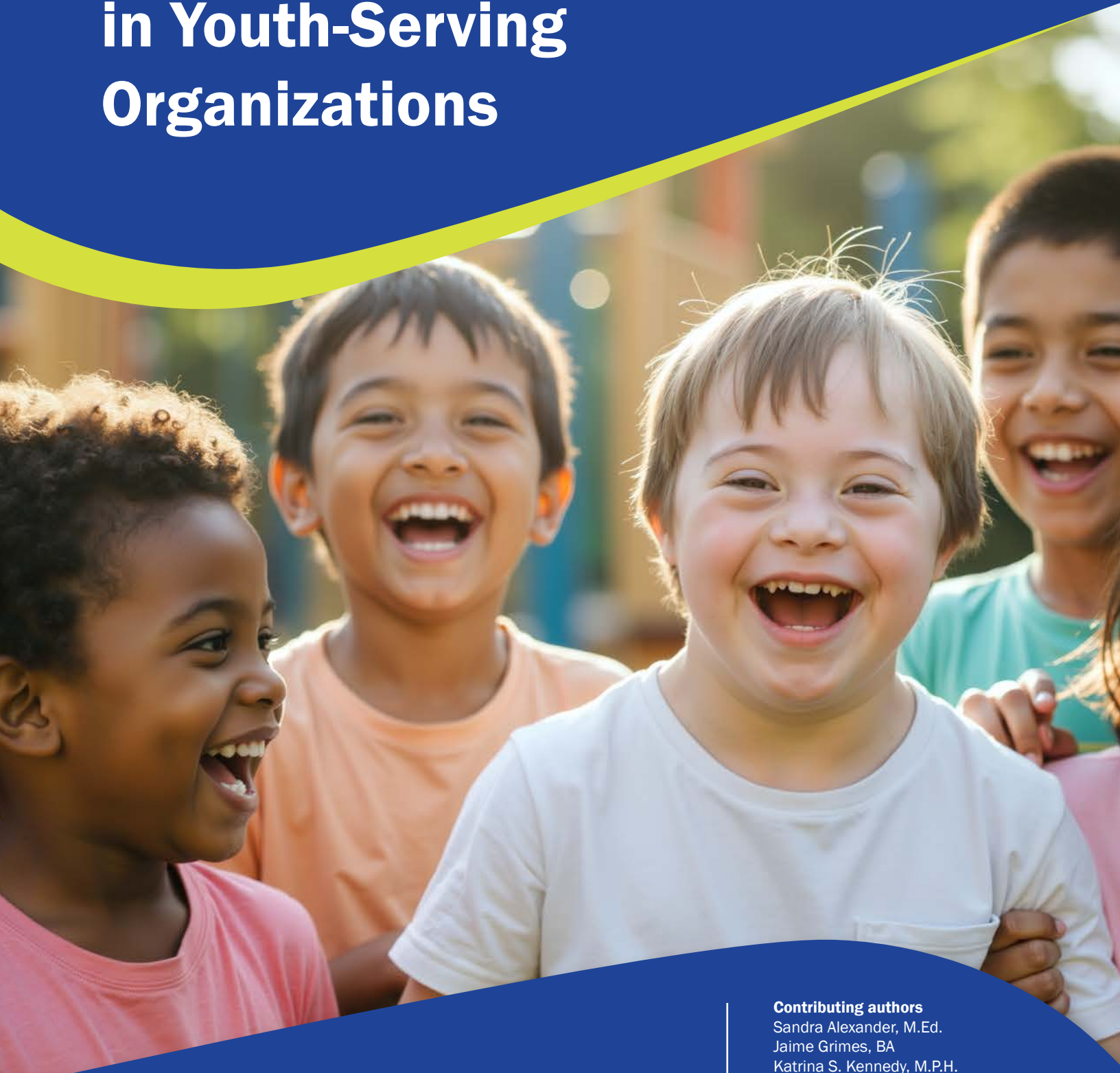


Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse in Youth-Serving Organizations



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Glossary of Terms

Below is a list of terms you will see throughout the document, along with a brief definition or description of each.

Child sexual abuse: The involvement of youth (person less than 18 years old) in sexual activity that violates federal, state, tribal, or local laws or that youth do not fully comprehend, are not developmentally prepared for, and do not consent to or are unable to give informed consent to.

Child sexual abuse can occur in person or online, it can involve contact (i.e., touching, penetration) and non-contact (i.e., exposure, image-based abuse) behaviors, and it is most often perpetrated by someone the child knows and trusts.

Parents and caregivers: In this resource, the phrase “parents and caregivers” is used to describe any parent or other guardian responsible for youth daily care and well-being, such as biological parents, adoptive parents, stepparents, foster parents, legal guardians, grandparents, or other relatives.

Problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth: Sexual behaviors by or between children under the age of 18 which are not developmentally appropriate and have the potential to harm themselves or others. These behaviors, which are sometimes called peer-peer abuse or youth-perpetrated child sexual abuse, can range from behaviors that are mutual but potentially problematic to behaviors that involve force or coercion.

Staff: Adult employees and volunteers of youth-serving organizations, unless specified.

Youth, young person, child, or children: Anyone under the age of 18.

Youth-serving organization: A corporation, association, community center, sports team, league, athletic association, or organization that provides recreational, educational, cultural, social, charitable, faith-based, or other activities or services to persons under 18 years of age.

Schools and long-term care facilities are not included in this definition and are not the main audience for this resource because specific regulations often govern them. However, many of the concepts discussed in this resource may help to keep children safe in schools and other organizations beyond those included in this “youth-serving organization” definition.

Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-Serving Organizations

Youth-serving organizations build strengths, skills, and connections in children and young people, supporting positive child development and strengthening community involvement through recreational, sporting, educational, faith-based, civic, or artistic activities. Because of the significant role they play in the lives of millions of children and their families, they are critical partners for keeping children safe and preventing child abuse, including child sexual abuse.¹ Youth-serving organizations already implement a wide array of strategies to keep the children they serve safe, spanning topics such as organizational commitment to child safety, codes of conduct, training and education, screening and hiring, and reporting and responding.⁶

This resource is designed to support youth-serving organizations as they adopt or strengthen child sexual abuse prevention strategies to keep the children they serve safe. While not every element in this document will be applicable to every youth-serving organization based on their mission, programs, or available resources, it contains prevention strategies related to eight priority areas based on the best available evidence for preventing and responding to child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.

Prevention Priorities

1. **Protect and support all youth:** This section provides information about groups of youth at increased risk of experiencing abuse and unique considerations to help organizations better support and protect all youth they serve.
2. **Strengthen organizational foundation:** This section focuses on establishing foundational policies and practices to create and maintain an organizational culture that keeps all children safe from sexual abuse and other harmful behavior.
3. **Understand and address youth sexual behavior:** This section provides information to help organizations understand youth sexual development and prevent and respond to problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.
4. **Build and maintain a staff that supports youth safety:** This section provides considerations and strategies to support organizations in identifying and onboarding staff and volunteers who will prioritize youth safety and well-being.
5. **Establish expectations for behavior and monitor interactions:** This section focuses on establishing organizational guidelines around acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and active monitoring and supervision of interactions.
6. **Create and maintain safe physical and digital spaces:** This section provides strategies for protecting youth and preventing abuse and problematic or harmful behavior by creating and maintaining safe environments in physical and digital spaces.
7. **Educate and empower staff, parents, and youth:** This section focuses on building critical skills and knowledge in staff, volunteers, parents and caregivers, and youth to support youth safety and well-being.
8. **Respond effectively to abuse and policy and boundary violations:** This section provides detailed information to support organizations in responding to concerns or knowledge of abuse, harmful behavior, or policy violations.



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Prevention Priority 1

Protect and Support All Youth

All youth deserve to live happy, healthy lives free from child sexual abuse. Any child can experience sexual abuse, regardless of their family's income, their race, ethnicity, culture, or if they live in a rural or urban area. However, research shows that some groups of children experience greater risk. Youth-serving organizations can learn about groups of youth who experience increased risk of sexual abuse and take active steps to support and protect them.

American Indian and Alaska Native Youth

American Indian and Alaska Native people experience the highest rate of child sexual abuse of any racial or ethnic group.⁷ In the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by CDC, approximately 15% of American Indian and Alaska Native people reported having experienced sexual violence, compared to an overall rate of approximately 11%.⁸

About 9.7 million people living in the U.S. identify as American Indian and Alaska Native, either alone or combined with one or more race or ethnicity groups. Youth-serving organizations in many cities and towns may have American Indian and Alaska Native youth in the areas they serve, as more than 87% of American Indians and Alaska Natives do not live on tribal lands or reservations.⁹

Some reasons American Indian and Alaska Native youth may be at higher risk for child sexual abuse include:

- **A history of psychologically painful experiences.** Many American Indian and Alaska Native youth—that is, children who would be or are in youth-serving organizations today—were born to parents and grandparents who, as children, may have been taken from their own families and forced into government-administered boarding schools where many were abused physically, emotionally, and sexually.¹⁰ This abuse deeply distressed some older American Indian and Alaska Native generations about authority figures—fears and beliefs that may have been passed down to younger generations.^{10, 11} This may result in American Indian and Alaska Native youth and their caregivers feeling less

comfortable reaching out for help if they have concerns about an unsafe situation, inappropriate behavior, or abusive behavior.

- **The impacts of unfair treatment.** American Indian and Alaska Native people, including youth, may encounter discrimination in many areas of life, including health care and the criminal legal system.¹² This may prevent parents and caregivers from seeking or receiving help to keep their children safe. For children, this may create barriers to reaching out for help.
- **The impacts of poverty, unemployment, and insufficient housing.** American Indian and Alaska Native communities experience high levels of poverty, unemployment, and insufficient housing.^{10,13} This can lead to unsafe environments for youth, reduced access to resources, family stress, and other family problems.
- **Involvement with child welfare systems.** Youth who are placed in foster care may be at increased risk of experiencing sexual abuse before, during, or after their placement.^{13,14} The Indian Child Welfare Act requires that efforts be made to place Native children with American Indian and Alaska Native caretakers, but challenges remain with the implementation of the law. Children removed from their families are sometimes placed with non-Native families due to a lack of resources.¹⁰

Organizations can support and protect American Indian and Alaska Native youth. In addition to other strategies found in this document, some of the steps organizations can take include:

- Identifying people or groups by their specific tribal affiliation whenever possible. “American Indian” or “Alaska Native” should only be used to describe people with different tribal affiliations, or when the tribal affiliations are unknown.
- Learning about unique identities of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples, such as Two-Spirit (2S) people. Two-Spirit is an umbrella term used in Native communities to describe people whose gender identity encompasses both male and female energies, and is recognized as a third gender. Two-Spirit people may or may not identify as LGBTQ+. Most Native communities have their own unique words for describing people who defy gender norms and often these individuals hold distinct places of honor in their communities.¹⁶
- Engaging in Native-led partnerships with Elders and other tribal or family leaders to incorporate Native values, customs, and perspectives into programming and training. Share lessons learned from these efforts back into the community.
- Connecting with organizations or tribal communities that specialize in helping American Indian and Alaska Native youth heal from negative experiences that happened to them or other family members, such as Canoe Journeys of the Pacific Northwest, [Healing of the Canoe Project](#), [Tribal Youth Resource Center](#) or [StrongHearts](#).
- Connecting with trusted leaders like the [National Women’s Indigenous Resource Center](#), [National Indian Child Welfare Association](#), and [National Tribal Clearinghouse on Sexual Assault - Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition](#) for information and resources.

Youth with Disabilities

A disability is any impairment of the body or mind that may limit activity and participation in how a person interacts with the world around them.¹⁷ Different

disabilities can affect vision, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, hearing, mental health, and social relationships. People with disabilities have a wide range of needs, and the same type of disability can affect different people in different ways. Some disabilities may be difficult to see, so it is important not to make assumptions about a person's abilities.^{17,18}

A 2023 review of 35 studies found that youth with disabilities experience child sexual abuse two to four times more often than youth without disabilities.¹⁹ Some youth with disabilities are at an even higher risk of child sexual abuse than youth with other types of disabilities, including youth who are nonverbal or hearing impaired, youth who rely on others for personal care or communication, and youth with more than one type of disability.²⁰⁻²³

Some reasons youth with disabilities may be at higher risk for child sexual abuse include:

- **Insufficient information on safety, sexuality, and relationships.** Youth with disabilities may not receive acceptable, accessible, or developmentally appropriate information about sexual health and relationships. Even when information about safety, sexuality, or relationships is provided in special education classrooms, it may not be tailored to the needs of children with disabilities. This can lead to youth with disabilities lacking understanding about their bodies, as well as healthy boundaries and relationships, increasing their risk of sexual abuse.^{24,25}
- **The potential need for assistance with personal care.** Youth with disabilities may depend more on others for daily activities and personal hygiene-related care, and they may rely more on personal care that happens outside the home.^{23,24} The need for assistance may lead to a lack of privacy when changing clothes, toileting, and bathing.
 - In addition, caregivers and others might touch youth with disabilities without their consent (such as touching youth with physical disabilities to “help” them, without asking if they need help). These factors may cause youth to have trouble understanding or enforcing their own boundaries.
- **Challenges associated with reporting.** Youth with disabilities, particularly disabilities involving communication, may not be able to tell others if they are experiencing abuse or inappropriate behavior.^{24,25}
- **The impact of perceptions of youth with disabilities.** Stereotypes about people with disabilities lead some people to view them as dependent, unaware, or weak, which can make them vulnerable to experiencing sexual abuse. They also may not be believed if they report boundary violations or abuse because people may think their reports are not credible.^{24,25}

Organizations can support and protect youth with disabilities. In addition to other strategies found in this document, steps organizations can take include:

- Adapting physical spaces to be accessible to all youth, such as making spaces large enough for wheelchairs to easily move around.
- Refraining from touching youth, their assistive devices, or service animals without their consent.
- Giving youth the opportunity to do things on their own without help unless they request it.²⁶ Encouraging staff to intervene and respond if they observe other staff assisting youth with disabilities with things that they can do themselves (e.g., helping them dress or undress, use the restroom, etc.).

