

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA NEVADA CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST YOUTH MINISTRY POLICIES & PROCEDURES

INTRODUCTION

The Board of Directors of the Northern California Nevada Conference United Church of Christ, in commitment to the life affirming values of the church, in order to honor the range of attitudes in our Conference constituency, and to meet legal and moral obligations, has developed the following policies for:

- ⇒ The NCNC Outdoor Ministries Program;
- ⇒ NCNC sponsored Youth Programs;
- ⇒ Events and programs beyond the Conference when groups of youth and their adult leaders are representing our conference at regional, denominational, ecumenical and other events and/or programs;
- ⇒ Guidelines for local churches and clusters of churches sponsoring youth gatherings, programs and events.

These policies should be communicated by all available means to youth, their leaders, local congregations, parents and any interested persons. Every effort should be made to clarify the expectations of the Conference to all groups associated with the Conference sponsoring youth activities.

The orientation to all youth events should include expanded verbal communication of the policies, specific rules pertaining to the event and possible consequences of inappropriate behaviors. This aspect of orientation is best set in the positive context of community building and affirmation of the vision, mission and goals of Youth Ministry in the NCNC.

COMMUNICATING POLICIES TO PARTICIPANTS

At the beginning of an event an orientation is held. The purposes of this session are to inform the participants of the policies of the Conference applicable to the event; to convey rules specific to the event; familiarize participants with the characteristics of the facilities and area in which the event takes place; give participants an opportunity to ask questions and engage in a discussion of community behavior that will be conducive to all participants feeling physically, emotionally and spiritually safe. At the end of this session, the policies, rules and specific needs elicited from participants becomes the Covenant for the event.

Possible consequences for breaking the Covenant are also communicated. The most serious violations of the Covenant are behaviors that create an unsafe environment for oneself and/or others, or that threaten to irreparably undermine the creation and development of safe and affirming community among the participants. These behaviors would include, but are not limited

to: physical or threatened violence against oneself or others; use or possession of alcohol or illegal drugs, inappropriate sexual conduct, and continuing patterns of uncooperative or otherwise inappropriate behavior disruptive of the event.

Worst case consequences of violations are contact with law enforcement officials and/or parent(s) and being sent home immediately. Persons dismissed from an event for breaking the covenant must take part in a reconciliation process in order to participate in future events or face an 18 month suspension from conference youth events. (See Process of Reconciliation)

Adult leaders who violate the covenant at a youth event, program or camp may be dismissed and may be subject to exclusion from future conference youth activities. Such a decision is made in consultation with conference youth leadership, event organizers and the Associate Conference Minister staffing Youth Ministries. An adult who is excluded from volunteering as a youth leader for conference activities will be notified in writing of the reasons for exclusion.

**YOUTH AND OUTDOOR MINISTRIES POLICIES & PROCEDURES
OF THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA NEVADA CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

POSSESSION OR USE OF ILLEGAL DRUGS AND OF ALCOHOL

Possession or use of illegal drugs and of alcohol are prohibited at NCNC youth events, activities and programs.

Under certain circumstances the Event Leaders may be legally obligated to contact authorities. Only in the case of the most serious violation, such as certain evidence of drug dealing, are law enforcement authorities to be contacted.

Anyone who violates this policy can expect to be dismissed from the event, following procedures previously described.

Persons who have brought illegal drugs or alcohol to an event will have the opportunity to turn them in immediately following orientation, without prejudice, that is, the person will not be sent home. Items turned in will not be returned. Report any incident of this nature to the Associate Conference Minister, who may decide to do follow up with the person.

Any person attending a youth event in a supervisory role will covenant to report violations of this policy to the Event Leadership, whose responsibility it is to process the situation. Every effort should be made to process these situations in a way which assists the violator(s), other participants, and the community as a whole to maintain the integrity of all participants, the program, consistency of policy application, and the overall welfare of NCNC Youth and Outdoor Ministries.

The Associate Conference Minister shall be notified immediately of any violation of the drugs, alcohol or sexual behavior policies, and will be a participant in making decisions regarding the incident.

