

Step Up & Speak Out

Provided by Darkness to Light

Selecting an Activity for your Child

Parents play an important role in keeping their kids safe when they participate in activities sponsored by youth-serving organizations. When deciding whether to enroll your child in a particular activity, learn about that organization's safe environment policies, prevention strategies and response preparedness.

1. All youth-serving organizations should perform background checks on potential staff and volunteers. Careful screening and selection will also include personal interviews, as well as personal and professional reference checks.
2. Programs should have policies in place that promote a safe environment. The policies should be available and made clear to parents, staff and volunteers. If an organization does not have a policy or is unwilling to share its policy, that should serve as a "red flag."
3. Safe-environment policies should set standards of conduct for staff and volunteers that are designed to minimize the opportunities for abuse to occur. For example, prohibiting one-on-one time, contact through electronic communication and social media, and contact between staff and participants outside of organized program activities.
4. Organizations that have expectations or requirements of parents in areas such as transportation or presence during practices (for example, requiring parents to observe private lessons) should clearly communicate them at the time of enrollment.
5. Staff and volunteers should be trained in child sexual abuse prevention and response.
6. Programs should have guidelines for how interactions between children and teens are structured. Older youth should be carefully screened, monitored, and supervised.
7. There should be well-documented procedures for reporting and addressing policy violations and suspected abuse.

Although it may be uncomfortable at first to have these conversations, organizations should be ready and willing to talk about their prevention measures. Do not accept excuses such as, "We know and trust our staff well," or "We don't have the time or money to do background checks." In today's environment, these answers are simply unacceptable. All youth-serving organizations must demonstrate their commitment to safety by taking an active role in decreasing the risk for inappropriate behavior and sexual abuse within their organization.

Questions to Ask When Selecting a Youth-Serving Organization

1. How are your staff and volunteers selected?
2. Do you perform background checks, as well as personal and professional reference checks?
3. Is your staff trained in abuse prevention and response?
4. What types of policies are in place to prevent child sexual abuse?
5. What is your policy for one-on-one time between adults and children?
6. How are older youth monitored and supervised when working with younger children?
7. What is your policy for reporting abuse? When a report is made, how are parents notified?
8. How do you handle policy violations?