

YOUTH PROTECTION

- a. General. It is very difficult to accept and understand that there are people who sexually molest, abuse, or neglect children. The facts are undeniable that sexual victimization is a very serious problem. As the Young Marines Program continues to grow, units may have Young Marines who are victims of abuse and/or neglect. Registered Adults responsible for the care, the safety, and the supervision of Young Marines must report suspected abuse or neglect to proper authorities.
- b. Responsibility.
 - 1) Because state laws differ, each commanding officer is responsible for knowing and understanding the reporting requirements and procedures for their respective state and locality. In general, many states require that any "professional who is responsible for the care and supervision of children must report cases of suspected child abuse to the proper authorities." These laws carry criminal and civil penalties for failure to comply. It is recommended that commanding officers include youth protection training during unit Registered Adult Training taught by representatives from child protective or family services, local boys scout council, or law enforcement organizations.
 - 2) Suspected sexual abuse must be reported immediately. If the sexual abuse occurred in another state, the sexual abuse must still be reported. The child protective services in your state will arrange for their counterparts in the other state to investigate. Seek advice from the authorities on how best to notify the parents or legal guardian. The commanding officer shall notify the parents or legal guardian in person and in privacy with the utmost sensitivity.
 - 3) The commanding officer must report serious misconduct or criminal conduct by registered adults to the next higher authority—battalion commander, regimental commander, division commander, and the National Executive Director. All such reports will be reported to concerned military and civilian authorities—especially any criminal conduct in which the health or safety of the youth may be threatened. Violation of the Registered Adult Code of Conduct (RACC) or inappropriate behavior of any kind will not be tolerated.
- c. Four Types of Child Abuse.
 - 1) Physical Abuse. Any injury to a child under the age of 18 by a parent, caretaker, household or family member caused by hitting, kicking, biting, punching, burning, or otherwise causing trauma to the child. It may result in bruises, welts, broken bones, and internal injuries. It is often the result of extreme and inappropriate discipline. The adult may not have intended to harm the child, but the injury was not the result of an accident. This type of abuse accounts for 25 to 27 percent of reported child abuse cases.
 - 2) Neglect. The chronic failure of a parent, caretaker, household or family member to provide a child under age 18 with the basic needs for life, such as; food, clothing, shelter, medical care, attention to hygiene, educational opportunity, protection, and supervision. However, one must be careful not to confuse poverty (i.e. limited money for clothing) with neglect. Also, cultural standards differ from those prevailing in a community are not necessarily neglect. Neglect accounts for 46 to 48 percent of reported child abuse cases.
 - 3) Sexual Abuse. The exploitation of a child or adolescent under the age of 18 for the sexual gratification of an adult. Sexual abuse also occurs when a minor under 18 years old uses a child as an object of sexual gratification while temporarily taking on the adult role (e.g. a baby sitter). The behavior includes acts of intercourse (anal or vaginal penetration), fondling, exhibitionism, voyeurism, restraining a child with ropes, and the involvement of a child in prostitution or the production of pornography. Sexual Abuse accounts for 15 percent of reported cases.