See the health form and other documents regarding the handling of prescription and other legal drugs at youth events.

WEAPONS

Possession of weapons such as guns and knives is strictly prohibited at youth events and camps. Potential weapons that are turned in to event leadership up until the end of the orientation session will be held for the course of the event and handed over to an adult at the end of the event. Failure to turn over a weapon, threats, or the actual use of a weapon will result in the person being dismissed and could involve the summoning of law enforcement.

USE OF TOBACCO

California State Law prohibits minors under the age of 18 years from purchasing, being in possession of, or using tobacco products. Minors in possession of tobacco products at conference events will be in violation of the covenant.

Adults who wish to use tobacco products while attending camps and other youth events must abide by the restrictions of the facility at which the event is held and must not smoke or otherwise use tobacco in the presence of minors.

USE OF ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT

The use of personal music equipment, pagers, cell phones and other electronic equipment for personal use is inappropriate in the setting of camps and youth events because they take participants' attention away from the experience and development of community.

Adult leaders of camps and events may elect to restrict or prohibit the use of electronic equipment of this nature and/or confiscate such equipment for the duration of the program.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

At conference gatherings the development of affirming relationships among youth is encouraged. Developing friendships is a primary goal of youth programming. It is inevitable that some relationships become affectionate; creating a safe environment is conducive to this. Youth often need guidance to keep their behavior within acceptable limits at youth gatherings. It is important that limits be clearly defined.

With high school youth, discussion on this subject at the orientation session should be matter of fact. Inappropriate sexual behavior includes sexual intercourse, oral sex, disrobed petting, long kisses, and fondling embraces. Couples going off to places where they cannot be seen by anyone is also inappropriate. (Literature to facilitate this discussion will be provided.)

Supervisors of children and youth of all ages should keep their charges within eyesight, unless they are in the bathroom, changing clothes or showering, in which case they should always be in earshot, in order to monitor the interaction of young people.

If, after speaking with persons about their observed inappropriate affectionate or sexual behavior at an event, the behavior continues, follow the procedures for behavior intervention.

Accusations of sexual harassment or assault could involve legal issues and must be processed carefully. Contact the Associate Conference Minister for assistance.

Sexual behavior by individuals that does not involve anyone but the individual may be inappropriate and embarrassing to others. It may also be a sexual offense. Leaders should follow the procedures described. Such behaviors should not be part of the orientation discussion of appropriate behavior.

Adults working with youth should always model appropriate behavior related to this and all policies.

VIOLENT BEHAVIOR: Physical and Verbal

It is the intent of the people of the NCNC that all gatherings of the people be free from fear. The number one priority of our Youth and Outdoor Ministries programming is Safety: physical, emotional and spiritual. Conflicts are a normal part of life and can be resolved without resorting to physical violence or abusive language. Children and youth should be encouraged to go to the adult leadership for help to resolve conflicts. No one has the right to put another person at risk, threaten the safety of others, or create a climate of fear or intimidation.

Acts of violence toward other persons or property are not to be tolerated. Such acts or threats of violence need to be dealt with quickly and seriously, stopping or minimizing danger to anyone, including the perpetrator of any violent act.

Call 911 if you need assistance to remove a violent person and restore a safe environment. Do not endanger others in attempting to restrain a physically violent person. If a person threatens violence with a weapon, keep others at a distance and attempt to resolve the situation calmly. Do not hesitate to call 911 if you need help to end a dangerous situation.

Abusive or inappropriate language: Cursing, racial epithets, disparaging comments, and sexual references will not be tolerated.

Adult counselors, event leaders, chaperones and other supervisors of youth are charged to model behavior and language that fits the setting of a caring, affirming community and will at no time relate to youth or children with threatening, abusive or sexual language or harassment.

SEXUAL ABUSE AND HARASSMENT

The people of the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ expect that all persons in leadership positions will act in ways that exemplify the teachings of Jesus Christ, providing love, care and concern for the well-being of others at all times. Conference clergy, employees and volunteer workers will not physically, sexually, emotionally, verbally, or in any other way abuse persons who participate in conference sponsored programs or activities.