- Providing disability-specific sexuality and abuse prevention education to help youth with disabilities have the language and knowledge to recognize and report abuse.
- Providing opportunities for youth to learn and share experiences with their peers.²⁶
- Asking what language youth with disabilities prefer to refer to themselves and their disabilities and using that language when speaking to or about them.
- Incorporating information about the strengths of youth with disabilities, how to respect their independence and abilities, and better recognizing and responding to suspicion of abuse for youth who may be unable to communicate, into training materials for staff and volunteers.

Immigrant and Refugee Youth

Immigrant and refugee youth come to the United States with or without their parents and caregivers for many reasons, including adoption, education, economics, or to escape threatening conditions.

A 2023 study using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health found that 41% of youth born outside the U.S. experienced child maltreatment, including child sexual abuse, compared to 33% of native-born youth.²⁷

Some reasons immigrant and refugee youth may be at higher risk for child sexual abuse include:

- **Unique, negative experiences.** Immigrant and refugee youth and their families may have had harmful experiences, such as sexual abuse or human trafficking; exposure to community violence; separation from family members before or after arrival; or unsafe conditions in their country of origin that led them to escape or flee. These experiences may lead to fears and beliefs that may prevent youth from speaking up if they are experiencing abuse.²⁸⁻³⁰
- **Challenges with access to services and support.** Both immigrants and refugees may have challenges with accessing services and support. Some may be ineligible for certain services or federal benefit programs due to documentation status, and some may have fears associated with refugee, immigrant, or documentation status. It can also be challenging to quickly learn the language, social situations, and laws of a new culture.³¹ Additionally, immigrant and refugee youth may handle family responsibilities such as translating or managing finances. These additional responsibilities can be stressful for youth and may lead to misperceptions that parents and caregivers are “disengaged” or “unfit.” These beliefs are not only harmful but also create additional barriers to accessing services.
- **The impacts of poverty, unemployment, and insufficient housing.** Immigrant and refugee youth are likely to experience poverty, housing instability, and food insecurity.²⁸ This can lead to unsafe environments for youth, reduced access to resources, and family stress and other family problems.

Organizations can support and protect immigrant and refugee youth. In addition to other strategies found in this document, steps organizations can take include:

- Helping connect youth with training and skill-building opportunities such as language learning and academic assistance, so they can more easily

- communicate, adapt to their new school system, and excel academically.
- Helping connect families with navigation services and basic need supports such as obtaining identification, registering for school, or finding a doctor and resources like support groups, legal assistance, and language instruction.
- Helping youth feel a sense of belonging and build healthy relationships with adults and youth in the organization.
- Collaborating with other community organizations to determine which services and resources are available to people regardless of their documentation status.
- Bridging cultural gaps by communicating to youth and their families what is considered child abuse and neglect and what organizations are required to report.
- Engaging in culturally responsive discussions with staff and youth about topics that may be difficult to talk about in some immigrant and refugee communities such as abuse, trauma, gender, sex, and relationships.
- Connecting with local or national immigrant and refugee support organizations such as [International Rescue Committee \[IRC\]](#) and [U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants \[USCRI\]](#).
- Translating organizational policies and prevention materials into the native languages of youth and their families.

LGBTQ+ Youth

LGBTQ+ youth include youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, non-binary or gender non-conforming, two-spirit (2S), and more. In the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 17% to 23% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students and 26% of transgender students reported experiencing sexual violence, compared to an overall rate of approximately 11%.⁸

Some reasons LGBTQ+ youth may be at higher risk for child sexual abuse include:

- **Insufficient information on safety, sexuality, and healthy relationships.** LGBTQ+ youth may have limited access to information about safety, sexuality, and healthy relationships that address the unique considerations and experiences of LGBTQ+ people. This can increase risk of sexual abuse because LGBTQ+ youth are not equipped with information that helps them determine if situations are unsafe or abusive.^{32,33}
- **Challenges with accessing support.** LGBTQ+ youth may have limited support systems. This lack of support increases risk of abuse and creates barriers to seeking help if they are experiencing an unsafe or abusive situation. LGBTQ+ youth may also be reluctant to report abuse or inappropriate behavior for fear of people finding out about their sexual or gender identity before they are ready or blaming their abuse on their sexual orientation or gender identity.^{33,34}
- **Experiences of stigma, discrimination, fear, and trauma.** Some LGBTQ+ youth have experienced complex trauma from gender- or identity-based discrimination, rejection, lack of family support, and bullying. These experiences may lead to LGBTQ+ youth feeling distrustful of others and not feeling safe to disclose their gender identity or sexual orientation, which can prevent them accessing the services and support they need.^{35,36}

Organizations can support and protect LGBTQ+ youth. In addition to other strategies found in this document, steps organizations can take include:

- Talking regularly with youth to ensure they feel safe at the organization and that they belong.

- Requiring respectful interactions between all individuals in the organization (adults and youth) and having a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination or hate speech.
- Incorporating LGBTQ+ affirming language and inclusive terminology, such as preferred pronouns and chosen names, as well as gender-neutral words. For example, “youth or children” instead of “boys and girls” or “parents and caregivers” instead of “mom and dad”. However, do not assume that youth will feel safe or comfortable sharing their pronouns or chosen name; it may be helpful if staff lead by example.
- Seeking input from youth about ways to update program materials to better reflect their identities and experiences. Partner with local or national organizations (such as the Human Rights Campaign or GLSEN) for additional resources and support.
- Establishing confidentiality policies that define what is considered confidential (such as sexual and gender identities, expressions, attractions, and behaviors) and when and where it is and is not appropriate to disclose that information, because some LGBTQ+ youth may not have come out to their parents and caregivers, family, community members, and/or peers.
- Considering whether it is necessary to separate activities and programming by gender for safety. If so, take steps to ensure all youth, including LGBTQ+ youth, feel safe and comfortable in their group.

Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Youth experiencing homelessness often do not have a safe, stable place to sleep, clean themselves, store personal belongings, access food, do homework, participate in youth-serving organization activities, or meet other basic needs. They may be with their family or on their own. They may live in someone else’s home; motels, hotels, or campgrounds; emergency or transitional shelters; or cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, or similar settings.³⁷

A 2016 study found that more than a third of respondents without safe, stable housing reported experiencing child sexual abuse prior to experiencing homelessness, and 13% reported experiencing sexual assault while experiencing homelessness.³⁸

Some reasons youth experiencing homelessness may be at higher risk for child sexual abuse include:

- **Exposure to high-risk settings and situations.** The lack of safe, stable housing can lead to exposure to high-risk situations, including situations where people may sexually exploit youth who are trying to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and safety.³⁹⁻⁴¹
- **Experiences of abuse, neglect, or rejection.** Youth experiencing homelessness may have experienced child abuse, neglect, or family rejection that forced them to leave home. These experiences can make them vulnerable to additional abuse or mistreatment.⁴⁰
- **Challenges with support systems.** Youth experiencing homelessness may be isolated from family and other support systems, making it more challenging for them to seek support or report abuse.

Organizations can support and protect youth experiencing homelessness. In

addition to other strategies found in this document, some of the steps organizations can take include:

- Considering unique challenges faced by youth experiencing homelessness when creating organizational policies. For example, before imposing disciplinary action for youth who miss events or activities, consider that they may have more challenges than other youth with things like transportation. Seeking out ways to provide support, rather than consequences, may help youth stay involved.
- Identifying and partnering with local community or national organizations such as [United Way 2-1-1](#) to provide resources for housing.
- Referring youth (and their families, if applicable) to resources to assist with basic needs such as housing, food, utilities, transportation and more.
- Providing staff training on engaging and serving youth experiencing homelessness while maintaining healthy boundaries between YSO staff and youth.
- Encouraging youth experiencing homelessness to actively participate in their own safety and protection and helping them identify individuals they can trust to share safety concerns. Focus on leadership skills to mobilize youth to create the changes they want to see in their lives.
- Having open, frequent discussions with youth to understand how their lives and circumstances are changing. As youth's needs change, consider what resources and organizations may be most helpful.

NOTE: It is important to understand that youth may be members of more than one group. For example, youth experiencing homelessness may also be immigrants, LGBTQ+, or have disabilities. These intersecting identities can increase the risk of complex trauma, which is often the result of racism, classism, ableism, homophobia, nativism, and other forms of systematic oppression. Youth with intersecting identities are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual abuse and face increased health, educational, employment, social, and economic inequities that can worsen as they get older.^{42,43}

Your organization may not serve children in each of these populations but understanding the different types of risks and taking steps to provide safe, supportive environments for all youth can help protect the safety and well-being of the youth your organization serves today and those you may serve in the future.

Youth-serving organizations may struggle to establish trust and engage with youth and community leaders, and that's understandable. Building trust takes time and happens when organizations show respect, consistency, and compassion through their mission, goals, values, and practices.

Some of the actions organizations can take to support and protect all youth include:

- Designing policies that help staff be positive role models.
- Hiring staff that represent the diversity of families and youth served by the organization.
- Using respectful, appropriate language when speaking with and about youth. Remember that language and terms are always evolving, and at times there

may be no clear consensus on language and terms within communities.

Continually engage with youth and community leaders to understand and use their preferred terms.

- Empowering youth to communicate concerns, suspicions, or child sexual abuse incidents or behaviors with adults who can help.
- Featuring youth of different races, ethnicities, gender identities, and abilities interacting with each other on program materials.
- Recognizing diversity and promoting inclusion and belonging by providing youth and staff opportunities to celebrate and share their backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives through activities.
- Creating opportunities for youth to connect with staff and other youth on issues that matter to them such as family relationships, safety concerns, social pressures, stigma, or trauma.
- Providing youth and their families with online and printed materials with prevention information and resources for support that are in the languages they speak and accessible to those with disabilities.
- Specifically prohibiting harmful and discriminatory language and behaviors in staff and youth codes of conduct.

If youth do not feel an organization accepts them for who they are or understands their backgrounds or experiences, the organization may not be able to establish a feeling of safety, foster healthy staff-to-youth relationships, and prevent child sexual abuse within it. Youth-serving organizations can better address the needs of all youth they serve by taking active steps to understand their backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives and ensure they feel a sense of belonging in the organization.⁴⁴ Through these actions, youth-serving organizations can foster environments where all youth feel safe and accepted, which supports positive youth development and may prevent child sexual abuse and other challenges youth face.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁷

TIP: Connect with partners to support and protect youth

Connecting and collaborating with partner organizations is a helpful way to learn how to work with youth at increased risk for child sexual abuse. Youth-serving organizations may not have the internal expertise needed to understand or address the needs of all youth they serve. For some partnership suggestions, please see Appendix A.

Organization Self-Reflection Questions

- Which of these groups of youth at increased risk of abuse are served by our organization? Which groups may be served by our organization without us necessarily knowing it?
- What challenges does our organization face in protecting and supporting youth in each of these groups? What ideas do we have to address these challenges?
- What organizations could we refer families or youth to or collaborate with?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization is already doing well?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization could improve to strengthen our efforts?
- What resources are available to our organization to support us in addressing this priority area?



Strengthen Organizational Foundation

Youth-serving organizations can take steps to strengthen their organizational foundation to create and maintain a culture that keeps all children safe from sexual abuse and other harmful behavior. This includes establishing or refining organizational structures, policies, practices; engaging parents and caregivers and youth in prevention goals and approaches; committing to emphasizing and developing youth strengths; fostering an open, transparent culture; and establishing review and improvement processes.

Establish and refine organizational structures

Staff, volunteers, board members, and other organization personnel play key roles in developing and implementing prevention policies and practices. Organizations can take steps to structure their board and staff roles and responsibilities in a way that reinforces organizational child safety goals and culture.

- Select diverse board members with skills and knowledge to support positive youth development and child sexual abuse prevention.
- Create an organizational chart that clearly defines leadership roles and responsibilities.
- Establish a position or team that focuses on child sexual abuse prevention and response.
- Hire and maintain staff whose identities represent the populations the organization serves.
- Provide necessary training to support successful implementation of child safety policies and practices.
- Create one or more advisory boards—consisting of parents and caregivers, community members, staff and volunteers, or any combination of these groups—that align with the organization’s mission, goals, and values.

Establish and refine organizational policies and practices

Once the organizational structure has been established or refined, leadership can evaluate existing policies and practices to determine if they should be expanded or refined.