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- 4) Emotional Abuse. Acts or omissions by parents or other persons responsible for the child's care such as threats, scapegoat, and belittling, including extreme forms of punishment, such as confinement of a child in a dark closet. Emotional abuse may include rejecting, isolating, terrorizing, and ignoring a child. This type of abuse accounts for 13 to 16 percent of reported child abuse cases.
- d. Child Abuser's Profile. There are three important steps to remember about who commits child abuse.
- 1) Child abuser can be anyone—they come from all ethnic, social, religious, and economic backgrounds.
 - 2) Most child abuse is committed by a person the child knows, rather than by a stranger. In fact, figures for experts indicate that the child knows the abuser in 80 to 95 of the cases.
 - 3) Never make assumptions about who abused the child because sometimes that abuser is not accurately identified until will into the investigation.
- e. Risk Factors. According to the *Child Protection: A Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Guidebook for Boys and Girls Clubs* identifies the following risk factors sometimes associated with people who commit child abuse:
- 1) Grew up as a child being abused. A significant number of abusing parents were themselves abused as children.
 - 2) Grew up in a household where the child was unwanted and ignored. Parents are more likely to be abusers if they describe their own parents as uncaring, unloving, and unable to meet needs. This factor is even more closely correlated with growing up to be an abuser than if one's own parents were abusers.
 - 3) Substance abuser. The link between substance abuse and child abuse has strengthened over the years. An alcoholic or drug-abusing caretaker seriously mistreats at least 675,000 children annually.
 - 4) Low self-esteem. Their own needs are so overwhelming that they are poorly equipped to meet the needs of their children.
 - 5) Poor social skills. They are unable to form solid relationships with relatives, neighbors, or friends.
 - 6) Isolated. Lacking social and emotional contacts and support, they are unable to ask for or accept help.
 - 7) Part of a chaotic and stress-filled household. The abuser may have inadequate coping skills, feel trapped and at the end of his or her rope.
 - 8) Chronically depressed. Chronic depression of a parent can be a cause for neglect, although the abuser and the abuser's home can give the impression of laziness and slovenliness.
 - 9) Ignorant about children's capabilities. The abuser may have unrealistic expectations for children and be uninformed about appropriate ways to discipline or instruct children.
- f. Precautions Against Child Abuse. Incorporate the following precautions as part of the unit's standard operating procedure to protect Young Marines from child abuse and Registered Adults from unfounded allegation of child abuse.
- 1) Avoid isolated situations. Most child abuse occurs when the child and the abuser are isolated from others. Follow an open door policy mandating that no registered adult shall be alone with a child in a room with closed doors, including toilets. Also prevent situations where two Young Marines are left alone.

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- 2) Make sure that transportation is adequately supervised. Limit the time a child may be alone in the bus or van with the driver. Enforce a strict schedule and prohibit the driver from making unauthorized stops with Young Marines in the vehicle.
 - 3) Be aware of custody arrangements. Do not release a child to a non-custodial parent. The custodial parent should be notified by the commanding officer of any unscheduled visits to the unit meetings and/or activities by the non-custodial parent.
 - 4) Isolation versus privacy. Take special care with toileting, showing, and sleeping arrangements to limit isolation yet provide adequate privacy.
 - 5) Set reasonable limits on physical interaction. Avoid inappropriate or questionable physical contact. Never let Young Marines sit on the lap of registered adults. Avoid activity such as back rubs.
 - 6) Discipline. Do not physically punish Young Marines. Do not restrain Young Marines except under the conditions established in the Registered Adult Code of Conduct (RACC).
 - 7) Situational Awareness. Be alert to situations where one Young Marine appears to be domineering or trying to corner or isolate another Young Marine. Sexual abuse by youth involves an unequal distribution of power.
 - 8) Supervision. Supervise Young Marines at all times.
- g. How to Respond to a Youth's Disclosure of Abuse. A calm supportive response can make the difference as to whether a child continues to suffer in silence or gets help. Follow these guidelines:
- 1) Control Your Emotions. Do not panic or overreact to your suspicions or to information disclosed by the child. If you truly are overwhelmed by what the youth is saying, take a deep breath and listen quietly but attentively.
 - 2) Believe the Child. Experts say that children rarely lie about their victimization. In fact, the fear of not being believed is the reason that many children give for not having told their stories sooner. Do not criticize the child or claim that the child misunderstood what happened.
 - 3) Don't Become the Investigator. Do not ask leading questions or try to fill in facts or details. You are not responsible for coming up with an exhaustive report or providing proof. Too many questions may confuse, scare, or misdirect a child from interviews. Do not attempt to physically examine the child.
 - 4) Respect the Young Marine's Privacy. You may need to take the child to a place where you can talk without interruptions, but should be in plain view of other adults. Do not tell other people who do not need to know about the alleged abuse.
 - 5) Show Support and Understanding. Reassure the Young Marine that he or she has done the right thing by disclosing the abuse. It is important to tell the Young Marine that he or she is safe since the child may have been threatened to keep silent. Emphasize that the Young Marine is not to blame for what happened. Thank the child for telling you and assure him or her that you will try to help. Do not, however, make promises that you cannot keep or guarantee that everything will be fine. Do not tell the Young Marine that you are going to call and make a child abuse report.
 - 6) Recognize Your Role as Reporter. Understand that you may not be hearing the complete story. The Young Marine's disclosure may evolve in a piecemeal fashion over time. Do not presume that you know the extent or length of the abuse or even the identity of the abuser. That is the job of the child protective service. Write down very carefully in detailed notes about your suspicions, your observations, and your interactions with the Young Marine. Report suspected abuse to the proper authorities as required by law.