

# Youth Protection Guidelines

## A Guide for Parents and Scout Leaders

Child abuse is one of the key issues that affects the youth of the Philippines. The Boy Scouts of the Philippines, being one of the foremost youth organizations in the country, has a key responsibility of educating Scout leaders and parents in manners of identifying a child abuse case as well as situations that may lead to such. It is likewise important for the Scout leaders and parents to be aware of their responsibilities in such situation and the manner of reporting such cases.

It is the hope of this publication to meet that end of educating our Scout leaders and parents about the realities of child abuse.

## The Rights of the Child

It is the right of the Child:

1. To be born. To have a name and nationality.
2. To be free. To have a family that will take care of them.
3. To have a good education.
4. To develop their potentials.
5. To have enough food, shelter, a healthy and active body.
6. To be given the opportunity for play and for leisure.
7. To be given protection against abuse, danger, and violence brought by war and conflict.
8. To live in a peaceful community.
9. To be defended and assisted by the government.
10. To be able to express their own views.

## Child Abuse

Normally we co-relate child abuse to physical abuse, when in fact child abuse is not simply limited to this type of abuse. Child abuse is defined under *Republic Act No. 7610* or the *Special Protection of Children against Child Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act*. Under RA7610 child abuse is defined as the maltreatment, whether habitual or not, of the child which includes:

- a. Psychological and physical abuse, neglect, cruelty, sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment;
- b. Any act by deeds or words which debases, degrades, or demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of a child as a human being;
- c. Unreasonable deprivation of his basic needs for survival such as food and shelter; or
- d. Failure to immediately give medical treatment to an injured child resulting in serious impairment of his growth and development or in his permanent incapacity or death.

The term “child” is defined as any person below the age of 18, or those over 18 but is unable to fully take care of themselves or protect themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition.

## **Types of Abuse**

It should be recognized that most abuses are not limited to one type; it is usually a combination of two or more types of abuses.

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is the act of deliberately inflicting injury to a child by a person who is responsible for the child’s care. It is the result of unreasonable physical punishment, or punishment that is too harsh for the child.

### **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse damages the child’s self-esteem and can lead to developmental problems. This type of abuse can be as simple as expecting too much from the child (e.g. academics, athletics) and can be as constantly ridiculing the child. It also includes comparing the child unfavorably with siblings or other children and making the child feel that his or her effort is not good enough.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse happens when an adult or an older child uses his or her authority over a child to involve them in a sexually oriented activity. In this case, the adult or the older child is considered a molester. It not limited to sexual inter-course of physically intimate sexual acts, it can include any activity performed for the sexual satisfaction of the molester such as the showing of sexual organs.

Sexual abuse also includes exploitation such as child prostitution.

### **Neglect**

If the person responsible for the child is able to but deliberately does not provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and supervision. The ability to provide separates neglect from the conditions of poverty.

Also, neglect can loosely include abandonment. Where in a child is no longer cared for by the adult responsible for his or her welfare. For the sake of law, a time frame is given. Six months of neglect or the discovery that a missing child report was not filed after 72-hours that the child was known to be missing constitutes abandonment.

## Detecting Abuse

A child who was abused may or may not show signs of the abuse ever happening. With the exception of physical abuse, there are no outward signs or symptoms that can tell us that a child is being abused.

### Physical Abuse

Children experience minor injuries as a normal part of their childhood. These injuries usually occur in predictable areas such as the knees and elbows.

Injuries found in soft tissue areas such as the abdomen or the back of the legs, which are not typical childhood injuries are possible signs of physical abuse. Bruises on the same area, especially if the bruises are of different discoloration are also a sign of physical abuse. Such difference in discoloration is a sign that the bruises occurred at different times.

Parents and Scout leaders are encouraged to be inquisitive about childhood injuries. Asking the child about a particular injury may give you an insight on whether or not such an injury is normal or something the child would rather not talk about.

Physical punishment that requires medical attention most definitely constitutes excessive physical disciplining.

### Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is very subtle compared to physical abuse. Some normal signs of possible emotional abuse are the child's apparent lack of self-esteem or self-worth which can be repeated verbally by the child. Stuttering or a speech disorder may be a possible sign of emotional abuse.

### Sexual Abuse

Children who are victims of sexual molestation may show knowledge of sexually oriented language or acts that are not normally known by children of their age. These children may show fear of adults and may isolate themselves from the rest of the people.

Other outwardly signs may include the sudden change of behavior of a child and change in attitude towards an adult or another child for no apparent reason.

### Neglect

Neglect can have a very outwardly sign. Children with poor hygiene, clothing, or equipment, even though the parent clearly has the means to provide for them, may be victims of neglect. Other signs may include medical conditions that are not given proper medical care.

## Policies of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA)

The BSA protection policies are designed to protect youth members as well as adult leaders from the possible occurrence of child abuse (particularly sexual abuse). These policies are:

- Two-Deep Leadership
- No One-on-One Contact
- Respect for Privacy
- Separate Accommodations
- Proper Preparation for High-Adventure Activities
- No Secret Organizations
- Constructive Discipline
- Hazing and Initiation Prohibited

### Why BSA Policies?

Despite the number of incidents of sexual abuse in camps, there has been a lack of written literatures, policies, and trainings from the Boy Scouts of the Philippines (BSP) concerning youth protection. This is the reason why there is a need to adopt the policies of the BSA to fit our own needs.

