



Akron Area YMCA

Youth Protection Policies and Procedures

In the State of Ohio, YMCA employees/volunteers are considered mandated reporters of child abuse. Employees/volunteers must report abuse-related concerns or complaints about other employees, volunteers, other adults, or other youth.

If you have any concerns or suspicions related to child abuse, you **MUST** immediately contact **at least one** of these:

- your supervisor or branch executive director and/or
- the YMCA's Vice President of Membership Branch Operations at **330-745-9622** and/or
- the State of Ohio anonymous line at **855-642-4453** (855-O-H-CHILD) and/or
- the anonymous form on **akronymca.org/youth-protection-resources** and/or
- the local or state authorities

Praesidium Helpline - **855-347-0751**

The Praesidium Helpline is a consultation line anyone can call to discuss any abuse prevention questions and issues. Reports can be anonymous if you prefer.

In this document, the designation "consumer" encompasses individuals who are YMCA members, program participants, family members, guests, and/or visitors.

"Adult Consumer" refers to a person aged 18 and older.

"Youth Consumer" refers to a person aged 17 and younger.

Note: Some divisions of the YMCA have division-specific policies/procedures because of their unique clientele. When any policy or procedure in this document conflicts with a policy or procedure from the division, **the most stringent of the two shall prevail.**

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

P1. Policy Prohibiting the Abuse or Mistreatment, of Consumers

This association has **zero tolerance** for abuse and will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of consumers in its programs. Any mistreatment or abuse by an employee or volunteer will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer service and cooperation with law enforcement.

P2. Policy Prohibiting the Abuse or Mistreatment of One Consumer by Another Consumer

The association has **zero tolerance** for abuse, mistreatment, or sexual activity among consumers within the association. This association is committed to providing all consumers with a safe environment and will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one consumer by another consumer. Conduct by consumers that rises to the level of abuse, mistreatment, or sexual activity will result in intervention or disciplinary action, up to and including, dismissal from the program.

In addition, our association will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, the association will take the necessary steps to eliminate such behavior.

P3. Policy Requiring Annual Review of Association Youth Protection Policies

Annually in the month of September, the Vice President of Membership Branch Operations and the Abuse Prevention Committee will review existing abuse prevention policies to:

- Ensure the purpose and goal of the policy is still relevant;
- Determine whether a policy should be combined with another policy or rescinded;
- Determine if the policy is up to date with current laws; and to
- Determine whether changes are required to improve the effectiveness or clarity of the policy and/or procedure.

Once a policy (or policies) has been identified for review, the policy owner or department responsible for enforcement will:

- Develop a draft update in consultation with relevant stakeholders;
- Review the draft with relevant stakeholders for relevance, clarity, and effectiveness;
- Submit the draft policy for review by the Vice President of Membership Branch Operations.
- Once the Vice President of Membership Branch Operations has reviewed and edited the policy, submit final version to the President and CEO.
- This association will announce and communicate all policy changes to employees, volunteers, consumers, and parent/guardians through written or electronic methods, and association methods such as employee meetings, trainings, and supervision discussions.

P4. Policy Requiring Adherence to Association Policies

All employees/volunteers with access to consumers shall confirm that they have read and agree to comply with the association's abuse prevention policies, Code of Conduct, and consumer protection standards by signing a written acknowledgment upon hire and annually thereafter. Association will keep signed acknowledgement forms in personnel files.

P5. Policy Defining Appropriate and Inappropriate Physical Contact

Our association's physical contact policy promotes a positive environment while protecting consumers, employees, and volunteers. Our association encourages appropriate physical contact with consumers and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact. Any inappropriate physical contact by employees/volunteers towards consumers in the association's programs will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

The association's policies for appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions include but are not limited to:

Appropriate Physical Interactions	Inappropriate Physical Interactions
<p>Contact initiated by the consumer such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Side hugs• Shoulder-to-shoulder or "temple" hugs• Pats on the shoulder or back• Handshakes• High-fives and hand slapping• Pats on the head when culturally appropriate• Touching hands, shoulders, and arms• Arms around shoulders• Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full-frontal hugs• Kisses• Showing affection in isolated areas or while one-on-one• Lap sitting• Wrestling• Piggyback rides• Tickling• Allowing a consumer to cling to an employee's or volunteer's leg• Allowing consumers, older than kindergarten, to sit on an employee or volunteer's lap• Any type of massage given by or to a consumer outside of accepted and documented medical treatment• Any form of affection that is unwanted by the consumer, employee, or volunteer• Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas that is outside authorized and documented personal care assistance

P6. Policy Defining Appropriate and Inappropriate Verbal Interactions

Employees/volunteers are prohibited from speaking to consumers in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.

