Develops special relationship with older friend that may include unexplained money, gifts, or privileges
- Inappropriate/adult-like knowledge, drawings, or play about sexual behavior

The YMCA strives to protect our children from all forms of abuse. The YMCA of Greater Richmond and the YMCA of the USA with its partner organization, Praesidium, have worked to increase awareness of ways to recognize and prevent child sexual abuse.

### How Sexual Offenders Behave

In addition to the warning signs our children may exhibit, sexual offenders have common characteristics. An offender may groom a child for abuse by pushing physical, emotional and behavioral boundaries. An offender may also groom persons in the community, working to build friendships and trust with a child and his/her parents. The warning signs are:

- Excessive touching with physical contact games, backrubs, tickling or wrestling, even when a child resists
- Inappropriate conversation, like talking about a child's developing body, discussion of specific sexual acts or explicit sexual language, or even spending excessive time e-mailing, texting or calling children
- Showing favoritism to a certain child with gifts/money, performing special favors to the child and/or family or doing things for the child that the parents may not be able to do, or taking a child to activities or on special outings
- Sexualized behavior, including engaging in sexually harassing behavior online or in person
- Pattern of rule breaking/thinking the rules do not apply to them like exposing kids to inappropriate activities (e.g. drugs) and allowing children to break parent rules (e.g. smoking, staying up late)

It is challenging to think of children and adolescents we know as capable of sexually abusing others. Children, particularly young children, may engage in inappropriate interactions without understanding the hurtful impact it has on others.

It is particularly important for parents and guardians to recognize the warning signs of any of the forms of abuse because children find it difficult or scary to tell an adult in words.

**Real prevalence of child abuse is not known because so many victims do not disclose or report their abuse. 90% of children will never tell anyone.**



### Why Children Do Not Tell

- Are not aware it is abuse.
- Afraid no one will believe them.
- Afraid that this news will hurt parents.
- Are protecting the offender that they care about.
- Hopes if they are “good enough”, the abuse will stop.
- Afraid to tell because of the offender’s threat.
- Are confused by the offender’s suggestions that they enjoyed the abuse and wanted it to happen (for Sexual Abuse).

### CHILD PROTECTION AT THE Y

The Y does not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of children in its programs by an adult or the mistreatment or abuse of one child by another child, including any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying. Staff, volunteers, and the children in our programs are expected to act in a caring, honest, respectful, and responsible manner. Staff and volunteers abide by a Child Protection Code of Conduct, parts of which are listed below. For the full Code, check out the Child Protection webpages at [ymcarichmond.org](http://ymcarichmond.org).

#### Staff and Volunteer Expectations

- Never leave a child unsupervised. Staff and volunteers must maintain Sight and Sound supervision for children placed in their care.
- At no time during a Y program may a staff member or volunteer be alone with a single child where others cannot observe him/her.
- Conduct or supervise the following private activities in pairs: putting on bathing suits, changing clothes, taking showers, etc. When this is not feasible, be positioned so they are visible to others.
- Ensure that suspicious or unknown individuals are not occupying the restroom before allowing children to use the facilities and stand in the doorway while children are using the restroom to ensure no inappropriate behavior happens between children.
- Respect children’s rights to not be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable and their right to say “no.” Other than diapering, children are not to be touched on areas of their bodies that would be covered by a bathing suit. The Y encourages high fives and side hugs!

- Refrain from intimate displays of affection towards others in the presence of children, parents, volunteers and staff.
- Profanity, inappropriate jokes, sharing intimate details of one’s personal life, and all forms of harassment are prohibited.
- Shall not abuse children physically, emotionally, sexually nor neglect children. Any type of abuse or neglect will not be tolerated and will be cause for immediate dismissal.
- Use positive techniques of guidance, including redirection, positive reinforcement and encouragement rather than competition, comparison and criticism. Have age appropriate expectations and set up guidelines and environments that minimize the need for discipline. Physical restraint is used only in situations where it is necessary to protect the child or other children from harm.
- Ensure that children in our programs are observing the same rules of appropriate touch and talk by which our staff and volunteers abide. We generally have a “keep your hands to yourself” rule and promote our Y values to the children we serve.
- Treat all reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with children or allegations of abuse very seriously. Y staff are mandated reporters and report any suspicions of abuse to Child Protective Services.
- Staff and volunteers are prohibited from being alone with children outside of Y activities when their only relationship with the children or family is through the Y. This includes prohibitions against babysitting members of the Y who staff know through the Y.
- Not to transport children in their own personal vehicles except in cases of emergency and with the approval of administration.
- Communication between children and staff via social media, e-mail and phones must involve YMCA business and must not be personal (e.g. sharing emotional issues, seeking more than a client relationship, etc.) in nature. E-mail and social media communications must be on Y-supported, sponsored, or approved sites only. Y staff may not use their personal social media or e-mail accounts to contact children who they know through the Y.
- Leave photography and videos of children to the Y experts. Only select leadership staff are permitted to obtain images of Y children and only for Y business.
- Provide gifts to ALL children in their program (or not at all) and only with the permission of their staff supervisor.

