

Counselor Handbook

Information on Child Abuse



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issues of proper conduct of staff and campers and child abuse have become of major importance. The following processes have been developed so that all staff is aware of the camp's expectations with respect to behaviour and interactions with campers, and also to give guidance in the event of complaints involving children or staff members at camp.

Child abuse is a complex matter, and staff members are not expected to be experts in this area. While Counselors have the most interaction with campers, it is important that all, including maintenance and kitchen staff, become familiar with the information in this section.

When concerns arise, Counselors and other staff should not hesitate to involve the Camp Director or Camp Manager when issues of this type arise at camp.

HOW DO WE ACT AS STAFF MEMBERS?

As staff members, we can avoid any complaints against us by acting in a reasonable manner, and avoiding situations that can be open to question or criticism. For example,

- All staff members - Directors, Speakers, Counselors in particular - need to be careful how they communicate with or touch a camper. Their actions can easily be misunderstood.
- All staff members – including Directors, Speakers, and Counselors - who wish to have private discussions with a camper should use a private yet visible area such as the dining hall or the picnic table area in front of the chapel. Avoid speaking one to one in cabins or other private areas.
- All staff members – including chore people, maintenance help, etc. - need to be mature enough to ignore the attention of the members of the opposite sex. Stay away from the cabin areas, out of washrooms etc. Excessive fraternization should be discouraged.
- All staff members should be aware that children do come to camp with problems, including abusive situations. Staff members should be familiar with the steps to take in the event that they become aware of a situation that may need intervention by the Camp Director.

WHAT DOES THE LAW REQUIRE OF US?

The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act of Alberta is the legislation that sets the requirements in the event of child abuse. This Act states in part,

4(1) Any person who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a child is in need of intervention shall forthwith report the matter to a director.

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Under the definitions of the Act, “Child” means a person under the age of 18 years and includes a youth (a child who is 16 years of age or older) unless specifically stated otherwise; The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act goes on to identify the types of situations that may require formal intervention. These include, but are not limited to:

- a child who has been or may be neglected,
- a child who has been or may be physically injured or sexually abused;
- a child who has been or may be emotionally injured,
- a child who has been or may be subjected to cruel and unusual treatment or punishment

The Meadowlodge Bible Camp board will be developing a policy around the issue of behaviour and contains detailed information regarding each of these situations. The policy will be made available to all Camp Directors.

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT CHILD ABUSE?

From time to time staff members do become aware of information that leads them to suspect there may be child abuse taking place. It is important that Counselors do not try to handle these types of situations on their own, but that they involve the Camp Director or Camp Manager as soon as possible. In turn, the Camp Director or Manager will involve the board representative assigned to the particular camp.

If there is any doubt, talk to the Camp Director or Manager.

Here are some situations that may arise.

1. If a Child comes to camp and talks of problems at home...

- Talk to them privately – not in front of the other campers.
- Ask “why” questions, not “yes/no” types of questions. Only ask enough questions to confirm that you need to talk to the Camp Director or Manager.
- Do not ask leading questions such as:
 - “- Does he / she touch you?”
 - “- Does he / she hit you?”
- *Remember that many kids are streetwise and are knowledgeable about child abuse and your questions may give them ideas.*
- Always listen carefully.
- Always tell the child that you believe them & that you will get them help.
- Do not promise that you will not tell anyone else about what is discussed.
- Speak with the Camp Director or Manager.

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2. If a child does not want to go home, or says "I'm afraid of my Dad"...

- Follow the above steps. If what they say is true, they will normally have a difficult time talking about it.

3. If a child comes to camp severely bruised (out of the ordinary)

- Speak with the Camp Director or Manager as soon as you become aware of the bruising.
- The Camp Director or Manager will call the Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-387-5437) and follow the instructions given to them. This may include calling the local RCMP.
- Have substantial information ready when you make the phone call:
 - *Full name & Date of Birth & Address & Telephone Number*
 - *Alberta Health Care Insurance Number*
 - *Details of what the child told you; Try to write it down word for word.*
- Remember, we are not to grill the child. Gather basic information and pass it on to the professionals.
- Too much questioning may actually hinder a subsequent investigation.

4. If you become aware of camper to camper bullying or abuse...

- Some of these situations may be a result of unwanted behaviour on the part of campers, rather than intentional abuse. Speak to the individuals involved and advise them as to what the camp considers proper behaviour. Often, this will address the problems.
- If the behaviour continues, speak to the Camp Director or Camp Manager for advice or more direct involvement.

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU BECOME AWARE OF A STAFF MEMBER ACTING IN AN INAPPROPRIATE MANNER?

Although this is a very difficult situation to become involved in, inappropriate behaviour must be reported to the Camp Director or Manager. Do not discuss your observations with any other staff member, including the person you have observed behaving inappropriately. You must trust the Camp Director or Manager to follow up in a manner that has in mind the best interests of the staff member.

Remember: Counselors or other staff members must go to the Camp Director or Manager with any information given to them. The Director or Manager will take any necessary action.