

Child Abuse and Neglect-Volunteers

BGCMT is required to report all suspicions of child abuse, neglect, or endangerment immediately. Volunteers are obligated to report any information to BGCMT staff. In no way should any suspicion of abuse be overlooked or unreported. Volunteers should notify BGCMT Staff immediately when abuse or neglect is suspected.

The following information is a general reference for volunteers to familiarize themselves with the indicators of abuse and neglect. Due to individual differences in how children cope with maltreatment, not all of the signs will be present in all victims. Furthermore, not all children with symptoms commonly associated with abuse are the victims of abuse or neglect.

Abuse

Abuse is an overt act, whether intentional or not, that may injure or otherwise cause harm to a child.

Physical abuse refers to an injury to the child by an adult caused by hitting, kicking, biting, punching, burning or otherwise causing trauma to the child. The adult may not have intended to harm the child, but the injury is not accidental. If a child is the victim of physical abuse, other forms of abuse are likely to have occurred; emotional abuse is nearly always present when another form of abuse has been substantiated.

Emotional abuse refers to actions by parents or caretakers that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders. Emotional abuse also includes threats that cause extreme fear in the child and the use of extreme or bizarre forms of punishment (such as confining a child in a dark closet), even if the child does not show evidence of harm.

Sexual abuse refers to any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors, when one exerts power over the other. It is forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act.

Sexual exploitation usually refers to forms of sexual abuse involving child prostitution or child pornography.

Once a child is old enough to walk unassisted, some bruises and scrapes can be expected as part of normal childhood activities. Normal cuts and abrasions are generally located on the leading edges of the body, such as shins, knees, palms and elbows. The outward signs of physical abuse, however, are not typical of the normal wear and tear of childhood and may include the following:

Unexplained bruises and welts:

- on face, lips, or mouth
- on torso, abdomen, back, neck, buttocks, or thighs
- on upper arms (where tightly gripped)
- in various stages of healing (of different colors)

- that appear clustered, forming regular patterns that reflect the shape of the article used to inflict pain, or damage (for example: electric cord, belt buckle, hand or fist)
- on several different surface areas
- regularly appearing after absences or vacation

Unexplained burns:

- cigar or cigarette burns, especially on soles, palms, back, or buttocks
- burns from being immersed in hot liquid (sock-like, glove-like or doughnut shaped burns on buttocks or genitals)
- patterned like an electric burner, iron, radiator grate, or some other object
- rope burns on arms, legs, neck, or torso

Unexplained fractures:

- to skull, nose or facial structure
- in various stages of healing
- multiple or repetitive fractures
- spiral fractures, from forcefully jerking or twisting the arms
- swollen or tender limbs

There are other explanations for some indicators of abuse. However, when no plausible explanation for a child's injuries exist or when a child's behavior undergoes dramatic changes, abuse or neglect may be the cause. In no way, should any suspicion be overlooked or unreported.

As a volunteer, it is not your responsibility to investigate, but it is your responsibility to notify adult staff before leaving the building for the day.

Neglect

Child neglect is the failure to provide for the basic needs of the child when resources are available. It is important to distinguish between willful neglect and a parent or caretaker's failure to provide for the child because of poverty or cultural norms. State laws often distinguish several types of neglect.

Physical neglect includes refusal or delay in seeking health care (often called medical neglect), abandonment, providing inadequate supervision, and expulsion from home or not allowing a runaway to return home.

Educational neglect includes permitting chronic truancy, failing to enroll a child of mandatory school age in an approved educational program and inattention to special educational needs.

Emotional neglect includes chronic or extreme spouse abuse in the child's presence, permitting drug or alcohol abuse by the child and refusing or failing to provide needed psychological care.

Unless a case is severe, it may be difficult to prove that the child is being neglected. If this is true, a child protective services agency may not be able to help the family. However, Club staff has a responsibility to report suspected neglect, whether or not they think the authorities will be able to help. Here are some signs of physical or emotional neglect:

- consistent hunger, poor hygiene or inappropriate dress
- chronically unattended physical problems or medical needs
- begging, stealing food
- extended stays at school or at the Club (early arrival and late departure)
- constant fatigue, listlessness, or falling asleep
- child reports that there is no caretaker in the home

Often the scars of abuse and neglect are emotional, rather than physical. These may manifest themselves in behaviors that are outside the norm. The following are examples of behaviors that may indicate abuse or neglect:

- little or no ability to concentrate, to listen, to play
- antisocial or destructive behavior (e.g. damaging property, deliberately breaking equipment or toys, etc.)
- social withdrawal, introversion
- behavior that is not age-appropriate: overly adult or overly childish; pants wetting or not going to the bathroom at the appropriate time
- promiscuity
- attempted suicide
- premature alcohol or drug use
- theft or runaway behavior

Handling Abuse Disclosure from a Club Member

Children and teens may disclose sexual or physical abuse in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, direct disclosure is one of the least common ways for children to disclose abuse. The following are more common ways that children and youth disclose that they are being abused.

As youth prepare to tell you something, they may start with, “do you promise not to tell anyone?” An honest response is, “I can’t promise, but I will keep what you tell me as private as I can. Sometimes I might need to get help from a staff member or other professional to help keep you safe.”