- Conduct an inventory of all current policies and practices related to youth safety and preventing abuse. Compare against best practices in this resource and others to identify potential opportunities for improvement.
- Conduct an inventory of all programming and activities within the organization that involve adult-youth or youth-youth interactions. Assess these programs and activities by evaluating aspects such as ratios of adults to youth, potential risk factors, and opportunities to increase safety.
- Work with your advisory board and others involved in the organization's prevention efforts to determine which policies and practices should be established or modified.

Engage parents, caregivers, and youth in prevention goals and approaches

Engaging parents and caregivers and youth in prevention efforts can increase buy-in and effectiveness of these efforts and strengthen your organization's foundation to keep children safe.

- Actively seek and incorporate feedback from parents and caregivers and youth about organizational policies and practices, especially those related to child safety and abuse prevention.
- Consider including parents and caregivers on organizational advisory boards and establishing youth advisory boards.
- Create opportunities for parent and caregiver involvement in the organization and share these opportunities through printed materials, the organization's website, social media pages, emails, or texts.
- Regularly check in with youth and their parents and caregivers about their experiences at the organization, including their interactions with staff, volunteers, and other youth.
- Make information accessible to all parents and caregivers and youth such as providing it in different languages and formats.

Commit to emphasizing and developing youth strengths

When organizations take active steps to emphasize and develop youth strengths, they build self-esteem in youth, increase their sense of belonging in the organization, and help them connect with their peers, families, and communities. These protective benefits may reduce a child's risk of experiencing sexual abuse.⁴⁸

To emphasize and develop youth strengths, organizations can:

- Empower staff to act as mentors or support in helping youth establish their own goals built on their strengths.
- Create roles for youth to provide input on youth-serving organization policies, programs, and practices.
- Create opportunities for youth to build skills and collaborate with and support other youth.
- Create youth-led groups or committees to support youth leadership development.
- Ensure supervisors regularly observe staff to assess how they promote youth strengths, provide positive feedback on what's working, and make suggestions for improvement.

- Talk with youth about their sources of support—whether it’s family members, school or religious organization mentors, a friend group, or their community.
- Learn about youth’s housing, education, employment, financial, or career goals and how the youth-serving organization can help support those goals.

Foster an open, transparent organization

Promote an open and transparent organization by working with youth, staff, and parents and caregivers to understand their experiences and identify areas of improvement for organizational culture and safety.

Ask direct, objective questions about behaviors, which may include:

- For youth: What do you like and not like about interacting with staff? Has anyone in the organization ever made you feel uncomfortable (for example, by touching you in a way or saying something to you that didn’t feel right)? If so, did you feel like you had a safe place or a person to talk to about what happened? Do you have any questions about the youth code of conduct or concerns about being able to follow our policies?
- For staff: Do you have any questions about maintaining appropriate boundaries with youth in our care? Have you ever witnessed a staff member, volunteer, or youth member violating a policy or crossing a boundary? If so, did you feel like you had a safe outlet to express concerns? What training or resources would help you in your role to keep our organization safe for everyone involved?
- For parents and caregivers: What is your child’s mood before and after spending time at the organization or with people from the organization? Do you ask direct questions of your child(ren) about their interactions with staff or other youth? Do you feel safe reporting concerning behavior by staff or by other youth? What could make you feel safer to bring concerns like this to staff or leadership?

Establish review and improvement processes

Establish processes to document and review the implementation of prevention policies and practices to track progress, recognize trends, and identify opportunities to reduce risk and strengthen the organization-wide prevention approach.

Organizations can establish processes to:

- Regularly seek and incorporate feedback from staff, parents and caregivers, youth, board members, and others involved with the organization.
- Document monitoring and supervision practices, especially in high-risk settings such as bathrooms and locker rooms, or situations such as overnight or offsite events.
- Document response to incidents of suspicions, allegations, or disclosures of abuse, as well as to policy or boundary violations (such as giving a child a ride home if it is against policy).
- Review data collected from feedback and documentation of monitoring and response reports to identify areas of increased risk and create action plans to address any areas of improvement.
- Seek professional input or regularly review emerging research to ensure policies and practices remain aligned with the best currently available evidence.

Organization Self-Reflection Questions

- How does our organizational structure support our mission to protect youth?
- How might we more actively engage parents and caregivers in organizational activities and prevention efforts?
- What feedback opportunities do we provide for parents and caregivers, staff, volunteers, and youth?
- Does our organization have any processes in place to regularly review our child protection policies and practices and make necessary adjustments?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization is already doing well?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization could improve to strengthen our efforts?
- What resources are available to our organization to support us in addressing this priority area?



Understand and Address Youth Sexual Behavior

In addition to preventing child sexual abuse by adults, youth-serving organizations are becoming aware of the need to address problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth. However, many youth-serving organizations may struggle with knowing the right way to talk about, prevent, or respond to this issue. Youth-serving organizations can prepare to address a range of sexual behaviors among youth, from developmentally appropriate behavior to problematic or potentially harmful behavior. They can establish expectations and provide training or other educational resources to help youth understand and choose healthy, appropriate behaviors.

Developmentally appropriate sexual behavior among youth:^{48,49}

- Aligns with milestones of typical sexual development.
- Occurs between youth of a similar age, size, and developmental level.
- Is mutually agreed upon by both youth without force or coercion.
- Is unplanned.
- Is infrequent.

Problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth can involve one or more of the following:^{48,49}

- Behavior that is not appropriate for a child's age or developmental level.
- Significant differences in age, developmental level, or power or status, such as between a youth volunteer and a youth member.
- Lacks agreement or consent among all youth involved.
- Any use of pressure, threats, intimidation, force, or other methods of coercion.
- Signs of discomfort or emotional distress.
- Unusual level of interest, such as sexual behaviors that occur often or are the focus of play.
- Repeated problematic sexual behaviors after adult intervention.

Problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth is an umbrella term for a spectrum of behavior that can include:

- Behaviors that involve only one child, like masturbating at a concerning frequency or in public settings.

- Behaviors between more than one child that are mutual but not appropriate because of factors like a significant gap in age or developmental ability.
- Behaviors that a child may not realize are inappropriate, problematic, or harmful.
- Behaviors that involve force, intimidation, or coercion.

Youth may engage in problematic or harmful sexual behavior for different reasons, including:⁴⁸⁻⁵²

- Insufficient information about healthy sexual development, behavior, and relationships.
- Exposure to sexual content or adult sexual behaviors.
- Curiosity, imitation, exploration, or play.
- Previously witnessing or experiencing violence, including sexual violence.
- Family stress and dysfunction.
- Emotional and/or behavioral disorders.
- Impulsivity or difficulty following rules.
- Insufficient supervision.

NOTE: Even developmentally appropriate sexual behavior may still not be permitted in certain contexts, such as on youth-serving organization premises or during youth-serving organization activities.

Be thoughtful about terminology

It is important for youth-serving organizations and staff to be thoughtful about the terms used to describe these behaviors and the children who engage in these behaviors, as the language we use has impacts on how we think about and respond to complex issues. Using thoughtful language about problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth demonstrates that organizations value and invest in all youth they serve, acknowledge the developmental differences of adults and youth, and avoid defining youth by problematic behaviors.

- Use language that describes the behavior rather than labels the youth, such as “youth who have engaged in problematic sexual behavior” rather than “peer abuser.”^{3,53}
- Help staff, volunteers, and parents and caregivers understand that this language is not meant to minimize any potential harm, but to acknowledge that children are still developing and may not intend to cause harm or even be aware that their behavior could cause harm.
- Notice and correct the use of stigmatizing terminology to refer to youth or youth behaviors in the organization including catching and correcting yourself if you accidentally use improper terminology.

Ensure policies and practices address risk of problematic youth interactions

Youth-serving organizations have made tremendous strides in implementing policies and practices that address risk of boundary violations or abuse by adults toward youth. However, such policies and practices do not necessarily address the risk of problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.

- Ensure training and professional development for staff and volunteers include

specific information to help them understand, prevent, and respond to problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.

- Ensure supervision and monitoring policies that allow for effective supervision of youth behaviors and interactions. For example, most organizations likely prohibit an adult from being alone in a restroom with a child, but they may not prohibit two children from being alone in a restroom together. Examples of policies to monitor youth interactions and behavior include limiting one-on-one interactions that are not observable or interruptible; having staff monitor any situation where older youth supervise younger youth; and ensuring staff-to-youth ratios are adequate to supervise youth interactions, particularly when large groups of youth are together.
- Ensure reporting and responding policies align with best practices about responding to problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth, which may differ from best practices about responding to suspicions or allegations of child sexual abuse by an adult.

Establish clear, consistent expectations for behavior and interactions among youth

Youth-serving organizations can ensure they have clear, concrete, and consistent policies about accepted and prohibited youth behaviors on organizational grounds or during organizational programming. Create a youth code of conduct that clearly defines these accepted and prohibited behaviors and outlines consequences for policy violations. See *Prevention Priority 5 for more information about expectations for youth behavior and interactions.*

After the code of conduct has been created:

- Provide all staff, youth, and parents and caregivers with physical and digital copies of the youth code of conduct and require written acknowledgment and acceptance.
- Include information about the youth code of conduct into other prevention-specific or broader organizational training for parents and caregivers and youth.
- Seek feedback from staff, youth, and parents and caregivers about the code of conduct, including any questions or concerns they may have or gaps they may notice.

With input from youth leaders, consider developing disciplinary procedures for youth policy violations. Depending on the severity and frequency of the violation, this may include redirection, increased supervision, removal of privileges, suspension, or termination from participation. Factors to consider include:

- Behavior that continues after intervention and education.
- Danger to children in the program.
- Impact of the inappropriate behavior on other participants.
- Resources available to address the behavior.
- Parent and caregiver willingness to work with staff or get outside help.

Provide developmentally appropriate information to youth

Youth-serving organizations can provide youth with training adapted to their age or developmental ability that teaches them about healthy boundaries, behaviors, and interactions. Training may include information about:^{3,48-50,53-58}

- Sexual development, including body parts.

- Developmental differences between youth.
- Disability-specific safety and sexuality education.
- Healthy relationships and how to prevent youth dating violence.
- Differences between developmentally appropriate, problematic, and illegal sexual behavior among youth.
- Identifying trusted adults that youth can go to with questions and concerns about their own or another child’s sexual behaviors.
- Resources to learn more on their own, such as [What’s OK?](#)

Empower staff and parents and caregivers to address youth sexual behavior

Training and educational resources can help staff and parents and caregivers understand and respond to developmentally appropriate and problematic sexual behaviors among youth. It is critical that training is required and provided for staff and volunteers, and organizations can also offer training programs or other resources to parents and caregivers. Training topics include:

- Characteristics of developmentally appropriate sexual behavior and problematic or harmful sexual behavior.
- Information on healthy sexual development for all youth, including youth with disabilities.
- Standard operating procedures for preventing and responding to problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.
- Standard operating procedures for responding to developmentally appropriate sexual behavior that is not allowed within the organization.
- Risk factors that increase the likelihood that youth may experience or engage in problematic or harmful sexual behavior.
- Guidelines on how to support impacted youth.
- Guidelines on how to support and supervise youth who have engaged in problematic or harmful sexual behavior.

When possible, staff may want to ask professionals trained in child development and youth sexual behavior (e.g., child psychologists, pediatricians or partners at Child Advocacy Centers, National Children’s Alliances, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, or the [National Center for the Sexual Behavior of Youth](#)) for help determining if youth sexual behavior is developmentally appropriate or problematic, to respond supportively, and prevent future harm.

Encourage open communication with parents and caregivers about youth behavior

Open communication involves encouraging parents and caregivers to share any signs of problematic sexual behavior they observe among their children with the organization, so staff can be aware of risks and vulnerability factors or potentially increase supervision and monitoring. However, many parents and caregivers may feel uncomfortable or unprepared to address sexual behavior with youth and may not be comfortable discussing it with youth-serving organization staff. It may help to ensure parents and caregivers have a voice in policies—and all parents and caregivers of involved youth know that the youth-serving organization values youth well-being—by providing:

- Information about sexual development and behavior in organization newsletters and parent nights.

- Online behavioral risks and strategies to monitor and support safe online behavior.
- Child sexual abuse information and prevention strategies.
- Expectations of boundaries and behaviors at the youth-serving organization.

Youth-serving organizations can also provide training or other resources for parents and caregivers on problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth. Include resources that help parents and caregivers:

- Understand how they can prevent and respond to problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.
- Talk to their children about appropriate boundaries and behaviors, respect, and healthy expression of emotions.

Increasing parent and caregiver comfort, knowledge, and involvement in understanding and discussing sexual behavior, as well as other important topics like self-respect, boundaries, and healthy expression of emotions, can open a door to critical caregiver-youth communication that can help keep youth safe.

Respond constructively to sexual behavior among youth within the organization

Childhood is a developmental period that is distinct from adulthood. Because of this difference, constructive responses to children engaging in problematic or harmful behavior focus on helping them understand why certain behaviors are problematic or harmful and guiding them toward healthy, appropriate behavior choices.³ Depending on the situation, children may benefit more from learning why certain behaviors are against the rules and how to recover from the mistake instead of being suspended or expelled from the youth-serving organization.³ When youth-serving organizations provide constructive responses to youth sexual behavior—whether developmentally appropriate or problematic—youth can learn which behaviors are acceptable, which are unacceptable, and which could cause harm. These responses also show youth that the youth-serving organization supports them if they experience inappropriate or harmful behaviors themselves.