The Northern California Nevada Conference has adopted the following policy on inappropriate sexual conduct:

“The Northern California (Nevada) Conference of the UCC is committed to supporting its congregations and pastors as they seek to create and maintain communities in which lay persons and pastors can work and worship, enjoy fellowship and render ministry together in an atmosphere free of all forms of inappropriate conduct and harassment, exploitation or intimidation, including sexual. Specifically, every member of the Northern California (Nevada) Conference should be aware that the Conference is absolutely opposed to inappropriate sexual conduct, including sexual harassment, and that such behavior is prohibited by law. It is the intention of the Conference to take whatever action may be needed to prevent, correct, and if necessary, initiate discipline for behavior which violates this policy.”

In California, abuse is defined as: “...any act of omission or commission that endangers or impairs a child’s physical or emotional health and development. This includes: physical abuse and corporal punishment resulting in a traumatic condition; emotional abuse; emotional deprivation; physical neglect and/or inadequate supervision; and sexual abuse and exploitation.”

The Outdoor Ministries Committee has adopted the following definition of physical harassment:

“Harassment of the same or opposite sex is offensive behavior including but not limited to unwanted touching of or assault on the breasts, buttocks, groin, or legs, and blocking or impeding movement of another person.”

It is important that leaders be aware of the messages they give through the ways in which touch of other persons is given and received. They must be able to discern between good, bad, and confusing touch as they work with people. Guidelines regarding sexual abuse and harassment can be found in the training materials used by Youth Leadership and Outdoor Ministries programs in the conference.

Persons who suspect abuse by anyone in a leadership position in the conference are expected to report that situation to one of the Conference Ministers who will take immediate and appropriate steps to address the situation. These steps may include required notification of legal authorities when the alleged abuse involves a minor child or an elder.

SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

Reports and suspicions that a minor is a victim of child abuse are taken seriously and will be reported to proper authorities. See the Camp Directors Manual for details on recognizing signs and symptoms of child abuse.

FOOD

Food served at conference youth events and camps is intended to be nutritious and adequate in portions. At all events, every effort should be made to offer nutritious, well-balanced meals.

In order to avoid high sugar and caffeine consumption, participants of conference youth events are generally instructed to refrain from bringing additional food with them. In rural settings, such as camps and retreats, food in living areas attracts animals. Personal snacks also threaten the environment due to increased littering of wrappers, cans, etc.

Food brought to the event in violation of the policy should be confiscated. It might be returned to the person at the end of the event or shared with everyone in an appropriate way.

Foods that are not nutritious and healthful should be kept to a minimum. These kinds of foods should not be available at a time when they would interfere with participants choosing to eat nutritious foods.

In circumstances where special diets cannot be provided at an event, a participant may make special arrangements to bring food necessary for her/his well being at the event. The food should be kept in an appropriate location.

ATTENDANCE AT MEALS POLICY

All persons attending youth events, both youth and adult leaders, covenant to participate fully in the program to the best of their ability. Mealtimes, if included in the program, are no exception. A person who exhibits symptoms of an eating disorder should be cared for with the same concern as someone with any other kind of illness or disorder. The issue should be addressed directly. The appropriate response may include creation of a specific covenant, contacting parents, and/or sending the person home for his or her own safety and well being.

VISITORS TO YOUTH EVENTS

Unregistered visitors are not allowed at conference youth events and camps. Local church pastors, adult youth leaders participating in the program, members of the Outdoor Ministries Committee and other official groups in the conference, and conference staff are not considered visitors, but members of the team who contribute to the ongoing Youth and Outdoor Ministries program of the conference. Those who meet these criteria and wish to attend a portion of an event or camp without registering or applying to be on staff should make arrangements in advance with the ACM and event leadership. They may participate in the event at the discretion of the leadership. Part-time participants should be introduced to the whole community whenever possible.