- **Indirect hints:** (*"My brother wouldn't let me sleep last night." "Mr. Jones wears funny underwear." "Daddy is trying to poison me." "My baby-sitter keeps bothering me."*)

A youth may use indirect terms because she/he hasn't learned more specific vocabulary, feels too ashamed or too embarrassed to talk more directly, has promised not to tell, or a combination of these reasons. Gently encourage him/her to be more specific within the limits of her/his vocabulary. Bear in mind that in order to make a report you do not need to know exactly what form the abuse has taken place.

- **Disguised disclosure:** (*"I know someone with a touching problem." "What would happen if a girl told her mommy a grownup was touching her private parts but her mommy didn't believe her?"*)

Here a youth might be talking about a friend or sibling but is just as likely to be talking about her/himself. Encourage the youth to tell you what he/she knows about the "other child." It is probable that the youth will eventually tell you whom s/he is talking about.

- **Disclosure with strings attached:** (*"I have a secret. But if I tell you about it, you have to promise not to tell anyone else."*)

Most children are all too well aware that some negative consequences will result if they break the secret of abuse; often the offender uses the threat of these consequences to force the child to remain silent. Let the youth know you want to help her/him and that the law requires you tell a staff member if any child discloses abuse. Assure the youth that you will respect her/his need for confidentiality by not discussing the abuse with anyone other than those directly involved in the legal process such as a staff member and/or a Child Protective Services investigator. Some ways to say this are, "I am really glad you took the risk to tell someone (or "tell me"). I need to help you be safe and will need to call or tell..."

If a child discloses during an activity, do not panic or express shock. Acknowledge the child's disclosure and continue the activity. Afterwards, find a private place where you can talk with the child. Express your belief that the youth is telling the truth and you appreciate that s/he took a risk by telling you. Reassure the youth that it was right to tell someone. Remember it is not your role to investigate the situation. It is your responsibility to report the abuse to a staff member and to be supportive of the youth.

Code of Conduct for Volunteers Working With or Near Children

This agreement is intended to indicate the seriousness of your service in the Boys & Girls Clubs of Middle Tennessee. The intent of the agreement is to assure you of our deep appreciation for your service, to indicate our commitment to do the very best we can to make your volunteer experience here a productive and rewarding one, and provide a safe, positive environment for Club members and staff.

1. In order to protect Club volunteers and program participants, at no time during a Club program may a volunteer be alone with a single child where he or she cannot be observed by others. As volunteers supervise children, they should space themselves in a way that other staff members and volunteers can see them.
2. Volunteers shall never leave a child unsupervised.
3. Volunteers shall not abuse children. This includes: physical abuse (strike, spank, shake, slap); verbal abuse (humiliate, degrade, threaten); sexual abuse (inappropriate touch or verbal exchange); mental abuse (shaming, withholding kindness, cruelty); neglect (withholding food, water, basic care, etc.). Any type of abuse will not be tolerated and may be cause for immediate dismissal.
4. Volunteers must use techniques of guidance, including redirection, positive reinforcement and encouragement rather than competition and criticism. Volunteers will have age-appropriate expectations and will create guidelines and environments that minimize the need for discipline. Physical restraint is used only in predetermined situations (necessary to protect the child or other children from harm), and is only to be administered in a prescribed manner and must be documented in writing.
5. Volunteers will respond to children with respect and consideration and will treat all children equally regardless of gender, race, religion, culture, ability, etc.
6. Volunteers will respect children's right not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable and their right to say no.
7. In the performance of their service, volunteers abide by the standards of conduct set forth by the Clubs.
8. Volunteers must appear clean, neat and appropriately attired.
9. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs is prohibited.
10. Smoking or use of tobacco in the presence of children or parents in or around Club premises is prohibited.
11. Profanity, inappropriate jokes, sharing intimate details of one's personal life and any kind of harassment in the presence of children or parents are prohibited.
12. Volunteers must be free of physical and psychological conditions that might adversely affect children's physical or mental health.
13. Volunteers will portray positive role models for youth by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy, tact and maturity.
14. Volunteers are not to transport children in their own vehicles or authorized in Club vehicles.
15. Volunteers may not date program participants and are strictly prohibited from telephoning club members or meeting them away from the Club.

16. Under no circumstances should volunteers release children to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other adult authorized by the parent or guardian (written parent authorization on file with the Clubs).
17. Volunteers are required to read and sign all policies related to identifying, documenting and reporting child abuse and to attend training sessions on the subject, if required by the Clubs.
18. Volunteers will act at all times as a member of the team responsible for accomplishing the mission of the agency.
19. Volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all propriety privileged information to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a single member of the staff, another volunteer, club member or other person or involves the business of the organization.
20. I give my consent to the BGCMT to use photographs, films and sound recordings and/or images of myself for an unlimited period of time as determined by the Club.
21. The undersigned further states that he/she carefully read the Code of Conduct, understands the contents, and has signed by his/her own free act.

I understand that any violation of this code of conduct may result in termination.

Staff/Volunteer Signature

Date

Witness Signature

Date