When developmentally appropriate youth sexual behavior that is prohibited at the youth-serving organization happens, staff can respond by:

- Briefly and calmly explaining to youth why the interaction is not permitted and reminding them of privacy and boundary expectations.
- Notifying a supervisor and parents and caregivers about the behavior.
- Providing extra supervision for youth displaying these behaviors.

When problematic or harmful sexual behavior happens among youth, staff can respond by:

- Intervening immediately and separating the youth involved.
- Reminding youth why this behavior is prohibited and inappropriate or harmful.
- Following organizational and local mandatory reporting requirements to determine whether the behavior warrants a report to authorities and respond accordingly (*see section below on Reporting*).
- Providing extra supervision for youth displaying these behaviors and, depending on the situation, provide guidance to children on why certain behaviors are against the rules and how to recover from the mistake instead of expelling the child from the youth-serving organization.³

- Supporting impacted youth by communicating regularly with the child and their parents or caregivers to ensure they feel safe and supported.

Reporting

Some problematic or harmful sexual behaviors involving youth may need to be reported to child protective services or law enforcement.³ However, clear legal guidance does not always exist for sexual behavior among youth, especially behavior that appears to be consensual. Many states have laws prohibiting sexual behavior between youth with certain age differences (see <https://www.ageofconsent.net/close-in-age-exemptions>) or in the presence of certain factors, such as coercion, physical force, or a large age or developmental gap between youth but these laws vary by state.

It is important for organizations to determine ahead of time the criteria for when sexual behavior among youth must be reported, complying with the law and accounting for the potential risks to youth of both under-reporting and over-reporting sexual behaviors and interactions.³ When behavior does not need to be reported to law enforcement, ensure the organization still takes steps to keep all youth safe, such as notifying parents and caregivers, increasing supervision, and providing education. This ensures that the behavior is addressed, and youth may learn from the experience.

Increased supervision

Create elevated supervision plans for youth who engage in problematic or harmful sexual behavior. Such supervision plans may include:

- Frequent communication between staff and the parents and caregivers of youth who engaged in problematic or harmful behavior.
- Increasing supervision when they are around other youth.
- Increasing digital space monitoring or removal of digital product privileges.
- Adjusting policies and practices, such as not allowing youth who have engaged in problematic or harmful sexual behavior to share sleeping spaces with other youth on overnight trips.
- Reminder about appropriate behaviors and boundaries in both physical and digital spaces.

When implementing an elevated supervision plan, it is important that organizations determine in advance what circumstances or requirements must be met for the supervision plan to end. For example, organizations may determine a certain timeframe (such as three or six months), after which they will reassess the child's behavior, determine if any additional boundary violations have occurred, and either modify or end the supervision plan.

Equity in responding

Research suggests that certain youth (e.g., LGBTQ youth or Black youth) may be more likely to be reported or receive harsher responses for sexual behavior.³ Organizations can help overcome possible detection and response inequities for sexual behavior among youth in your organization by:^{3,59}

- Developing staff guidance to identify and respond consistently to sexual behaviors among youth, based on behavior and relevant context.
- Helping staff understand how their own experiences may impact their

perceptions about youth's behaviors and motivations through training and practice.

- Encouraging staff and parents and caregivers to be open-minded and learn from youth about their experiences.
- Implementing a confidential incident and response records system to track organization trends, determine if reporting and response inequities are happening, and adjust accordingly.

TIP: Acknowledge complexity and seek support

Developmentally appropriate sexual behavior and problematic or harmful sexual behavior do not have concrete criteria that can be applied objectively to every interaction. There are unique factors to consider in each situation. Because this may be challenging, staff within youth-serving organizations may find it helpful to consult additional evidence-based resources or reach out to professionals specifically trained in youth sexual behavior (such as psychologists, pediatricians, partners at Child Advocacy Centers, or the National Center for Sexual Behavior of Youth) for assistance.

Organization Self-Reflection Questions

- How do we currently address this topic in our organization?
- What language do we use to talk about problematic or harmful sexual behaviors and children who engage in them?
- What approach do we currently take to preventing and/or responding to problematic or harmful sexual behaviors among youth?
- Are there any gaps in our current policies and practices where we are effectively addressing risk between adults and youth but perhaps not between youth?
- Do we have a code of conduct specific to youth behavior? Does it explicitly address sexual behaviors?
- Do our youth members have the knowledge, skills, and support to understand healthy behaviors and problematic or harmful behaviors?
- What training or guidance do we currently provide for our staff and volunteers on this topic?
- How do we currently engage parents and caregivers around this topic? How might we engage them? What resources could we provide?
- Do we have a system in place to document these incidents, including our organizational responses?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization is already doing well?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization could improve to strengthen our efforts?
- What resources are available to our organization to support us in addressing this priority area?



Prevention Priority 4

Build and Maintain a Staff that Supports Youth Safety

Youth-serving organizations can build and maintain staff with diverse identities and experiences and the knowledge and skills to support the organization's child safety mission. A thorough, consistent recruitment and selection process that explains expected staff values and behaviors can reduce the risk of boundary violations or child sexual abuse and create shared values and commitment to child sexual abuse prevention among staff and leadership.⁶⁰

Recruit diverse staff who represent the community served

Recruiting diverse staff means attracting and selecting individuals who reflect the diversity of the populations served by the organization and have experience with people of different ages, ethnicities, cultures, or if they live in a rural or urban area. Recruiting staff with varied experiences and backgrounds can increase youth engagement and belonging within youth-serving organizations. When young people are comfortable and feel safe in their environments, they may be more likely to report boundary violations or child sexual abuse concerns to a trusted adult.⁶¹

Youth-serving organizations can actively recruit a representative pool of applicants by:

- Connecting with partners and organizations that can expand the network of potential applicants to represent the community served.
- Connecting with the [local workforce commission](#) and asking for strategies to help recruiting a representative pool of applicants.
- Circulating job advertisements with community organizations, universities, and websites with a goal of recruiting multi- or bilingual staff.
- Working with staff, parents and caregivers, and community members to recruit through their networks.

Educate applicants about your organization and youth safety policies

By letting applicants know your organization is serious about protecting youth, you may deter some people at risk of abusing youth from applying for staff or volunteer positions. For example, organizations can include:

- Informing applicants about your organization’s policies and procedures relevant to preventing and responding to child sexual abuse.
- Sharing your code of conduct or ethics, including recruitment standard operating procedures that prioritize fair hiring practices and a diverse workforce.
- Asking applicants if they would have difficulty following and implementing any of the policies and procedures.
- Requiring applicants to sign a document describing the policies and procedures of your organization to demonstrate their understanding and agreement.

Require a written application

A written application provides some of the information needed to assess the background and interests of applicants. On written applications, organizations can include:

- Asking open-ended questions that encourage broad answers. These will provide material for follow-up in the personal interview and throughout the screening and selection process.
- Asking about previous work and volunteer experiences.
- Asking questions related to experiences working or interacting with children.
- Providing a permission form for contacting personal references and performing a criminal background check.
- Using disclosure statements to ask applicants about histories of sexual offenses, violence against youth, and other criminal offenses. The inquiry will demonstrate your organization’s seriousness about protecting youth and potentially discourage applicants who may engage in child sexual abuse from seeking employment.

For each role, organizational leadership can clarify processes related to:

- Adapting written applications for those who require accommodations.
- Cross-checking written applications with other screening procedures, such as personal interviews and background checks.
- Ensuring the persons responsible for conducting background checks are aware of all requirements from federal, state, tribal, and local laws and policies.
- Determining based on written applications who will be invited for a personal interview.

Conduct personal interviews

The personal interview provides an opportunity to meet applicants, determine if they are a good fit for your organization, and ask additional questions to screen for risk factors of boundary-violating behaviors or abuse. Ask open-ended, behaviorally based questions to encourage discussion, and use the interview as an opportunity to clarify and expand upon the applicant’s answers to questions from the written application.

For each role, organizational leadership can clarify processes related to:

- How the interview will be documented.
- How applicants will be evaluated, including any factors that would disqualify them.
- Whether additional procedures are required based on how much the applicant will work with youth, such as multiple interviews or involving youth leaders in interviews.

For examples of questions to ask on applications or during interviews when screening and selecting prospective staff and volunteers, please see Appendix B.

Conduct reference checks

Reference checks provide additional information about applicants and help verify previous work and volunteer history.

- When possible, obtain verbal—not just written—references for applicants. Conversations can bring out much more information than written responses.
- Match references with employment and volunteer history. Is anyone important missing from the references, such as the supervisor from the applicant’s most recent job?
- Seek various reference sources beyond family members or friends, such as mentors or professors. This can lead to a complete, well-rounded picture of the applicant.
- Be aware that many employers will only provide basic information, such as dates of employment or rehiring eligibility. If a former employer will only provide limited information, clarify whether the person providing the reference is limiting information because of company policy.
- Document the references’ responses to questions so you can share them with the hiring team.

Reference check policies can include:

- Requiring reference checks for all staff and volunteers who will have access to youth.
- The number and type of acceptable references, including references that could be used other than those of a previous supervisor.
- The process for identifying reference gaps, such as what to do if a current or previous employer isn’t listed as a reference.
- Standardized questions for applicant references tailored for each role within the organization.

For examples of questions to ask during reference checks, please see Appendix B.

Conduct criminal background checks

Criminal background checks are one important tool in screening and selection. To identify criminal convictions, including prior arrests for domestic disputes and sexual offenses, conduct criminal background checks such as:

- Federal background checks.
- State and multi-state background checks.
- Registries for people who have committed sexual offenses.
- Child and adult protective services records.

Some best practices organizations can consider related to background checks include:

- Save time and resources by delaying criminal background checks until the end of the screening and selection process. Applicants who do not make it through the written applications, personal interviews, and reference checks will not need a criminal background check.
- Determine the type and level of check required for each position. Types of checks include name, fingerprint, sex offender registries, and social security

number. Data systems are not always linked or comprehensive, so a thorough search may be needed to address concerns about an applicant.

- Plan for the time and financial resources needed to conduct background checks.
- Decide ahead of time which offenses to examine in background checks and which offenses will disqualify applicants.
- Consult with a local attorney to help ensure your organization's process for conducting criminal background checks is legally thorough and consistent with federal, state, local and tribal laws and regulations.
- Review your organization's insurance policy to help identify if the organizational policy requires additional levels of background checks.
- Conduct criminal background checks every 2-3 years or utilize continuous monitoring for staff who work directly with youth to help monitor any changes. Conduct background checks upon returning to the organization for seasonal staff.
- Remember that background checks are just one part of child sexual abuse prevention efforts, and relying on background checks alone may give your organization a false sense of security.

Conduct additional checks

Additional checks may be helpful when screening and selecting staff and volunteers.

- **Check applicants against internal records.** This strategy involves keeping lists of applicants who are disqualified during the screening process and employees and volunteers who are dismissed because of an offense. During the screening and selection process, your organization would then check current applicants against these lists to make sure the applicant has not been previously disqualified or dismissed. Youth-serving organizations can also screen potential applicants by searching internal records and databases, such as the [U.S. Center for SafeSport Disciplinary Database](#).
- **Search the internet and social media.** This strategy involves searching for the applicant's name on the internet and looking for any articles that would disqualify the applicant, such as their being fired for a reason related to child safety, including child sexual abuse or discrimination. Be aware that more than one person can share the same name and that it may be difficult to verify the accuracy of information found on the internet. Though many pages are private or unlisted, check applicants' personal social media pages for concerning posts or images. Consider using your existing background check provider to compile problematic online conduct without risking including information about protected characteristics that cannot be considered in hiring practices.
- **Assess the home environment.** The need to assess an applicant's home environment depends on your organization's mission. This may be an essential strategy for mentoring programs where youth meet with mentors at their homes, but it may be irrelevant or inappropriate for other organizations, such as sleep-away camps or after-school programs.

Thoroughly onboard all new staff

Onboarding new staff includes orientation, mentoring, and training. Below are some best practices for onboarding new staff that can help to reinforce organization policies and practices and keep children safe from sexual abuse.

- Introduce newly hired staff to the organization’s structure, vision, mission, and values, including its commitment to child sexual abuse prevention.
- Thoroughly review the employee handbook and code of conduct with them and outline a plan for them to complete any required training.
- Match new staff with a mentor to answer questions, model desired behaviors and attitudes, and identify potential concerns about their work with youth.
 - Require a trial period with a specified end date, when the new hire shadows the mentor and has consistent supervision and support when interacting with youth.
 - Ask the mentor to identify and report any notable strengths or concerns in how the new staff member interacts with youth.
- Be clear and transparent about procedures for addressing concerns with or dismissing new employees.
- Regularly check in with new staff during the onboarding process to answer their questions. Ensure they understand the organization’s policies and practices, especially those related to child sexual abuse prevention.