#### Additional Y Child Protection Procedures

- Thorough staff and volunteer screening and selection procedures
- Staff and volunteer training and re-training on abuse prevention and reporting on abuse or inappropriate behavior between adults and children as well as between children.
- Abuse prevention curriculum for children in youth development programs

## PROTECTING YOUR CHILD

### Parents as Y Partners

At the Y, we ask parents to be partners in child abuse prevention by:

- Reading this flier so you are equipped to recognize and address abuse,
- Stopping by our programs to observe and talk with staff,
- Talking to your child about his or her experiences in the YMCA programs (as well as school, sports and other activities),
- Trusting your instincts. Don't wait to tell us if something seems "strange". Speak up.

### Open Communication

Open communication with your child on serious topics, like abuse, in an environment that encourages your child to share his or her views or concerns often means your child will be more likely to come to you for help and be equipped to respond appropriately to attempted abuse. Really listen. Here are some talking points:

- **Boundaries** Review rules about boundaries, both in the privacy of your home and outside the home, and how to know when someone is violating them. Instruct your child that they do have the right to say "NO", even to a family member or friend; your child can choose who he or she wants to hug or kiss.
- **Intuition** Instruct your child to listen to their intuition. If it does not feel right, it probably isn't!
- **Secrets** Explain the difference between Safe Secrets (will the surprise at the end make someone happy, secrets that bring good to you and others) v. Unsafe Secrets (secrets that make you feel bad or they hurt you or someone else). Instruct your child that, if someone tells you to keep a secret from you, you want to know.
- **How to Stop Abuse Before It Happens** Teach your child various phrases to tell the offender to stop, like: I'm not supposed to do that; That's against my family rules; I can't; My parents would be mad at me. Teach them to walk away.
- **Safe Adults** If abuse were to occur, instruct your child who a safe person to tell is: family, a Y staff member, friends, teachers, coaches. Help your child to understand that you want them to come to you if someone makes them feel bad or sad, and that you will believe and help them and that they will not get in trouble.

### Internet Safety

Children and adolescents are naturally curious about sex. Adolescents questioning their sexuality are even more at risk, as they may go online with the intent of finding support and companionship. By acting as guides, predators can exploit this curiosity or vulnerability and gradually lure children into sexual activity. To prevent abuse via the internet:

- Set limits before allowing your child to go online anywhere.
- Keep computers in a high traffic area of your home.
- View your child's browsing history by pushing CTRL+SHIFT+H to see history or look for the History tab to Show All History.
- Set parental and safe search controls on all electronics.
- Review cell phone records for unknown numbers and late night calls/ texts.
- Become knowledgeable of which social networks, apps, instant messaging, e-mail, gaming, blogging and webcams your child is using and who your child communicates with via these portals.

For more information how to protect your child in the Internet, check out these resources:

- [netsmartz.org](http://netsmartz.org)
- [commonsensemedia.org/articles/online-safety](http://commonsensemedia.org/articles/online-safety)
- [noslang.com/parents.ph](http://noslang.com/parents.ph)

### What to Do if You Suspect Abuse or a Child Makes a Disclosure

If your child discloses that someone hurt, scared, or made him or her feel uncomfortable, stay calm and listen. Your reaction has a powerful influence on your child! Do not react with anger and disbelief, as they may feel shame or guilt and shut down. Instead, believe your child and make sure your child knows you believe them, thank your child for telling you and praise their courage for speaking up. To report suspected child abuse:

- **If you have any questions or concerns about Y staff or volunteers, or another program participant, you can:**
  - Report concerns to Y staff.
  - Call the YMCA Safety Line 804.474.4345. (This is a voicemail. Please leave a message and the Y will get back to you.), or
  - Email [ethics@ymcarichmond.org](mailto:ethics@ymcarichmond.org) or, to contact the Executive Leadership of the YMCA, e-mail [executiveleadershipteam@ymcarichmond.org](mailto:executiveleadershipteam@ymcarichmond.org).
  - Report anonymously in the Child Protection webpages at [ymcarichmond.org](http://ymcarichmond.org)
- **Community Resources:**
  - Virginia Child Protection Services (CPS) 1.800.522.7096
  - For reports of immediate danger, call local law enforcement at 911.
  - Sex Offender Registry: <http://sex-offender.vsp.virginia.gov/sor/>
  - YMCA Child Protection webpages at [ymcarichmond.org](http://ymcarichmond.org)