As far as BSP units are concerned, the BSA policies should be considered as a recommendation, since I am in no position to dictate what policies the BSP should adopt.

But it is my sincerest hope that the BSP recognizes the vacuum in policies with regards to youth protection within our organization, and that they make haste on creating our own policies or simply adopt, entirely or partly, policies of other youth organizations such as the BSA.

## BSA Policies

These policies were instituted to proactively prevent opportunities for abuse to arise within the Scouting program and to provide protection to both our youth and adult members.

### Two-Deep Leadership

In all Scouting activities, trips, and outings, there should be at least two registered adult leaders or one registered adult leader and one parent or guardian of a participant. One adult should be trained with regards to youth protection policies.

This is further ensured through requirements on the tour permits or camping permits inquiring on whether an accompanying adult is youth protection trained. An affirmative answer to these inquiry is required prior to a tour permit is issued by the local Scout service center.

**No One-on-One Contact**

One-on-one contact between youth and adult members is not permitted. Any meeting that requires personal conferences (e.g. Scoutmaster's Conference) must be done in clear view of other youth and adult members.

The BSA also adopts the policy of the buddy system which requires a Scout to be with at least one other Scout at all times during Scouting activities.

**Respect for Privacy**

Adult leaders must respect the privacy of youth members in situations such as changing clothes or taking showers. Adults must protect their own privacy in similar situations.

**Separate Accommodations**

No youth member may sleep in the tent or sleeping quarters of an adult, unless the adult is a parent or guardian. At no time may an adult sleep in a sleeping quarter assigned for youth members, wherein the adult is not a parent or guardian to at least one of the youth member staying in that tent or sleeping quarter.

Separate accommodation, shower, and latrine facilities must be provided for female participants. Members under 18-years of age and those 18-years of age and over must be provided separate accommodations as well. If not possible, a shower schedule must be implemented.

**Proper Preparation for High-Adventure Activities**

Activities that have elements of risk must not be undertaken without proper preparation, equipment, clothing, supervision, and safety measures.

Placing youth members in potentially dangerous situation without proper preparation, equipment, clothing, supervision, and safety measures may constitute neglect. Forcing or pressuring a child to participate in an activity he or she is not prepared to participate in may be a form of emotional abuse.

**No Secret Organizations**

The Boy Scouts of America does not recognize any secret organizations as part of the program. Although the Order of the Arrow program may be called a secret organization because of the nature of their degree of secrecy, all Scouting programs are open for observation by parents and adult leaders.

## **Constructive Discipline**

Corporal punishment is never permitted in Scouting. Discipline used in Scouting must reflect its values.

## **Hazing and Initiation Prohibited**

Physical hazing and initiation are prohibited in any Scouting activities.

# **Unit Responsibilities**

All members of Scouting are responsible to conduct themselves in accordance with the principles of the Scout Oath and Law.

It is the responsibility of the adult leaders of the unit to monitor the behavior of its youth members and intercede whenever necessary. Parents of misbehaving youth must be informed of the misbehavior and are expected to assist in dealing with it.

The unit committee must review repetitive and serious incidents of misbehavior in consultation with the child's parent. A course of corrective action must be determined and may include the possible revocation of the youth's membership in the unit.

It is also the responsibility of the unit committee and other adult leaders to likewise monitor the behavior of its adult leaders.

# **Responding to Disclosures**

The easiest way to know whether a child was a victim of abuse is when a child discloses the abuse to you. As leaders, we should be aware of how to deal with such disclosures and what is the appropriate course of action to be taken.

## **Your Response**

Stay calm. Do not overreact to the disclosure and avoid asking questions similar to "why didn't you say no?" or "why didn't you do this or that?" Don't criticize the child or make comments that will make the child feel guilty. Make sure you listen to the child and avoid taking notes at this time (listen carefully and take notes later). Identify to the child that he or she is the victim and that the abuser is the guilty one.

Unless you are trained to interview abused children, there is no need to ask for more information than the information the child is spontaneously giving to you.

## Reporting

Within BSA policies, if the incident occurred during a Scouting activity or through Scouting, it must be reported to the Council Scout Executive who has jurisdiction on the place where it happened. You are to report it to the Council Scout Executive alone and no one else to provide privacy to the victimized youth member. The Council Scout Executive will make sure that the report reaches the appropriate government agency.

Philippine law requires that the reporting be done by the following:

- a. Offended party;
- b. Parents or guardians;
- c. Ascendant or collateral relative within the third degree of consanguinity;
- d. Officer, social worker, or representative of a licensed child-caring institution;
- e. Officer or social worker of the Department of Social Welfare and Development;
- f. Barangay chairman; or
- g. At least three (3) concerned, responsible citizens where the violation occurred.

## If you Suspect...

Unit leaders are not an investigative body. It is not the responsibility of the unit leader, the sponsoring institution, or the Boy Scouts of the Philippines to investigate incidents of suspected child abuse. That responsibility falls upon the proper government agency.

As long as there is reasonable suspicion that child abuse did occur, we have a moral obligation to report such suspicion to the proper authorities. This is true even if you suspect that a child is lying about an alleged child abuse. It is not our place as adult leaders to make a decision whether or not the child is lying. It is our responsibility to report any incidents or disclosures of child abuse.

If you suspect that the child is lying, report it anyways, but include in your report your observations of why it may not be true.