Organization Self-Reflection Questions

- **How well do our staff and volunteers represent the diversity of youth we serve? How might we actively increase or maintain such representation?**
- **What are the different phases in our hiring and onboarding process where we might identify concerns about a potential staff member or volunteer?**
- **What questions are we asking in the application, interview, and reference checks? What background checks or other checks are we conducting?**
- **How do we currently orient new staff members and volunteers to our child safety and abuse prevention policies and practices?**
- **What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization is already doing well?**
- **What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization could improve to strengthen our efforts?**
- **What resources are available to our organization to support us in addressing this priority area?**



Establish Expectations for Behavior and Monitor Interactions

Organizations can ensure the expectations for behavior by staff, volunteers, youth, and parents and caregivers are clear, consistent, and based on the best available evidence for keeping youth safe and preventing abuse. Once clear expectations have been established, active supervision can help prevent child sexual abuse and problematic sexual behavior and support faster, more effective interventions when there are policy or boundary violations.

Develop and refine codes of conduct

It is critical that organizations develop or refine codes of conduct for staff and volunteers, youth, and parents and caregivers to ensure their expectations for behaviors and interactions within the organization are clearly defined.

Staff Code of Conduct

The purpose of the staff code of conduct is to clearly define expectations for behavior of staff and volunteers, including expectations for behaviors and interactions between staff and youth. Examples include:

- Treat all youth members and other staff and volunteers with kindness and respect. Do not use harmful or discriminatory language.
- Do not engage in any romantic or sexual contact or interactions with youth members, including flirting.
- Use the “rule of three” to avoid being in a one-on-one situation with a youth member. If you must be alone with a youth member for a safety or other critical reason, notify a supervisor in advance to create a safety plan.
- Ask youth for permission before touching them, and only use appropriate touches such as a high five, side hug, or fist bump. Exceptions apply if the youth require emergency medical attention or restroom assistance and adequate supervision is provided.
- Do not give youth gifts or money, ask them to keep secrets, talk to them about your personal relationships or other adult topics, or show any form of favoritism.
- Disciplinary actions should be constructive and never involve shame, humiliation, or physical harm.
- Do not consume tobacco or nicotine (including vapes), alcohol, marijuana or other substances.

- Do not view sexual material or discuss sexual topics while on organizational premises or during programming.

Youth Code of Conduct

The purpose of the youth code of conduct is to clearly define expectations for behavior by youth within the organization, including individual behaviors as well as behaviors and interactions with other youth. Examples include:

- Treat all staff and volunteers and other youth members with kindness and respect. Do not bully other youth online or in person.
- Do not engage in sexual behaviors by yourself or with other youth while on organizational premises or during programming. Sexual behaviors include kissing; touching breasts, buttocks, or genitals; masturbating; engaging in oral sex; and engaging in intercourse.
- Ask other youth for permission before touching them in accepted ways, such as giving a high five, side hug, or fist bump.
- Do not engage in physically violent or aggressive behaviors with anyone in the organization, including staff, volunteers, and other youth.
- Do not consume tobacco or nicotine (including vapes), alcohol, marijuana or other substances.
- Do not view sexual material or discussing sexual topics while on organizational premises or during programming.

Parent and Caregiver Code of Conduct

The purpose of the parent and caregiver code of conduct is to clearly define expectations for behavior by parents and caregivers when they are on organization premises or involved in organization programming, including expectations for interacting with organization staff and youth. Examples include:

- Behave in a respectful manner towards organization staff, volunteers, and youth members. Do not use harmful or discriminatory language.
- Use the “rule of three” to avoid being in a one-on-one situation with youth members besides your own child(ren), including to provide transportation.
- Ask youth members for permission before touching them, and only use appropriate touches such as a high-five, side-hug, or fist-bump.
- Do not consume tobacco or nicotine (including vapes), alcohol, marijuana or other substances.
- Do not view sexual material or discussing sexual topics while on organizational premises or during programming.

Ensure understanding of expectations for behavior

Organizations can ensure understanding of expectations for behavior by:

- Providing all staff, youth, and parents and caregivers with physical and digital copies of the codes of conduct and require written acknowledgment and acceptance. Including accessible formats, such as using large fonts for those with visual impairments or providing documents in a variety of languages.
- Providing multiple opportunities and mechanisms for staff, volunteers, youth, and parents and caregivers to ask questions or raise concerns about expectations for behavior.
- Educating staff on codes of conduct during new employee onboarding, and reinforcing the information periodically, such as during staff meetings.
- Reinforcing codes of conduct with youth and parents and caregivers at events like open houses and orientations.

- Reminding staff and youth about codes of conduct before program activities, particularly if they're off-site, and incorporate adherence to codes of conduct in staff performance reviews.

Develop and implement comprehensive monitoring policies and practices

Comprehensive monitoring policies and practices can help ensure youth, staff, and volunteers are actively and consistently supervised during all activities in both physical and digital spaces in the organization, allowing organizations to respond immediately to policy and boundary violations or concerns of abuse. Examples of monitoring policies and practices include:

- Creating an expectation of active, engaged, and consistent supervision by staff and volunteers.
- Ensuring staff and volunteers are clear on their monitoring roles and responsibilities.
- Prohibiting phone use or other potential distractors when supervising youth-youth or adult-youth interactions.
- Ensuring the appropriate ratio of adults to youth for all activities and circumstances to ensure active, consistent supervision is possible.
- Ensuring all youth-youth and adult-youth interactions are always observable and interruptible.
- Conducting random checks and walk-throughs of activities to monitor interactions and reinforce a culture of accountability.
- Equipping staff and volunteers with the skills and knowledge needed to act quickly if they observe policy or boundary violations during monitoring. See Prevention Priority 8 for more information on responding to abuse and policy/boundary violations.

TIP: Consider context when determining necessary ratios

When making decisions about the ratio of adults to youth needed for given settings or activities, consider contextual variables such as:

- **Age and developmental level of youth, employees, and volunteers:** In what situations would additional staff be needed?
- **Risk of the activity:** Does it involve isolation from others?
- **Activity location:** Is it in a classroom that is easy to monitor, or at a park, where losing track of individuals may be more likely?

Think strategically about monitoring in unique situations

In certain settings or activities, typical monitoring policies and practices may not always be sufficient or possible. In these situations, organizations need to think strategically and creatively to ensure sufficient supervision of adult-youth or youth-youth interactions. Below is a list of these potentially high-risk activities along with examples of policies or practices that could be applied to reduce risk and effectively monitor interactions.

- **Activities that happen in an off-site location:** Inspect locations in advance to identify areas that may be difficult to monitor and make plans to minimize risk.
- **Activities that require transportation:** Ensure adult-youth ratios are

maintained by dispersing staff throughout the bus or vehicle.

- **Activities that require one-on-one mentoring:** Conduct regular youth and parent and caregiver check-ins before and after mentoring activities.
- **Activities that take place overnight:** Require one person per sleeping bag and conduct random checks of sleeping quarters.
- **Activities that involve off-site or after-hours interactions between staff and youth:** Require that any off-site or after-hours communication with youth be made through youth-serving organization communication channels or include parents and caregivers.

Organizations can also consider requiring documentation of monitoring practices after high-risk activities (e.g., off-site field trip, overnight activity, or larger youth to adult ratio than usual because of a sick employee).

Organization Self-Reflection Questions

- Does our organization currently have a separate code of conduct for (1) staff and volunteers, (2) youth members, and (3) parents and caregivers? How clear are the behavioral expectations?
- What steps do we currently take to ensure behavioral expectations are understood by staff, volunteers, youth members, and parents and caregivers?
- What are some of the things that work well in terms of our monitoring and supervision policies and practices? Where have we noticed high-risk situations or challenges with active and engaged supervision?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization is already doing well?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization could improve to strengthen our efforts?
- What resources are available to our organization to support us in addressing this priority area?



Create and Maintain Safe Physical and Digital Spaces

In youth-serving organizations, safe spaces refer to physical and digital spaces where children are free from harassment, bullying, violence, and abuse. Safe physical spaces can enhance youth safety and connectedness, but unsafe physical spaces can increase the risk of abuse.⁶² Digital spaces are a major part of the lives of youth, and increasingly part of youth-serving organization programming. Adult offenders tend to avoid detection and conceal abuse by seeking opportunities for more privacy with youth in both physical and digital spaces.

Physical Spaces

Physical spaces refer to the physical locations where organization programming or activities take place. Some organizations have multiple activity sites (such as some sports and recreation organizations), some have leased or undefined spaces (such as mentoring organizations or field trip locations), and some organizations utilize vehicles.

Establish visibility in physical spaces

Ensuring all spaces in the organization where youth interact with adults and each other are open and visible to multiple people is critical to keeping children safe and preventing abuse.³ Organizations can use the following methods to increase visibility in physical spaces by:

- Having clear lines of sight throughout the building.
- Securing areas not used for programming purposes to prevent youth from being isolated, such as locking closets and storerooms.
- Installing doors with windows.
- Ensuring windows are not permanently blocked from view.
- Instituting a “no closed door” policy in spaces like offices, classrooms, and play spaces unless there are windows to increase visibility.
- Installing bright lighting in all areas.
- Creating checklists that staff must complete regularly to ensure spaces are monitored, doors remain open, and lights are turned on.

- Installing automatic locking systems on external doors and security gates.
- Getting feedback from youth and staff on facility areas where they don't feel safe or where they think inappropriate behavior or policy violations could happen.
- Installing cameras in hallways, outdoor spaces, and in isolated and high-risk areas and perform regular maintenance checks to ensure the cameras record who is going in and out and when individuals enter and exit these areas. Do not rely on cameras as a preventative measure. Recorded footage is helpful to determine what took place if an incident occurred but it cannot replace effective line-of-sight monitoring practices.

Ensure privacy and safety when toileting, showering, and changing clothes

Since restrooms and locker rooms can be areas of increased risk for child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth, it is critical that organizations develop policies and procedures to provide safe restroom spaces for all youth and reduce risk of inappropriate or harmful behavior when attending to personal needs such as toileting, showering, and changing clothes. Organizations can do this by:

- Avoiding situations where an adult and a youth or two youth are alone together in multi-stall restrooms, sleeping areas, or changing areas, for example by using the “rule of three” or having staff stand outside bathrooms.
- Encouraging staff to monitor how long youth spend time in a bathroom unsupervised.³
- Considering designating bathrooms for youth of the same developmental stage or age group to avoid instances of older and younger youth using the bathroom at the same time.³
- For a variety of reasons, youth may not feel safe or comfortable using multi-stall restrooms or other common areas for toileting, showering, and changing clothes.⁶³ When possible, organizations can provide safe, private options, such as single-stall restrooms, that are available and accessible to all youth.

Take unique safety considerations for certain groups of youth into account to protect privacy and safety for all youth in bathroom spaces. For example:

- Youth with disabilities may need assistance in the bathroom, which can increase their risk of sexual abuse.^{24,25} Organizations can train staff to ask for consent before assisting youth with disabilities, especially when toileting or showering, and they can ensure sufficient monitoring and supervision.
- Transgender and non-binary youth who are required to use the bathroom that aligns with their biological sex rather than their gender identity may be at increased risk for sexual abuse and other forms of victimization and adverse health outcomes.⁶⁴ Organizations can allow youth to use the restroom they feel safe and comfortable using, and if this practice is prohibited by state or local law, organizations can communicate with youth to identify safe alternatives.

Maintain control of building and spaces

Monitoring who is present in the organization at all times can create a safer environment and help prevent child sexual abuse. Organizations can do this by:

- Developing policies and procedures for admitting and releasing youth so their whereabouts are always known when they are in the youth-serving organization's care.

- Developing policies and procedures for monitoring which people outside your organization are allowed in and under what circumstances, including which identification forms are acceptable (e.g., badges/warrants for authorities or photo ID for parents).
- Establishing guidelines for ensuring safety when using leased or undefined spaces or when outside groups use your organization's spaces.

Maintain safe spaces during transportation and off-site activities

Organizations can take extra precautions to maintain safe spaces during off-site activities, such as field trips and overnight trips, or when transporting youth to and from these activities, including:

- Obtaining permission from parents and caregivers before activities that involve transporting youth, such as field trips or overnight trips.
- Providing parents and caregivers written and electronic copies of procedures related to transportation before trips and provide opportunities for them to ask questions before granting permission.
- Reminding staff and volunteers about basic travel safety requirements, supervision ratios, and other requirements before accompanying youth during transportation.
- Ensuring program youth are easily identifiable (such as having them wear matching organization shirts) for field trips with large crowds.
- Prohibiting staff members from being alone in a vehicle with youth except in the event of an emergency. If this must happen, it is suggested that the youth ride in the back seat, if possible.
- Developing policies for field trips and other off-site activities, such as how to handle off-site bathroom breaks and use of public transportation.
- Creating policies ensuring staff-to-youth ratios are adequate to supervise youth interactions, particularly when large groups of youth are together during off-site or overnight activities.
- Creating policies for what to do if an unknown adult or youth attempts to interact with youth at an off-site event.
- Making youth aware of safety procedures before travel begins, such as how to communicate if youth get separated from the group.
- Documenting and maintaining records of any off-site activities or activities involving transportation of youth.

Display organizational presence

Another strategy to promote a safe environment is to create physical cues and visual boundaries to show the youth-serving organization's presence, integrity, and physical territory.

