

Preventing Child Abuse

An allegation of child abuse can be devastating to the reputation and morale of a youth program.

There are four primary steps your camp or club can take to reduce the risk of child abuse:

1. Screen staff and volunteers. Ensure that you have a fully completed application from all staff and volunteers. Check a minimum of three references and perform a criminal records/sex offender registry check.
2. Document staff training and provide written policy and procedure manuals that address all forms of child abuse, as well as appropriate staff responses. Ensure that staff and volunteers strictly adhere to your organization's policies and procedures.
3. Implement quality control measures to verify appropriate supervision by staff and volunteers, particularly around vulnerable areas such as bathrooms and cabins.
4. Effectively communicate behavior expectations to youth, parents, and contact people to whom youth can report inappropriate behaviors.

Once an allegation of abuse is made, time is critical (usually 6-8 hours maximum) for making a professional response. You can take these additional steps to help protect your organization:

- Immediately isolate the alleged perpetrator from other children. Seek medical aid for the victim, if needed.
- Contact your local child protection services (within 8 hours in most states).
- Contact the parents of the children involved. Have a prepared script for consistent communication. You may also want to prepare a script for other parents who may hear of the situation, and for the press.
- Work with the insurance company, parents, and government authorities to get all involved the help they need. The messages you want to communicate are: "We're not hiding anything", and "we care about this child's welfare."
- Feel free to contact the Markel Claims Department and discuss the situation. You can also report the incident to your insurance agent.