TRANSPORTATION OF MINORS

Any minor transported to, from, or during a conference event, activity, program, retreat or camp by someone other than a custodial parent must have a permission slip and medical release completed and signed by a custodial parent. This documentation should be in the possession of the driver and will be collected at onsite registration for the event. Event leaders will be responsible for turning over transportation forms to those driving minors home from the event.

Non custodial drivers of children and youth to conference events must:

- ⇒ be 21 years of age or older;
- ⇒ possess a valid driver's license;
- ⇒ have at least the minimum insurance coverage required by law;
- ⇒ have signed permission and medical release forms from the custodial parent.

It is recommended that two adults be present in every vehicle in which minors are transported.

Minors will not be released to adults other than custodial parents without parental permission.

Persons age 18 and over may drive to conference events and may transport other persons age 18 or over. Persons between the ages of 18 and 21 may not transport minors with the exception of their own siblings.

Persons violating this policy may be subject to engaging in a process of reconciliation. If allowed to remain at the event, the person's car keys will be confiscated and they will not be allowed to drive from the event. In either case the person will be considered to be in violation of the covenant.

Vehicles used for transportation during youth events must be owned by a parent, a conference staff member, a conference-related church, or a volunteer leader of a youth activity. In addition, the vehicle may be on loan to the conference or rented by the conference.

Due to the lack of sleep characteristic of overnight events, it is highly recommended that designated drivers be afforded every opportunity to get a good night's sleep prior to driving home.

PARTICIPANTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL LIMITATIONS

Intention: Youth and Outdoor Ministries programs of the Northern California Nevada Conference recognize the potential for great value in including children and youth with special physical or emotional limitations. Therefore, such participation is encouraged whenever practical. It may, however, be possible that such participation could detract from the overall goals of the program. We must do everything possible to ensure that all participants have a safe, healthy, educational, Spirit-filled experience.

Pre-acceptance discussion: All limitations or handicaps which might affect an individual's ability to participate in a specific program or event must be discussed with the appropriate people prior

to the event. This could include the youth, parents, event leadership and Associate Conference Minister. The decision about participation of a person with limitations will be the responsibility of the event leaders and ACM. All information provided in the course of making such a decision will be kept confidential, unless release of information is expressly authorized by a custodial parent.

Arranging the program: The leadership will make every effort to arrange the event or program so that all campers can participate as fully as possible in all activities. The leadership must weigh the benefits of modeling integration and participation by people with different gifts, as well as the potential for special learning opportunities to be gained by all participants against safety concerns and the detraction from the overall goals of the camp on a case-by-case basis.

The leadership will take into account such factors as: available resources within the staff (providing safe levels of supervision for all youth), physical layout of the site and facilities and accessibility. Creative imagination together with input from the individual and family members can make possible a rewarding experience for everyone in most situations.

Covenant: Before the leadership agrees to register the applicant, after appropriate consultation, all concerned parties will agree to any special conditions and expectations which will pertain to the event or program. This could include the need for someone to provide one-on-one assistance, e.g. an ASL interpreter. Such a person would be required to cooperate with the event leadership at all times.

Sending a participant home: It needs to be understood and agreed that event leadership has the authority to send a person home at any time during an event or program if behavior, limitations or other circumstances make the situation unsafe for that person or others. Parents are encouraged to discuss with the Associate Conference Minister and event leaders any possible circumstance or limitation that would affect the quality of their child's experience or merit special attention while at an event.

Emergency contact: Parents of a child or youth with special limitations should be especially aware of notifying event leaders of their whereabouts during an event and being reachable at all times, in case an unexpected situation arises which necessitates their presence or the removal of their child or youth.

HEALTH SUPERVISION

At all camps and youth events that involve an overnight, a person will be designated to provide health services. These services will include, but not be limited to first aid and the intake and dispensing of all medications, prescribed or over the counter to all participants. (See exceptions to this policy in UCCR and American Camp Association health supervision guidelines and California State Law.)

The minimum requirement for fulfilling the role of health supervisor is certification in advanced First Aid and CPR. Particularly for events lasting over 72 hours, we seek to engage as health supervisors people who are trained at the level of emergency medical technician, licensed vocational nurse, registered nurse, or a higher level of training.

