

## Protect Your Organization's Reputation and Assets

A sexual abuse allegation against your organization can be costly. In addition to tying up financial resources, these allegations can damage your public image and long-term survival.

One way to minimize the risk of sexual abuse allegations is through careful screening and selection of employees and volunteers. The following practices are recommended:

- Conduct thorough background checks on everyone who will have any interaction with children under age 18 and mentally/physically disabled adults, including part-timers and volunteers.
- Clearly communicate your expectations of the position, including what constitutes unacceptable behavior.
- Always conduct an in-person interview.

Based on a review of sexual abuse allegations reported to Markel, your organization should consider implementing the following policies:

- Maintain vigilant supervision during field trips and other offsite activities. Supervisors should keep their group in visual contact at all times.
- Coach staff to be on the lookout for bullying and romantic exchanges between youth, and to be prepared to intervene.
- Establish a bathroom usage policy governing the amount of time spent in a bathroom to reduce the opportunity for abuse to occur in a concealed environment.
- Reinforce that there is no such thing as a consensual relationship with a minor. Issue educational materials stating that a conviction of this illegal behavior can result in an extensive prison term, national publicity, and registration as a sex offender.
- Insist all staff and volunteers pledge to uphold a code of ethics, and hold them accountable for their actions.

The Nonprofit Risk Management Center offers these guidelines for unacceptable behavior. Employees should avoid:

- Telling sexual jokes or stories
- "Making eyes at" or giving seductive looks
- Discussion of one's sex life or relationships
- Sitting too close or lying next to a child or teen
- Finding ways to be alone with a child or teen
- Confiding in a child or teen about personal issues
- Giving gifts to participants
- Unnecessary touching

Markel offers a guide to preventing sex abuse and additional safety tips on our web site. Go to [www.markelsocialservice.com](http://www.markelsocialservice.com) and click the Safety Resources button.