Some examples of this strategy include having physical signs (with organization logos) directing youth and parents and caregivers to the organization's physical space and having staff wear matching shirts or uniforms with the organization's logo clearly displayed. Staff uniforms, logos, and signs help prevent child sexual abuse because they help clearly show who does and does not work for the organization and where activities are held, preventing strangers from approaching children, pretending to be staff, or taking children somewhere off-site.

Digital Spaces

Digital spaces refer to technology systems, devices, and resources that generate, store, or process data, such as social media, online games, mobile and smartphones, image and video storage, and artificial intelligence (AI). While there may be benefits to AI technology, it is a rapidly developing field lacking legal regulations and can hold many risks for youth. For example, AI can be used to generate “deepfakes” and other synthetic images to create illegal sexualized images of children.

In today’s digital world, it is critical for youth-serving organizations to address online spaces and technology, including AI, in their efforts to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and problematic and harmful sexual behavior among youth. Digital spaces can provide valuable platforms for positive youth-serving organization programming, but they can also be risky settings for boundary-crossing, harmful behavior, and abuse to occur. Additionally, youth-serving organizations may find it challenging to keep up with the fast pace of technological advancements in their policies and practices. Continually taking active steps to create and maintain safe digital spaces can positively promote the organization and create safer, healthier online environments to protect children.

Design content and resources for safe digital spaces

Ensuring safety in digital spaces can be subjective, especially because many digital spaces and interactions take place outside of organizational control. Organizations can start by ensuring that youth-serving organizations’ digital content and access are safe in the following ways.⁶⁵⁻⁶⁸

- Asking youth and staff what they already know about risks and safety in digital spaces, how to use certain technologies, and the platforms they prefer. Include youth in developing policies and practices for safe digital spaces.
- Ensuring digital spaces are age appropriate, both in content and technology use.
- Blocking dating apps, pornographic sites, and other adult websites on youth-serving organization devices. Consider blocking social media sites and generative AI sites that can be used to make inappropriate images and videos.
- Requesting feedback from staff and youth on their experiences using organizational affiliated digital spaces (and other digital spaces) and revise policies and practices as necessary.

Implement policies that prevent and address harmful behavior in digital spaces

Organizations can develop policies and practices that support safe digital interactions between youth members or between staff and youth and prevent or reduce child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior. Expectations for behavior and interactions in digital spaces can be incorporated into staff, youth, and parent and caregiver codes of conduct or provided in a separate document.

Adult-youth interactions

Policies and practices related to adult-youth interactions in digital spaces might include:

- Boundaries for staff and volunteers related to engaging with youth in digital spaces and devices, such as:
 - No taking, sharing, or storing photos of youth on their personal devices.
 - No following youth on social media.
 - Keeping their own social media accounts private.
- Prohibiting the use of AI to generate images or videos of youth.
- Designating hours for communication between staff and youth, such as only during organization operating hours.
- Establishing which platforms are acceptable for communication with youth, such as through organizational email and monitored organizational platforms, and prohibiting one-on-one interactions via text, social media sites, gaming platforms, etc.
- Setting requirements for posting appropriate content on organization or staff's personal social media pages:
 - No sexually explicit images or discussions.
 - No derogatory, discriminatory, or hurtful language.
 - No speaking about specific youth by name or with any identifying information in personal social media posts.

Youth-youth interactions

Policies and practices related to youth-youth interactions in digital spaces might include:

- Boundaries for posting and sharing digital content on organization social media sites or organization technology, such as:
 - No sending or posting disturbing or offensive images.
 - No engaging in harmful behaviors such as cyberbullying.
 - No threatening, harassing, or using derogatory language.
- Policies for the use of personal devices or social media on organization premises or during organization programming. For example, define limitations on the use of personal devices and social media during organizational programming. Clarify whether youth will be expected to follow the same guidelines as they do for using organizational digital spaces (listed above) when using personal devices and social media.
- Rules for getting permission to post or share other youth members' videos, images, social media posts, or text messages, including on their personal devices or social media pages.
- Prohibitions against creating AI-generated images or videos of their peers or any sexualized images.
- Reminders to only post information youth are comfortable with others seeing and knowing.
- Rules about when and where on the youth-serving organization property that youth can use their personal digital devices.

Engage staff, youth, and parents and caregivers in digital safety

Efforts to improve and maintain safety of digital environments are stronger when organizations actively engage everyone in the organization, including staff, volunteers, youth and parents and caregivers.

Staff

Equip staff with skill and knowledge for monitoring and maintaining safe digital spaces, such as:

- Understanding, following, communicating, and enforcing policies related to the use of digital spaces.
- Understanding, educating, and managing a safe digital environment for youth by communicating in a healthy way and not tolerating child sexual abuse, bullying, and other inappropriate behaviors.
- Understanding how child sexual abuse can happen in digital spaces in organizations, such as taking or distributing inappropriate photos of youth, using technology to solicit in-person contact with youth, or sending or requesting sexual messages or images to youth.
- Understanding how problematic sexual behavior among youth can happen in digital spaces in organizations, such as sharing images of others without their consent, sharing images of themselves without understanding legal or safety considerations, or accessing inappropriate sites.

Youth

Youth are facing increasing risk of both engaging in and experiencing problematic and harmful behaviors in digital spaces. The use of AI tools by youth themselves to harass and exploit other youth is a new trend.^{69,70} Consider involving youth in creating rules for safe use of digital spaces and violation consequences. Engaging youth to help create digital codes of conduct helps ensure:

- Policies are appropriate for youth.
- Youth feel ownership of their time online.
- Youth understand why and when to ask and receive permission for digital actions, such as before sharing someone else's images, videos, social media posts, or text messages.
- Youth can recognize and identify places online where child sexual abuse or problematic sexual behavior is likely to happen.
- Youth know how and when to block and report unwanted content, including by visiting CyberTipline, Take It Down, or contacting local law enforcement to report any instances of online exploitation.

Parents and caregivers

When parents and caregivers are partners in protecting children in digital spaces, they can better understand which digital spaces youth use, benefits and risks of youth engagement in digital spaces, and appropriate guidance for creating safe digital spaces for youth outside the organization. Plus, parents and caregivers can learn how to report concerns of technology-facilitated child sexual abuse, bullying, and other harmful behavior. Some best practices to consider include:

- Involving parents and caregivers in advisory councils to address safe digital interactions for youth.
- Obtaining written parent and caregiver permission for each type of organization digital communication with youth and including ways to opt out of certain digital communication with youth.
- Getting written parent and caregiver permission for taking or sharing any photos or videos of youth on organization websites, social media, or anywhere else online.
- Including parents and caregivers in all communications or social media interactions between staff and youth.

- Sharing digital literacy training resources with parents and caregivers, such as the [Surgeon General's Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#), so they can develop knowledge and skills to support youth.
- Encouraging parents and caregivers to report problematic content and activity.

Organization Self-Reflection Questions

- What steps does our organization take to ensure physical environments are safe? What risky areas have we noticed still exist? Where do behavioral incidents and policy violations most often occur?
- What steps does our organization take to ensure any digital environments are safe? Where might risk still exist?
- How does our organization currently balance the need for visible interactions with the need for privacy (e.g., in bathrooms)?
- Do we have organizational policies specific to adult-youth or youth-youth interactions in digital spaces (whether during or outside of organization activities)?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization is already doing well?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization could improve to strengthen our efforts?
- What resources are available to our organization to support us in addressing this priority area?



Educate and Empower Staff, Parents and Caregivers, and Youth

One of the most important things organizations can do to prevent and constructively respond to child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth is to build knowledge and skills in their staff, volunteers, and leaders.³ Organizations can also provide critical information to youth and their parents and caregivers, through training or other resources, to support an organization-wide approach to child safety and abuse prevention.

Establish an organizational foundation for effective training

Organizations can establish requirements and processes for onboarding and training leaders, staff, and volunteers, as well as processes for training or other educational resources for youth and parents and caregivers.

Establish training requirements and goals

The first step in establishing a foundation for effective training is determining requirements and goals. This includes determining who will receive each type of training, when and how often training will occur, and how training completion and outcomes will be monitored.

- **Determining who in the organization will be required to receive which training.** For example, organizations will likely require training of staff and volunteers, but the training may vary depending on their roles. Organizations can decide which critical content will be provided to parents and caregivers and youth during required orientations and which content can be provided later in optional training and resources.
- **Establishing training schedules.** Develop new and existing staff training schedules, including annual “refresher” courses or periodic certification. Identify opportunities for organizations to train or provide resources to parents, caregivers, and youth.
- **Monitoring and enforcing training completion.** Create deadlines and designate a person or automated system to track staff training completion. In cases where training is not required but provided as an option, organizations can monitor training utilization and completion to inform them of their efforts.
- **Setting measurable goals for training outcomes.** Determine the desired

behaviors or gains in skills or knowledge you want to see in trainees as a result of the training. What is essential that trainees learn?

- **Evaluating the training periodically.** Compare what the training was intended to achieve with the actual changes in behavior or gains in skills and knowledge that can be observed or measured. Gather feedback from staff, youth, parents, and caregivers about the helpfulness of the training, including format and content. Identify any gaps and make adjustments as necessary.

Consider different strategies to increase accessibility and effectiveness of training

Your organization can provide information and teach skills in a variety of ways. Considering different strategies for training, including different formats, methods, durations, levels of interactivity, and other factors, can help ensure that training and educational resources are accessible to everyone in the organization and effective at achieving their intended outcomes.

- **Delivery formats:** Delivery formats can be technology-based, in-person, or both. When choosing a delivery format, consider training messages, how many people will participate, available resources, and how the format will integrate with other training within the organization. Consider that some may be unable to access digital spaces (due to lack of internet access or devices) and develop alternative methods for providing training content. Alternatively, digital formats may be more convenient for some, such as parents or caregivers with long work hours or challenges with transportation.
- **Interactivity:** Training can be passive, interactive, or somewhere in between. Passive training, in which trainees do not interact with anyone else (such as video), may be helpful in raising general awareness. Interactive training, in which trainees interact with the trainer or other trainees, can help build skills and comfort with implementation of policies and practices. In all cases, create discussion and skill-building opportunities to reinforce material and raise questions or concerns.
- **Accessibility:** Trainings for youth-serving organizations are most effective when they are accessible to the entire community. Organizations can take steps to ensure that training and educational resources are:
 - Accessible to adults and youth with disabilities.
 - Available in the languages spoken by organization staff, youth, and parents and caregivers.
 - Developmentally and culturally appropriate.
 - Flexible in terms of format, method, duration, and other factors.
- **Methods:** Using several methods to train individuals on child sexual abuse prevention and response reinforces messages and helps people with different learning styles absorb information and skills. Some suggested methods are:
 - Encouraging youth leaders to deliver or assist with training for youth.
 - Presenting case studies to encourage discussion and suggestions for handling situations and problem-solving.
 - Asking people to role-play situations.
 - Inviting outside professionals to conduct the training, which may emphasize the topic's importance or provide a fresh perspective.
 - Considering using breakout groups during or after training to encourage conversation between participants.
 - Using staff meetings, events, and communication with parents and caregivers and youth to reinforce training content.

Integrate training content into the entire organization (go beyond formal training)

Ensure training content is modeled by everyone in your organization, from leadership to youth, by:

- Integrating training content in performance measures, supervisor feedback to employees, parent and caregiver observations, and how your organization treats youth.
- Provide positive reinforcement when staff, youth, parents, and caregivers demonstrate training content mastery.
- Melding elements of your organization's philosophy or mission with child sexual abuse training. For example, a faith-based organization may want to incorporate elements of its faith into the training content.
- Regularly reinforcing positive behaviors among youth with developmentally appropriate tools, such as demonstrating personal space boundaries by placing hula hoops around themselves.

TIP: Take Steps to Ensure Sensitivity

Because of the sensitive nature of child sexual abuse prevention and response content, consider providing the following support for training participants:

- Informing them at the beginning that discussing child sexual abuse can be difficult, and they are welcome to step away or take a moment if needed.
- Providing information about helplines or other resources so participants can talk to someone if they are in distress.

Educate and Empower Staff and Volunteers

A youth-serving organization's staff and volunteers are its first line of defense in keeping the children they serve safe by implementing abuse prevention policies and practices with fidelity. Organizations can require and provide evidence-informed trainings for staff and volunteers to equip them with the skills and knowledge to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior in the organization. They can also supplement formal training with routine, informal reminders and reinforcements in staff meetings or other touch points.

Below are some key areas in which organizations can develop knowledge and skills and build confidence and competence in staff and volunteers to support effective prevention and response.

Provide background information on child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth, such as:

- Definitions and characteristics of child sexual abuse.
- Definitions and characteristics of developmentally appropriate sexual behavior among youth and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.
- Information about prevalence; risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse; and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth, both generally and within youth-serving organizations.
- Misconceptions about abuse; for example, ensure they understand that most

child sexual abuse is committed by a person the child knows and trusts, not a stranger.

- Potential behavioral signs that a child has experienced sexual abuse, such as appearing depressed, afraid, or withdrawn, or exhibiting sexualized behaviors.

Emphasize the role of staff and volunteers in prevention and child protection.