Employees/volunteers must not initiate sexually oriented conversations with consumers. Employees/volunteers are not permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with consumers.

Our association's policies for appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions include but are not limited to:

Appropriate Verbal Interactions	Inappropriate Verbal Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive reinforcement• Appropriate jokes• Encouragement• Praise• Strength-based conversations• Self-disclosure as a supervised therapeutic tool by licensed clinicians, medical professionals, and pastoral counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name-calling• Discussing sexual encounters or in any way involving consumers in the personal problems or issues of employees/volunteers• Cursing• Off-color or sexual jokes• Shaming, belittling• Oversharing personal history• Derogatory remarks• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten, or humiliate consumers• Derogatory remarks about the consumer or his/her family

P7. Policy for Managing One-on-One Interactions Between Employees, Volunteers, and Consumers

One-on-one interactions may occur as part of this association's programming under authorized circumstances. The purpose of this policy is to ensure the association clearly communicates expectations for employees/volunteers and gives examples of appropriate behavior when one-on-one interactions may occur. In those situations where one-on-one interactions are authorized, employees/volunteers should observe the following guidelines to limit the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

- Meet consumers in a public place where they are in full view of others.
- Avoid physical affection during one-on-one interactions. If unavoidable, ensure physical and verbal interactions align with this association's established policies and are limited to the task at hand.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- To the extent possible, ensure one-on-one interactions occurring behind closed doors with **ADULT** consumers are scheduled in advance or are communicated with the supervisor.

- One-on-one interactions occurring behind closed doors with **YOUTH** consumers is prohibited.
- Employee/volunteer will document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

P8. Policy for Managing Interactions between Employees, Volunteers, and Youth/Teen Consumers Outside the Association

Research shows many cases of abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. Allowing contact outside of regularly scheduled activities may put employees, volunteers, consumers, and our association at increased risk. This document is created to manage the risk of abuse and false accusations arising from contact with youth and teens outside the association's regularly scheduled programming.

Examples of contact outside of regularly scheduled program activities:

- Babysitting arrangements
- Tutoring
- Private lessons/coaching
- Mentorship
- Social interactions between employee's or volunteer's children and children served by the association:
 - Playdates and birthday parties
 - Sleepovers
 - Overnight trips and vacations
 - Rides to/from association or extracurricular activities and events
- Attending public events in a shared community (like graduation, sports events, religious ceremonies)
- Continued contact with consumer after a consumer's participation in a program has ended.

It is the policy of the Akron Area YMCA to prohibit employees/volunteers from meeting outside of the YMCA with youth whom they have met in YMCA programs. This includes baby-sitting, sleepovers, and inviting children to the employee's/volunteer's home, emailing, telephoning, texting, or having any other type of correspondence with the children unless one of the following conditions exists:

- The employee/volunteer and the child's family or custodian have a relationship that predates the beginning of employment or volunteering at the YMCA,
- The employee/volunteer and the child's family or custodian have a relationship which predates the child's enrollment in a YMCA program, or
- The employee/volunteer and the child, the child's family, or the child's custodian are related

For exceptions to be permitted, the child's parent or custodian must sign a waiver authorizing contact with the specific employee/volunteer. The waiver must be kept on file by the program manager.

An employee/volunteer who has a pre-existing relationship with a child will have the parent/guardian sign the waiver to document the relationship.

After a consumer's participation in programming has ended, an employee/volunteer may only initiate contact with the consumer for authorized YMCA business.

P9. Electronic Communication and Social Media Policy

The terms "electronic communications" and "social media" or "social network" refer to activities that integrate technology, telecommunications, and social interaction using words, images, video, or audio tools. Examples include, but are not limited to social websites, blogs, message boards, wikis, podcasts, image- and video-sharing sites, live webcasting, and real-time web communities. Additionally, sending text messages between two or more mobile phones or fixed or portable devices over a phone or wireless network is included within these definitions.

It is mandatory that all programs that require communication with youth and parents/guardians use a group communication app, to be used exclusively for communication about program details.

