

# CHOOSING SAFE PROGRAMS FOR KIDS

Among many considerations when evaluating the merits of a volunteer program, camp or extracurricular activity is the program's child protection policy and the safety of children under 18, male and female, within the organization.

In addition to asking about the program's child protection policy and code of conduct, the following evidence can indicate the rigor of the policy and the organization's commitment to preventing abuse or misconduct.

PREPARED BY THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN | MAY 2018

## LOOK FOR A CLIMATE OF PROTECTION

- ▶ Child protection policies and codes of conduct or mission statements are posted and made available in additional languages.
- ▶ Contact between children and adults is within view and hearing distance of others and out of program contact is monitored or prohibited.
- ▶ Facilities designate 'adults only' or visitor bathrooms.
- ▶ Protective procedures are in place for activities requiring changing clothes, touch, bathing, and sleeping. Touch is consensual and for the benefit of the child.
- ▶ Adults ask children's opinions and honor their preferences.
- ▶ Children appear happy and relaxed with each other and members of staff. The tone is warm and supportive, rather than adversarial or fearful.

## WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

**Be realistic.** Background checks on staff are likely outside your control and may create a false sense of security. Focus instead on asking about supervision and communication policies.

**Have high expectations.** Don't abdicate your responsibility to evaluate the safety of all children with a critical eye. Have a conversation with leaders about strengthening their level of care and professionalism.

**Be brave.** You may be the first person to ask these questions. You are justified, so aim for a collaborative rather than confrontational conversation. Your inquiry may prompt the organization to strengthen safeguards.

**Judge by another standard than your family boundaries.** Relationships with other adults in your child's life should be less intimate and more like a boss or work relationship. Help your children understand boundaries with other adults around touch, gifts, and appropriate interactions and conversations.

**Be alert. Be curious.** Show up unexpectedly and observe. Ask questions. Ask your child about the program and listen closely. Do not assume people and programs working with children are incapable of causing harm.

### GROOMING FOR SEXUAL ABUSE MAY INCLUDE:

patterns of favoritism or preference, gift giving, progressive intimacy, boundary violations, meeting parents' needs, secrets, testing of limits, sexually inappropriate conversations or comments



# WHAT TO TELL YOUR CHILD

- ▶ **Empower your child to refuse unwanted or inappropriate touch** and who to tell if they feel uncomfortable. Model asking consent and giving choices around touch.
- ▶ **Give your child the correct words for body parts that stay covered.** Let them know they can ask you anything, even if it's something you don't normally talk about.
- ▶ **Explain the difference between surprises and secrets.** A surprise makes people happy. Trusted adults can help children decide if a secret is harmful.
- ▶ **Practice refusal and bystander skills often,** saying, "I'm not allowed to keep secrets", or "that's not okay".
- ▶ **Teach your child that online life is real life!** Children should know family rules about what's allowed on screens. Reinforce and model the need to behave the same way online as you do in person.

## ALL ADULTS PLAY A ROLE IN CHILD PROTECTION



### LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[Safe to Compete. Protecting Child Athletes](#)

[Orphanage Volunteering. Why to Say No](#)

[Best Practices for a Staff Code of Conduct](#)

[9 Questions to Ask About Child Protection](#)