- Emphasize that staff members are integral to your organization's efforts to create a safe, healthy, and respectful environment.
- Explain that child sexual abuse policies protect youth from abuse, adults and youth from abuse allegations, and organizations from accusations of not doing enough to prevent sexual abuse.
- Help staff feel comfortable and motivated to prevent child sexual abuse. For example, provide staff with information about preventing child sexual abuse and opportunities to practice how to handle situations.
- Give staff opportunities to ask questions and express concerns about child sexual abuse prevention.
- Train staff to emphasize and promote the unique strengths and goals of youth, as well as their connections to their families, peers, and communities.

Outline organizational expectations for behavior and interactions.

- Clearly outline permitted and prohibited behavior by staff and youth from your organization's perspective, in both physical and digital spaces.
- Explain organizational consequences for policy and boundary violations by staff and youth.
- Describe how to deal appropriately with risky or compromising situations, such as a youth member expressing a romantic crush on staff.
- Acknowledge the power differential between adults and youth, and youth leaders and youth.
- See *Prevention Priority 5* for more information about expectations for behavior and interactions.

Outline expectations for responding to policy violations and abuse or harmful behavior.

- Inform staff of their responsibility to act when they suspect, see, or hear about inappropriate or harmful behavior by staff, volunteers, leadership, parents and caregivers, or youth.
- Ensure staff and volunteers understand how to identify policy and boundary violations.
- Ensure staff and volunteers understand and are comfortable implementing the correct processes for responding to these situations, which could range from witnessing lower-level policy or boundary violations, to interrupting children engaged in sexual behavior, to responding to a disclosure of abuse from a child.
- Teach staff and volunteers what to say and what not to say to a person who is disclosing child sexual abuse.
- Instruct staff and volunteers to report allegations, suspicions, and disclosures to the authorities according to your organization's policies.
- See *Prevention Priority 8* for more information about responding effectively to child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.

Educate and empower parents and caregivers

Parents and caregivers are critical partners in prevention within youth-serving organizations. When leadership, staff, volunteers, and parents and caregivers all

have a shared understanding and set of expectations around the organization's approach to preventing abuse and harmful behavior, it can strengthen these efforts. While organizations likely cannot require that parents and caregivers undergo formal training, they can share information in a required orientation and make training and other resources available for parents and caregivers who are interested in learning more and taking an active role in prevention.

Below are some key areas in which organizations can provide training and resources to parents and caregivers to support effective prevention and response.

Emphasize the role of parents and caregivers in prevention and child protection in the context of the organization.

When onboarding youth members, organizations can build in opportunities to inform their parents and caregivers about the critical role they play in keeping their children safe and supporting the larger organizational mission to keep all youth they serve safe. Examples include:

- Describing the organization's approach to keeping children safe and preventing abuse and harmful behavior, including policies (e.g., codes of conduct, disciplinary actions) and practices (e.g., monitoring and supervision). Provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to ask questions and give feedback.
- Reinforcing this information, including the critical role of parents and caregivers in the organization's prevention efforts in training or resources provided to parents and caregivers.
- Informing parents and caregivers about the points of contact they can reach out to if they have questions, concerns, or feedback about the organization's policies and practices to prevent abuse.

Provide background information on child sexual abuse, and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.

As with staff and volunteers, parents and caregivers can benefit from having foundational knowledge of definitions, characteristics, risk and protective factors, and potential signs of child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth. In addition to the information that is provided in staff and volunteer trainings, organizations may also consider providing parents and caregivers with:

- Resources and strategies to help them better understand these topics and discuss them in an age-appropriate way with their children.
- Information about potential services and supports, if they suspect their child has been or is being abused or sexually harmed.
- Information about potential services and supports if their child is engaging in problematic or harmful sexual behavior.

Outline organizational expectations for behavior and interactions, such as:

- Organizations can set clear expectations for parents and caregivers, outlining acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and interactions while on the organization's premises, during organizational programming, or when interacting with youth members, staff and volunteers, or other parents in the organization.
- See *Prevention Priority 5 for more information about expectations for behavior and interactions.*

Provide guidance for responding to policy violations and abuse or harmful behavior, including information about:

- Parents' and caregivers' responsibility to act if they witness or hear about inappropriate or harmful behaviors.
- Where to go for help within your organization, such as contact information for the point person for child sexual abuse or other concerns inside your organization.
- Resources for seeking help outside your organization, such as child sexual abuse prevention organizations.

Educate and empower youth

It is critical that the responsibility of keeping youth safe is placed firmly on adults, not youth themselves. However, it is also important to provide youth with knowledge and skills to understand and recognize healthy development and relationships, as well as acceptable and unacceptable or harmful behaviors by adults and youth in the organization. It is also critical to ensure they know how and where to seek help if they are experiencing unacceptable or harmful behavior. Effective child sexual abuse education and youth training is both developmentally appropriate and provided at the proper skill level. For example, different skills and knowledge may be provided to teenagers versus younger children.

Below are some key areas in which organizations can provide training and resources to youth to empower them to understand acceptable and unacceptable behavior by adults, engage in healthy, appropriate behaviors with each other, and seek help if they or another child are being harmed or abused.

Provide background information on child sexual abuse, and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.

Youth can also benefit from learning developmentally appropriate information about child sexual abuse, developmentally appropriate sexual behavior in youth, and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth. For youth, critical information on these topics might include:

- Definitions and characteristics of child sexual abuse.
- Definitions and characteristics of developmentally appropriate sexual behavior among youth and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.
- Information about boundaries and consent, including establishing and enforcing your own boundaries, respecting others' boundaries, and how to make sure you have consent if you engage in romantic or sexual behavior with a peer.

Outline organizational expectations for behavior and interactions.

It is important to inform youth of expectations for their own behavior in the organization as well as expectations for the behaviors of staff and volunteers, other youth members, and parents and caregivers. Clearly defining acceptable and unacceptable behavior by adults and youth in the organization and explaining what youth members can do if they see unacceptable behavior will help them readily identify when a boundary or policy violation is occurring and ask for help. See *Prevention Priority 5* for more information about expectations for behavior and interactions.

Provide guidance on how to seek help

Organizations can provide information to youth to help them know what to do and how to get help if they or someone they know is experiencing abuse or harmful behavior, engaging in harmful behavior themselves, or has concerns about any of these issues by:

- Teaching youth that if abuse or harmful behavior happens to them, it is not their fault, they should expect to be believed if they tell someone about it, and they should expect something to happen if they tell someone. If they aren't believed by the first trusted adult they tell, they should keep telling trusted adults until someone believes them.
- Telling youth where and how they can seek help when they see, experience, or hear about inappropriate or harmful adult-youth or youth-youth interactions.
- Telling youth where and how they can seek help if they have concerns about their own sexual thoughts or behaviors.

TIP: Don't reinvent the wheel

It can be overwhelming to think about all the critical content that must be conveyed to staff, volunteers, parents and caregivers, and youth to establish a shared understanding and set expectations around preventing harm and abuse in your organization. Organizations do not have to develop training and resources on their own. Collaborate with and learn from other organizations that have developed or identified evidence-informed information and resources related to preventing and responding to child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.

Organization Self-Reflection Questions

- What are our organization's current training requirements and processes for leaders, staff, and volunteers?
- Do we provide training for youth members? Parents and caregivers? If we don't provide formal training, do we find other ways to provide resources and information?
- What training programs do we currently use? Are they evidence-based? Are there any gaps in content covered by current training that we might need to fill?
- Do we go beyond formal training to integrate and reinforce concepts in day-to-day organizational practice?
- Do we use a variety of training methods? Are our current methods accessible to all trainees?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization is already doing well?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization could improve to strengthen our efforts?
- What resources are available to our organization to support us in addressing this priority area?



Prevention Priority 8

Respond Effectively to Abuse and Policy and Boundary Violations

The goal of prevention efforts within youth-serving organizations is to prevent child sexual abuse, problematic or harmful sexual behavior, and policy or boundary violations from happening in the first place. However, if and when these situations do occur, organizations must be prepared to respond immediately and constructively. Clear, consistent policies and practices for responding to concerns or knowledge of abuse, harmful behavior, or policy violations can create safer organizations where concerning behaviors are interrupted before more serious harm occurs, youth who have experienced abuse or harm are immediately protected and supported, and organizations learn from incidents to prevent future harm.

NOTE: Because Prevention Priority 3 provides detailed information on responding constructively to problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth, this section focuses primarily on responding to and reporting abuse and boundary or policy violations involving adults.

Understand and address barriers to disclosure and reporting

Disclosing child sexual abuse can be difficult for youth for many reasons. For example, youth may:⁷¹

- Not understand that a behavior is inappropriate or abusive.
- Fear not being believed or what could happen if they disclose.
- Experience boundary violations, threats, or manipulation.
- Feel guilt or shame for the abuse they experienced.
- Feel they need to protect those who abused them (an adult they care about).

Some children may have additional barriers to reporting, such as experiences of shame or abuse related to their disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, or other identities. These experiences may make them not trust people in authority positions, including child protective services, law enforcement, and youth-serving organization staff.

To create environments where youth feel safe to disclose abuse or other harmful behavior, youth-serving organizations can:

- Provide youth with developmentally appropriate information about child sexual abuse and problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.
- Regularly remind youth that they will be believed and supported if they report abuse or other harmful behavior.
- Provide alternative or anonymous ways for youth to report. For example, ensure there is not only one designated person to whom youth are instructed to disclose in case the person designated to take reports (such as a supervisor or mandated reporter) is the one accused of abuse or inappropriate behavior.
 - Anonymous reporting methods allow potential victims or those with concerns about abuse an opportunity to report without fear of retaliation. Organizations can seek out methods to ensure they receive enough information to investigate anonymous reports, such as setting up reporting forms that require certain fields to be completed or creating an anonymized email address to allow follow-up with the reporter without exposing their name or identifying information.
- Ensure there is protection for reporters, so they do not experience retaliation for reporting.
- Prevent further reporting barriers by making sure everyone, including those with disabilities or who speak different languages, have accessible reporting methods, such as verbal and written reporting options and translating forms into multiple languages.

Respond effectively to concerns or knowledge of abuse or harmful behavior

Respond immediately to concerns or knowledge of a youth member being abused or harmed by anyone—adult or youth, inside or outside the organization—according to organizational policy and federal, state, local, and tribal law.

Support and protect youth who disclose they are experiencing or have experienced abuse or other harmful behavior by:

- Remaining calm, using active listening skills, and letting the child know you believe them and they've done the right thing by telling you.
- Ensuring the child is safe, including taking immediate steps if the child is in imminent danger (such as if the person the child said is abusing them is their parent or caregiver).
- Asking only open-ended questions, like who did what and where the behavior occurred. Avoiding asking additional questions or details. If asked the same questions multiple times, youth may feel pressure and change their story.
- Informing the child that you are legally required to report this information.
- Establishing policies for how to respond if youth react in a potentially harmful way—if they threaten to run away, harm themselves, or harm others if allegations are reported.
- After someone discloses about child sexual abuse, encouraging them to seek self-care, such as receiving therapeutic or community support, finding a creative outlet, and setting boundaries. Organizations can provide support for victims and their families to help them cope with sexual abuse in the following ways.⁷²
 - Responding appropriately and compassionately to child sexual abuse disclosures.

- Prioritizing the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of the youth involved.
- Taking accountability and providing personal (and public, if applicable) apologies to impacted youth and their families.
- Offering counseling services, referrals to child sexual abuse organizations, or therapist referrals to staff, youth and parents and caregivers impacted by the incident.

Report suspicions, concerns, or disclosures of abuse or harm

- Who is accountable:
 - Be explicit that the head of your organization is professionally and legally accountable for ensuring that all cases of abuse are reported to the proper authorities. Regularly remind staff and volunteers of their duty to report concerns or knowledge of abuse.
- Who should report and when:
 - Immediately report suspicions, concerns, or disclosures of abuse to the appropriate authorities. Allegations and suspicions should be reported to very few people inside the organization before authorities are contacted, to expedite the process, maintain confidentiality, and minimize the number of times a youth must repeat allegations. Further, if a child disclosed abuse or harm, the person to whom a child discloses should be the one to make the report.
- Where to report:
 - Determine which external authorities, such as child protective services or law enforcement, should be contacted in different types of abuse cases. In most states and territories, child protective services are responsible for initial investigations of parent or caregiver abuse, and law enforcement is responsible for abuse by all other individuals. Consider consulting state or territory guidelines or partnering with child protective services, law enforcement, and child advocacy centers to ensure organizational policies align with the law and do not unintentionally harm youth.
- Who else to inform:
 - Inform leadership or board members about the incident immediately after making a report.
 - For allegations of abuse occurring within the youth-serving organization, contact the organization’s legal counsel and the insurance company or risk management provider.
 - Immediately notify the child’s parents and caregivers, unless a parent or caregiver is reportedly the person who abused them.
 - Inform uninvolved staff as needed, balancing organization transparency with the privacy and confidentiality of those involved. For example, when an incident is reported, inform staff that a report has been made and an investigation is pending, without revealing specific details of the incident until investigations are complete.

TIP: Remember that responding and reporting laws and organizational policies and practices may differ for youth behaviors.

See Prevention Priority 3 for more information about responding constructively to problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth.