This association does not permit employees/volunteers to use electronic communication and/or social media using their own personal sites/accounts with consumers. However, if these interactions are part of programming or otherwise unavoidable, employees/volunteers will:

- A. Require employees/volunteers to sign the Employee/Volunteer Handbook which contains the Social Media Policies which explain guidelines about appropriate and inappropriate communication with consumers.
- B. Employees/volunteers are required to use a YMCA-authorized communication platform to allow communication to be seen by all consumers and parents/guardians.
- C. Employees/volunteers may not electronically contact a consumer under the age of 13 outside of the association-approved app.
- D. Employees/volunteers should keep communications professional in nature and limit discussion to programmatic purposes.
- E. Employees/volunteers will respond to private electronic communication from youth consumers stating that this is prohibited under the Code of Conduct.
 - a. Exceptions may be made under emergency situations wherein private messages may occur to locate consumers and secure their safety, but all such contact must be documented accordingly.
 - b. If a consumer reveals abuse or inappropriate interactions with an adult or child, the employee/volunteer must report this information to a supervisor and child protective services or law enforcement immediately.
- F. Employees/volunteers may choose to or may be required to include a supervisor or the association leadership in their direct communications with a consumer.
- G. Provide consumers and parents/guardians with information about how to respond to inappropriate communication from employees/volunteers. The responding procedure includes:
 - a. Contact information for the administration.
 - b. An anonymous method for reporting concerns.
- H. Requests to discontinue – Parents/guardians may request in writing that a consumer not be contacted by the association through any form of electronic communication or social media.

P10. Gift-Giving and Gift Acceptance Policy

Gifts from Employee/Volunteer to Consumers

Offenders routinely groom consumers by giving gifts, thereby endearing themselves to the consumers. They might instruct the consumers to keep the gifts a secret, which then encourages keeping other bigger or more harmful secrets from trusted adults.

This association strongly encourages employees/volunteers to refrain from giving gifts to consumers. However, gifts to consumers may be given under the following circumstances:

1. Gift requests must be submitted to a supervisor and/or a designated administrator prior to being purchased;
2. The supervisor and/or designated administrator will determine a cost limit regarding how much can be spent on the gift; and,
3. Parents/guardians of the consumers must be notified about the gift item and why the consumers are receiving the gift.
4. Employees/volunteers are prohibited from giving gifts to individual consumers except when the gift is authorized by a supervisor or designated administrator and given to all consumers (i.e., celebration of special events/holidays or group recognition).
5. Require employees/volunteers to communicate that the gift is given on behalf of the association not the individual employee or volunteer.

Gifts from Consumers to Employee/Volunteer

Sometimes it may be difficult to refuse gifts from consumers or their families. In many cultures, people give gifts to reflect their appreciation for people or services.

To be respectful of consumers and their families, the association makes reasonable allowances for acts of gratitude involving small gifts of appreciation from consumers and/or their families that fall under the following parameters:

1. Employees/volunteers may not accept gifts, payments, or favors valued greater than **\$100.00** from any individual or organization that is providing goods or services to the YMCA or receiving goods or services from the YMCA.
2. If someone approaches an employee or volunteer with a gift that exceeds \$100.00, the employee or volunteer must politely decline the gift and refer to this policy.
3. Employees/volunteers must disclose all such gifts to their immediate supervisor and/or a designated administrator.
4. At no time should an employee solicit, request, or otherwise indicate that gifts, payments, or favors are expected.

The YMCA reserves the right to thank outgoing board members or employees with gifts exceeding the amount listed. When this occurs, two or more senior level employees must approve the gift purchase and follow all gift logging procedures.

P11. Policy Regarding Sexually-Explicit Materials

Everyone in the YMCA is prohibited from accessing, displaying, producing and/or distributing pornography or sexually-explicit materials on our association's property or involved in our services.

P12, P14. Policy Requiring Cooperation with Investigations

This association takes every allegation of abuse or misconduct seriously and will fully cooperate with the authorities to investigate all cases of alleged abuse or misconduct. Employees/volunteers shall cooperate with any external investigation by outside authorities or internal investigation conducted by the association or persons given investigative authority by the association.

Cooperation with investigations includes, but is not limited to:

- Promptly acknowledging and responding to requests for information;
- Making oneself available for meetings with investigating officials;
- Providing full, accurate, and truthful information;
- Keeping confidential information learned or transmitted during the investigation, unless directed by legal authorities, and
- Preserving relevant information and documents.

An employee or volunteer's failure to cooperate with an investigation will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment or dismissal from the association.

P13. Policy Governing Mandatory Reporting Requirements for Employees and Volunteers

All employees/volunteers must follow state specific mandatory reporting requirements. All YMCA employees /volunteers are mandated reporters.

Employees/volunteers must be trained to be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse.

Employees/volunteers will:

1. be familiar with the symptoms of abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse;
2. know and follow association policies and procedures that protect against abuse;
3. report suspected abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws; and
4. follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken.

Employees/volunteers will read and sign the Code of Conduct documenting employee's/volunteer's understanding of the legal and ethical duty to report suspected mistreatment or abuse.

The State of Ohio's rules on reporting child abuse or neglect can be found here:

<https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-2151.421>

The State of Ohio's rules on reporting elder abuse or neglect can be found here:

<https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-5101.63>