REGISTRATION

At all events for which advance registration is conducted, there will be an onsite registration process which will include review of the health form and parental permission for medical treatment and determination of proper transportation permission for minors. If persons who are registered for an event do not arrive within a reasonable period of time, event leaders will make every effort to contact parents and inform them that their child or youth is not present at the event.

STAFF APPLICATIONS

All adult leadership at camps and youth events will complete a staff application or adult registration form. Staff applications will include one of the following: two references, one from a church official who knows the person and one from someone who has known the person for at least five years; or a written review of that person's performance at a similar camp in the past 1 or 2 years.

Adult registration materials for youth events must include the signature of a church official from the congregation which the adult represents as a leader or chaperone of youth.

PROCEDURES FOR BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION

1) Level of intervention

Whether to dismiss a person for inappropriate behavior or to issue a warning is often a difficult decision. Each situation is unique. Event Leaders in consultation with the Associate Conference Minister (ACM) and other leaders are responsible for making these decisions. If at all possible, we want to keep youth at the event. Those who are having a difficult time fitting into the community, even if they are expressing that difficulty with inappropriate behavior, perhaps need that sense of Christian community desperately and can benefit from it most. If the energy can be redirected, if the behavior can be turned around, a person has the potential for a life changing experience.

Given all that, leaders must consider the welfare of the whole community over and above the welfare of any one member. The reason for this is that if one person threatens the safety of the community, then the setting is not appropriate for ministering to the needs of that individual. The Process of Reconciliation is an attempt to minister to the needs of the individual who is removed from a youth event. Please refer to the *Process of Reconciliation* elsewhere in this document.

- 2) The Associate Conference Minister should be notified if anyone is sent home or leaves a youth event unexpectedly for any reason. The ACM will follow up immediately with parents and/or with any staff member who leaves camp due to a health problem or who is dismissed due to misconduct.

Once the decision is made to intervene, camp leadership needs to decide between the following two alternatives:

- a) Immediate removal due to inappropriate behavior: The best guideline for determining whether to send a person home is to ask this question: Does the continued presence of this person at camp present a serious ongoing risk to the physical, emotional or spiritual safety of anyone at camp, including him or herself? If the answer to this question is “yes,” the person needs to be removed.

Situations where this would be the case include, but are not limited to acts of physical, or sexual violence; continual verbal violence or abuse; refusal to adhere to restrictions or prohibition on smoking; continued alcohol or drug use; continued disregard for the covenant, the authority of leaders, or the common goals of the community; inability to comply with a specific covenant regarding a change in behavior.

- b) Issuing a warning and creating a specific covenant as terms under which a youth or adult member may remain at the event: Offenses that do not jeopardize the continued safety of members of the community may be able to be rectified by talking with the person and determining a needed change in behavior.

- 3) Warning and Covenant (If the leadership decides to allow the person to remain at the event)

- a) Ask the person if he/she wants to stay. A desire to continue to stay at the event is necessary as an effective incentive for agreeing to any change in behavior.