For information about mandatory reporter laws in your state, go to <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect/>

Take immediate action if the accused is a staff member or volunteer

While the report is investigated and after the report concludes, take immediate action, including deciding to suspend employment, volunteering, or participation until the investigation is complete. Below are some best practices to ensure youth safety.

While the child sexual abuse report is under investigation, ensure youth are not in danger or at risk of harm before any corrective actions and decisions are made by:

- Separating the accused person from the youth who reported or experienced the incident.
- Stopping contact between all youth and the individual accused of abuse until the investigation is complete.
- Deciding whether to put the adult accused of abuse on probation or suspension until the case is resolved legally.

If the child sexual abuse report is confirmed:

- Terminate the employee or volunteer, even if the volunteer was a parent and caregiver who was active in the organization.
- Pursue legal options, such as pressing charges against adults who commit sexual abuse.
- If the child sexual abuse report is unconfirmed:
 - Provide additional training if necessary.
 - Provide additional supervision and monitoring.
 - Engage in consistent and thorough documentation and record-keeping.

TIP: Do not conduct or hinder child sexual abuse investigations.

Let child protective services, law enforcement, and child advocacy centers investigate allegations or suspicions. An organization should not complete an initial investigation before reporting child sexual abuse allegations or suspicions to the authorities. An internal investigation can harm the youth, delay reporting, or hinder the legal investigative process.

Establish plan for communicating with the media and the community, when needed

Effective and responsible communication with people outside of your organization can help improve youth safety and may prevent future child sexual abuse. Examples include:

- Developing a communication plan for responding to the media and the community if a high-profile child sexual abuse incident occurs, which may involve journalists and the media.
- Designating a communications response person who appropriately and compassionately addresses outside inquiries about the situation.
- Preparing public statements on the situation, carefully weighing publicly available information and confidentiality considerations for those involved.

- Adopting a policy for notifying the wider organization, community, and all parents and caregivers for youth in the organization that child sexual abuse has happened. But before doing so, determine what information is appropriate to share and in what order to share.
- Maintaining confidentiality and ensure that the names and other identifying information of people involved in the incident are not shared with the public.

Respond effectively to policy and boundary violations

In addition to responding to suspicions, allegations, or disclosures of abuse or harmful behaviors, it is critical that organizations also have concrete policies and practices related to responding to behavior that violates policy and boundaries and may not constitute abuse or warrant reporting but may increase risk of abuse. Constructive responses to such violations by staff and youth can strengthen organizational culture and prevent policy and boundary violations from escalating into abuse or harmful behavior. Examples include:

- Determining which behaviors your organization will respond to internally and which behaviors will require reporting to the authorities. For example, policy violations such as being alone with a child require an organizational response but do not necessarily warrant reporting to the local authorities. Reporting guidelines should be aligned to state and local laws and reporting requirements.
- Deciding as an organization how to ensure policy violations are taken seriously without having consequences so severe that people are afraid to speak up about their own or others' violations. For example, if a staff member would be immediately terminated for giving a youth member a ride home, they might avoid telling their supervisor if they gave a child a ride home in an emergency situation, or their colleague who saw it happen might be hesitant to report the violation. On the other hand, if the organization creates a culture of accountability that still allows for mistakes, leadership could work with the employee to help them understand the risks of the behavior, the consequences for repeating it, and alternatives to consider when there are exceptions or emergencies.
- Implementing policies and taking active steps to ensure there is no retaliation, discrimination, or coercion against youth, staff, or others who report boundary and policy violations. This reinforces the organization's mission and values and helps create a positive organizational culture.

Implement thorough record-keeping and internal review policies and practices

It is important for organizations to develop a system to track suspected or confirmed incidents of child sexual abuse or problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth, as well as all policy and boundary violations. Examples include:

- Categorizing child sexual abuse, problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth, and prevention policy and boundary violations on general incident reporting forms. These forms should be completed by staff who observe or first learn of the abuse, harmful behavior, or policy or boundary violation.
- Documenting how incidents were addressed with those involved, including whether the incident was reported to authorities, disciplinary actions taken, prevention policies or practices adjusted or reinforced, whether parents or other caregivers were notified, and the final resolution. Document reporting to local authorities and your youth-serving organization board.

- Considering referring records of child sexual abuse reports to a higher-level individual, preferably a trained internal or hired investigator, so they can review each incident within the organization to determine what went wrong and how a similar scenario can be prevented in the future. For example, was a policy or a policy step not followed? How can policies be modified to prevent another occurrence?
- Ensuring confidentiality and, in some cases, safety for youth by keeping incident reports and other documents with any identifying information in a locked location or a password-protected file.

Organizations can observe trends from these records to identify potential policy or practice adjustments and strengthen organizations' prevention efforts.

- If child sexual abuse, problematic or harmful sexual behavior among youth, or policy or boundary violations happen within the organization, leadership can evaluate existing policies and practices to identify whether there is anything that could be adjusted to better prevent similar incidents in the future.
- If the abuse occurred outside the organization and was disclosed or reported there, organizations can still evaluate how they responded to the disclosure or report to ensure they followed all protocols and legal requirements in a timely manner and make any needed adjustments.

Organization Self-Reflection Questions

- What steps are our organization already taking to make sure youth feel safe to disclose abuse or other harmful behavior? What additional steps could we take?
- How does our organization currently respond to suspicions or disclosures of abuse? Have we noticed any differences between our policy and practice?
- Do our staff feel comfortable reporting suspected abuse or harmful behavior? Do they feel comfortable responding to youth disclosures?
- Do we have specific policies and processes for responding to policy and boundary violations that do not constitute abuse or warrant reporting?
- How can we create an organizational culture where staff feel comfortable sharing their own mistakes or policy violations, or those of their colleagues, while still taking those violations seriously?
- What are our current policies and practices around documentation and record-keeping? Are we tracking policy and boundary violations in addition to formal reports of abuse? Do we use tracked information to identify opportunities for improvement in our prevention approach?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization is already doing well?
- What stands out in the information in this section as something our organization could improve to strengthen our efforts?
- What resources are available to our organization to support us in addressing this priority area?

What's Next

Implementing child sexual abuse prevention policies and practices and making the changes to protect youth from child sexual abuse in organizations can be challenging. Variations in missions, values, goals, services offered, and populations served mean there is no one-size-fits-all approach to child sexual abuse prevention. The process of implementing child sexual abuse prevention strategies takes time, evolves differently in each organization, and is based on many factors such as the size and resources of the organization, the mission and culture of the organization, and most importantly, the children being served by the organization.

The following considerations can help guide youth-serving organizations as they evaluate their current child safety policies and practices and identify opportunities to strengthen existing efforts based on this and other evidence-informed resources.

- Conduct an internal assessment to reflect on current strengths and areas for improvement.
- Before adopting a specific strategy, policy, or practice to prevent child sexual abuse, determine the goal you want to achieve (such as improve safety during off-site activities), and then explore the most effective program, policy or practice to achieve that goal.
- Obtain feedback and support from all levels of your organization on new policies and practices so everyone accepts and owns the policies and practices.
- Ensure new policies and practices comply with organizational policies, state and national laws, tribal laws, child protective services, and law enforcement.
- Ensure everyone in the organization is thoroughly familiarized with new policies and practices, including board members, leadership, staff, volunteers, youth, parents, and caregivers.
- Seek ongoing feedback from staff, volunteers, parents and caregivers, and youth to evaluate and measure whether goals are being met and modify elements of the policy or practice as needed.

Preventing child sexual abuse is a community effort that requires everyone to prioritize youth safety and well-being. Youth-serving organizations can use the strategies in this publication, collaborate with staff, volunteers, youth, and parents and caregivers, and utilize additional resources and partnerships to continuously expand their collective knowledge, strengthen prevention efforts, and protect the safety and well-being of all youth they serve.

Appendix A:

Connect with Partners to Support and Protect Youth

Connecting and collaborating with partner organizations is a helpful way to learn how to work with youth at increased risk for child sexual abuse. Youth-serving organizations may not have the internal expertise needed to understand or address the needs of all youth they serve.

American Indian and Alaska Native youth

- Identify tribal and community resources from the [Indian Health Service \(IHS\)](#) or the [Administration of Children and Families](#).
- Connect with trusted national leaders such as the Native American Children's Alliance ([NACA](#)) and National Indian Child Welfare Association ([NICWA](#)) for information and resources.
- For child sexual abuse and other violence-related resources, see the National Center for Victims of Crime [Tribal Resource Tool or Strong Hearts](#).
- Seek opportunities to engage people from across the American Indian and Alaska Native community, including tribal leaders, parents and caregivers, extended family, tribal Elders (grandparents or Elders from their own or other tribes), and youth.
- Engage with Native leadership to help connect child sexual abuse prevention to tribal culture and customs. Youth-serving organizations can build successful partnerships if they respect cultural customs, jurisdiction, and privacy. For example, some tribes may allow visitors to respectfully observe and discuss certain, but not all, sacred ceremonies and practices.¹¹

Youth with disabilities

- Connect with organizations that specialize in serving youth with disabilities, such as national organizations like the [Arc](#) and community organizations like the [Coalition Against Sexual Abuse of Children with Disabilities - Chicago Children's Advocacy Center](#).
- Identify resources and provide staff training on how to prevent child sexual abuse by:
 - Identifying places and situations that might increase child sexual abuse risks for youth with disabilities.
 - Talking to youth with disabilities and their families about child sexual abuse risks.
 - Learning how to address situations in a way that may increase the need for physical contact with youth with disabilities.

Appendix A Continued:

Immigrant and refugee youth

- Find and connect with community organizations that provide services to meet the evolving needs of immigrant or refugee youth and their families.
- Connect with national and local immigrant and refugee support organizations (such as [International Rescue Committee \[IRC\]](#), [U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants \[USCRI\]](#), or [Americans for Immigrant Justice](#)).
 - Call community organizations to confirm they are still open and serve youth and determine any documentation needed to access services.
 - Confirm resource-providing organizations employ staff from immigrant and refugee communities.

LGBTQ+ youth

- Connect with local chapters of [PFLAG](#), and other organizations that provide community services and support for LGBTQ+ youth.
- Seek input from youth and partner with organizations like [Human Rights Campaign](#), [Youth Pride Association](#), [Rainbow Youth Project USA](#), or [GLSEN](#) to better reflect LGBTQ+ youth's identities and experiences.
- Learn about the unique identities of LGBTQ+ youth, and have staff complete ally training, such as [The Safe Zone Project](#).
- Seek out resources to learn more about this population and how to support LGBTQ+ youth and their families, such as those found in [The Trevor Project's Resource Center](#).

Youth experiencing homelessness

- Connect with the local Continuum of Care program (a community group dedicated to the goal of ending homelessness) or [United Way 2-1-1](#) to identify community services and supports, as well as suggest or offer staff training on engaging youth experiencing homelessness.

Appendix B:

Example questions for screening and selecting staff

Below is a non-exhaustive list of example questions that may be used in a written application or personal interview.

- **What type of supervisory situation do you prefer?**
If applicants are very independent, they may not fit in an organization whose policies and procedures require close supervision.
- **What age/gender/disability/background of youth do you want to work with? How would you feel about working with a different age/gender/disability/background?**
If an applicant seems fixated on one age, gender, disability, or background, be wary. However, it may be that the applicant has experience or is gifted with working with certain age groups. Asking follow-up questions about why an applicant has a strong preference can help you determine if there is cause for concern.
- **Why do you want the job?**
Describe a challenging situation you've had to handle with youth.
- **What are some examples of appropriate and inappropriate ways to interact with children in a youth-serving organization?**
- **What are some signs that a child may have experienced child sexual abuse?**
Not all applicants will know the answer to this question, especially if they're entry-level applicants. But someone who has worked with children before may be able to identify signs of child sexual abuse and know when to report it.
- **What would you do in a particular situation?**
Set up scenarios that involve potential concerns, boundary issues, or youth protection policies and interactions to gauge the applicant's response. Be concerned if applicants disregard the organization's policies and procedures or handle a situation poorly.
- **What makes you a good candidate for working with youth? What would your friends or colleagues say about how you interact with youth?**
- **Would anyone say you should not work with youth? Why?**
- **Tell me about a time you had to have a difficult conversation with a frustrated colleague.**
- **We're often expected to adhere to policies that may not make sense to us. Tell me about a time that you had to stick to a rule, even if it didn't seem reasonable.**
- **What would you do if you suspect another staff member of being inappropriate around youth or abusing a young person? What signs might you notice?**
- **What other hobbies or activities do you enjoy?**
Determine if applicants have mature, adult relationships—not just relationships with youth.

Appendix B Continued:

The following questions may be used in a written application or personal interview. Below is a non-exhaustive list of example questions that may be used when conducting a reference check.

- **How long have you known the applicant, and what is your relationship to them?**
- **How would you describe the personal characteristics of the applicant?**
- **Can you give me an example of how the applicant interacts with youth?**
- **How would you describe the applicant's ability to follow policies and procedures?**
- **Why would this person be a good candidate for working with youth? Is there any reason this person should not work with youth?**
- **Have you seen the applicant discipline youth (other than their own children)? How did they discipline them?**
- **Would you hire this person again? Would you want this person in your organization in the future?**

Appendix C:

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