



# Child Abuse Prevention Month

## Tips for Youth-Serving Organizations to Prevent Child Abuse

Organizations that work with children and youth must strive to create safe environments for youth, employees, and volunteers so that young people can grow, learn, and have fun. It is vital that youth-serving organizations create a culture where child abuse is discussed, addressed, and prevented.

### Hire wisely.

**Screen all applicants for all positions that will have contact with youth.** Screening for child abuse prevention should be integrated into the general screening and selection process that organizations use when choosing the best possible candidates for positions. Child abuse prevention should be a key consideration when deciding whom to select.

### Establish interaction guidelines.

**Organizations should develop interaction policies before situations arise.** Guidelines on interactions between individuals should be determined by an organization's mission and activities. For example, organizations that promote one-on-one activities between adults and youth may need different interaction guidelines than programs built around group activities. Strategies should also match the cultural context of the population served by the organization.

### Monitor behavior.

**All employees/volunteers are responsible for monitoring behavior and interactions.** Organizations need an appropriate balance between monitoring for potential risk and for appropriate behaviors. Acknowledge that some situations pose more risk for inappropriate or harmful behavior than others. For example, interactions during an overnight trip are harder to monitor than interactions in a classroom. It is equally important to acknowledge, praise, and encourage appropriate behaviors by rewarding and reinforcing positive interactions between employees/volunteers and youth.

### Ensure safe environments.

**Select spaces that are open, visible, and easily monitored.** Environmental strategies will vary depending on the organization. Some examples include having clear lines of sight throughout the building, secure areas not used for program purposes to prevent youth from being isolated, and Institute a "no closed door" policy. Your organization should monitor who is present at all times.

### Train all staff.

**The best defense against child abuse is to prevent it from ever happening.** To prevent child sexual abuse, employees/volunteers need to understand general information about child abuse and its prevalence. Defining the continuum of appropriate, inappropriate, and harmful behavior from your organization's perspective is critical. Your training should also describe risk and protective factors and address common myths about offenders such as the myth that most people who abuse children and youth are strangers.