- b) Create a covenant with the person describing in detail the expected or needed behavior. The person should express a willingness to abide by this covenant. The covenant should be signed by the offender and by an adult in charge of the event or camp.
 - c) Call the parent(s) (in the case of a youth or event leader who is a minor).
 - i) Describe the specifics of the offense.
 - ii) Explain the specifics of the covenant agreed to by the offender and leaders.
 - iii) Inform parents that any further infraction will result in immediate dismissal from camp and the need for a parent or agent of the parent to remove the person immediately.
 - d) Call the ACM.
 - i) Describe the offense, action taken, terms of covenant.
 - ii) Give the name and phone number of the parent(s) contacted.
 - e) Review details of the covenant with the leader most immediately responsible for that youth.
 - f) Review the status of the person's compliance with the covenant on a daily basis with him or her and the counselor in the case of a camper. (Not necessarily together.) One event leader should be assigned to follow the progress of the covenant.
 - g) If the person improves and abides by the covenant for the remainder of the week, a final review should be held with the director. Thank and praise the person for contributing in a positive way to the camp community. A handwritten note to this effect after camp would provide additional reinforcement. Be sure to speak with the parent personally if they pick up their child after the event.
 - h) If the person fails to abide by the individual covenant, the decision will be made to have the person leave the event. Follow the procedures listed under section 4 if the decision is made to dismiss a person from a youth activity.
- 4) **Dismissing a youth or adult participant from a youth event**
- a) If removing a minor, call the parent or guardian and arrange for someone to pick the person up as soon as possible. If this proves to be impossible, contact the ACM for assistance in arranging to remove the person. It is of utmost importance to minimize the time the person remains onsite after being removed from the program.
 - b) Remove the person from the program. (Rules regarding one staff person never being alone and out of sight with a minor apply while supervising someone who has been removed from the program.)
 - c) Process the incident with the rest of the community. This can be done as a whole group (not including the person being sent home), or by briefing the leaders and having them process the incident in small groups. Event leaders and other staff should be willing to answer appropriate questions asked by adults or youth but should not reveal confidential or embarrassing information or personal opinions about the person who is sent home or any other individual involved.
 - d) Meet with the parent when a youth is picked up. Facilitate the initial encounter between the parent and person being sent home. Answer any questions. Give the parent a copy of the letter from the ACM and a copy of the Policy of Reconciliation. (These documents are provided for every event.) Help them understand the Policy of Reconciliation before leaving. (If a person with permission of the parent picks the person up, written material

should be sent home and this information should also be conveyed as soon as possible to the parent by phone.)

- e) Inform the parent that the ACM will phone the person sent home, the parent, and the home pastor within a week to review the incident and facilitate the Process of Reconciliation.

5) **Dismissing a staff person.**

If a member of the adult leadership of a youth event commits a serious breach of the camp covenant, directors will have to decide whether to dismiss the staff person from camp. Again, the first criterion for making such a decision is safety. Can this person still be relied upon to perform his/her duties regarding the supervision of youth? Losing a staff person means increasing the number of youth per adult leader, thus it cuts down on the level of supervision. However, depending on the offense, a staff person may create a threat to the safety of campers and other staff. Again, the ACM is available to help onsite leadership weigh the risks in these cases. In rare cases, we may decide to keep the person on staff with a specific covenant, but suspend him or her from serving on staff in the future, perhaps pending the completion of an individualized process of reconciliation.

PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION

The following process of reconciliation is offered when appropriate to youth and adults who have been removed from the program of a summer camp or other conference youth event or activity. If a person does not wish to engage in this process of reconciliation, they are excluded from participation in conference youth activities for 18 months. The purpose of this policy is to create an opportunity for learning and insight and to reinstate the participant as soon as possible to full participation in the conference youth community.

Steps of the process:

1. **Suspension:** Leaders decide a participant must leave the event. In the case of youth, the person is not permitted to attend the next youth event for which he/she is eligible by age.
2. **Intervention and reconciliation:** A Covenant Committee of three persons is formed. This committee ideally will consist of a member of the Conference Youth Leadership (Outdoor Ministries Committee or Youth Leaders Network), an adult member of the faith community, and a peer of the person removed from the event. The peer will be someone who is not acquainted with the person removed and who was not present at the event in question. It is also desirable that one of the adults be a minister and one be a lay person. This committee meets with the person removed and an advocate of that person's choice (youth pastor, church member, parent, etc.) to develop a plan of insight, discipline and reconciliation. (Altogether five persons are involved in this process.) The plan might include counseling, biblical research on the concepts of "covenant" and "reconciliation", and restitution (church or community service.). Creativity in finding the appropriate plan of action is highly encouraged.

3. **Confidential review:** After an agreed upon time frame the Covenant Committee meets with the youth in question to review progress of the agreed upon plan of reconciliation.
4. **Vote:** If satisfied with the progress of the plan of reconciliation, the Covenant Committee may vote to restore full privileges of the person to participate in youth events of the conference. Conference Youth Leadership and the Associate Conference Minister are notified in writing that the plan has been carried out successfully.

PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO REPORTS OF CHILD ABUSE, PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

It is of primary concern that both children and adults be safe at NCNC events and that when possible the experiences offered through conference youth ministries be transformational in the lives of all who participate in it. Although we may wish victimizing situations did not exist, sometimes this time away from home becomes the opportunity for a child or an adult to share with a trusted person the painful experiences of their lives. When this happens, it is our calling as leaders to make responsible and appropriate response to help alleviate the pain and take appropriate action toward removing the threat under which a particular child, youth or adult lives.

Two possible events are discussed here: (1) situations that occur at the event and (2) situations that occurred in the past or are ongoing in the person's life.

Situations that occur at an event or camp: These may include, but are not limited to, physical assault, sexual assault, and sexual molestation. In the event of a report of such an act occurring at your event, call the local police immediately. At camp, you may seek assistance from the site director. But do not delay in notifying the police when a person has allegedly physically injured or sexually attacked another person. After calling the police, immediately contact the site director when at camp and the ACM. If you do not reach the ACM directly, leave a message stressing the urgency of the situation. Either stay by the phone, or make arrangements for someone to cover the phone where you want the call returned.

Remember that assault and child abuse are against the law. If a person physically or sexually abuses another person, it is most appropriate to ask the police to assist you.

Situations that occurred in the past or are present in the person's life outside the camp setting: This type of situation may come to your attention because it is reported by a child to a camp counselor, another youth, other staff, or directly to you. It may come to your attention because of physical, verbal or emotional symptoms exhibited by a child or youth.

While we follow the policy of reporting suspected child abuse to the authorities, it is possibly better not to state this bluntly to participants. The law does not require anyone to warn another person that confidentiality will be broken in certain instances. Issues of confidentiality probably do not need to be raised with young children (under age 12) at all in an abstract manner. When going over the camp policies with older children (age 12 and up) issues of confidentiality might

be put in this way. “Of course, anything of a personal nature shared with a staff person will be kept confidential. However, sometimes campers share with us very bad problems and we cannot help them without getting help from another person, possibly a professional. If we feel we need help to help you with a really bad problem, we may have to share the situation with someone else.”

All staff should be advised that, if approached with the request to “promise not to tell” before the issue is shared, they should not make such a promise. An appropriate response might be, “I certainly want to keep our talk confidential, but sometimes I can’t because I might need help to help you. We will have to talk for awhile before I will know whether I can promise not to tell.”

In any circumstance, remember it is a far greater sin to allow a child to go back into a dangerous or hurtful environment without taking action than it is to break a promise not to tell.

Instruct all adult leaders to report to the event leadership, health supervisor or chaplain any cases of suspected child abuse, either reported verbally, or observed.

It is impossible to set rigid guidelines in these situations, because every case is different and needs to be judged individually. In some cases, other people might be consulted before making a decision to report to Child Protective Services. In other cases, it may be best not to notify anyone off site prior to reporting. For this reason, the ACM should be informed as early as possible of any situation of this nature arising at camp. Use a “team approach,” consulting with such people as the health supervisor, chaplain, any other clergy or mental health professionals present at the event. Whether onsite or offsite, the ACM will be included as a member of that consulting team.

It is probably most logical for an eyewitness to the situation to make the report to Child Protective Services. Also, remember that clergy and health care professional are mandated reporters.

The ACM will report any incident of reporting suspected child abuse, or any incident of illegal activity at one of our camp sites to the Conference Minister immediately. The Conference Minister will be kept up to date on any developments. If anyone from outside the camp, such as a representative of the media, asks questions about any incident at camp, refer them to the Conference Minister.

Verbal reports and written reports: The law on child abuse reporting states that with mandated reporters a verbal report must be made immediately and a written report must be filed within 36 hours. Report forms will be provided. If you call CPS, be sure to ask if you need to file a written report. When talking with a CPS officer, take notes of your conversation. Include the date, time and name of the officer, any instructions she or he gives you, and a synopsis of what was discussed. Fax or mail your notes to the ACM as soon as possible.