

# **Policies and practices that prevent abuse or neglect and keep children and staff safe at camp**

## **Child Abuse Mandated Reporter Policy**

As a staff person at Camp Mechuwana, you are a Mandated Reporter required to report any alleged abuse that is reported or suspected to the Department of Health & Human Services.

There are four categories of child abuse: Physical, Sexual, Emotional, and Neglect.

To make sure we are up to date in regard to being a mandated reporter, we are required to complete the Mandated Reporter training (done every four years). You may do this online. After you complete the training, you will be able to print out a certificate. For those who cannot do this online, we are able to offer this training at camp.

## **Camper Interaction**

**The Rule of Three.** One-on-one and camper/staff interaction. Mechuwana tries very hard to create a safe environment for everyone: staff, adult counselors, and youth. In order to do this, we follow the “**Rule of Three.**” This simply means: **Never be alone with a camper/youth.** If there is need for a one-on-one interaction with a camper/youth, you should be in **Auditory and Visual** (sound and sight) range of others. This way you can still have a conversation but not be alone with a camper or youth.

## **Helpful Guidelines:**

- We are here for you. Asking for help whenever you feel overwhelmed as a counselor is the right thing to do. It not only will help you in the long run, it will help the campers.
- Be understanding and compassionate. Strive to make all situations positive ones.
- Set rules and guidelines for your cabin and for your camp. This should be seen as a way of living together so everyone can have fun and be safe and should not be seen as negative.
- Discipline consistently and without judgment. Do so with the individual’s and group’s best interest in mind. Everything situation is a “teachable moment.”

## **Physical Contact at Camp**

**ALWAYS** at the discretion of the recipient. Ask permission, read verbal and nonverbal cues, and keep the following in mind:

- A comforting touch on the arm, shoulder, or upper back is allowed with the child’s consent.
- Hugs must be camper-initiated with brief, limited contact; side hugs are preferable.
- Any contact should be in the company or line of sight of other staff members.
- Contact should never be in a place on a child’s body that is normally covered by a bathing suit.
- The exception of this is a medical necessity, done for a medical reason by trained staff.

## **Specific Policies for Protection of Children/Staff**

**Physical:** Mechuwana will provide safe facilities and supervised activities. Basic comforts of food, lodging, and sanitation are provided while at camp. Behavior of physical aggression is never tolerated. Personal boundaries are enforced at all times.

**Mental/Emotional:** Emotional wellbeing is very important to us. Being positive, non-threatening, and compassionate of different personalities and backgrounds is vital. Bullying/hazing is not tolerated in any form. Always ask for help if you feel a camper needs emotional or mental help to deal with situations at camp or in their life outside of camp.

**Social Media/Electronics:** Staff may not post photos of campers on any social media platform (even if given permission by the camper). Ask Camp Director for clarification or if you have questions concerning sharing photos.

**Photographs:** Designated photographers may take photos of program participants if the parents/guardians have given the camp written permission to photograph their camper. Posting promotional photos will only be done on Mechuwana's official social media accounts with permission.

## Relevant Topics Covered in Staff Training

- Positive Interaction with Campers
- Behavior Management
- Appropriate Discipline at Camp
- Recognizing Bullying
- Sensitive Issues and How to Talk about Them

## Mechuwana Safe Sanctuary Policy

**Introduction:** The Safe Sanctuary Policy is actually a series of policies that we implemented in order to make Mechuwana a safe place for everyone. Our Volunteer Handbook, Dean Handbook, and Staff Handbook go into more detail with regard to day-to-day procedures, but the following nine points make up our Safe Sanctuary Policy:

1. All volunteers or staff members must fill out an application, provide at least two references, and be interviewed.
2. All volunteers and staff members must sign an American Camping Association "Disclosure Form."
3. All volunteers and staff members must have a criminal background check done, which includes a check of all "Registered Sex Offenders" of every state.
4. All volunteers must take the State of Maine Mandated Reporter training. This may be done online. The camp also provides a printed version and/or training for those who cannot do this online.
5. **One-on-one and camper/staff interaction.** Mechuwana tries very hard to create a safe environment for everyone: staff, adult counselors, and youth. To do this, we follow the "**Rule of Three**," which simply means: **Never be alone with a camper/youth.** If there is need for a one-to-one interaction with a camper/youth, you should be in **Auditory and Visual** (sight and sound)

range of others. In this way you can still have a conversation but not be alone with a camper or youth. The **“Rule of Three” is a Camp Mechuwana policy that must be followed by all groups using camp property.**

6. We strongly suggest you do everything in groups as that is the best way to protect everyone involved.
7. **Sexual harassment is defined as:** “The use of one’s authority or power, either explicitly or implicitly, to coerce another into unwanted sexual relations or to punish another for their refusal; or the creation of an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment through verbal or physical conduct or a sexual nature.” (US Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Definition)  
**Mechuwana** is a place where children and adults come to have a fun and relaxing time. It is also a place at which all people should feel safe and respected. If someone is feeling harassed or uncomfortable, then Mechuwana is no longer a “safe” environment for this person. We want to ensure that we are providing a caring Christian experience for each and every person at camp.
8. **Anyone witnessing behavior that they feel breaks these regulations must report what they have witnessed to a Dean or to Camp Director *immediately*.**
9. **Report suspected abuse or neglect or other violation to appropriate designated authorities.**
  - If you suspect abuse or neglect, please contact the Camp Director, camp nurse, or your dean. We will assist you in the correct reporting to the appropriate authorities.
  - As an organization we are also obligated to report allegations of abuse or neglect made against our staff.

## **Reporting When and How: Remember your mandated reporter training**

### **Please immediately share with your Dean or Camp Director:**

- Interactions, discussions, or conversations that you observe or are made aware of that violate any of the above guidelines by staff or campers.
- Interactions, discussions, or conversations that are overheard or disclosed to you by a child about themselves or someone else that involves any of the information on abuse.
- Interactions, discussions, or conversations that you observe or are made aware of that seem strange, suspicious, uncomfortable, or unsafe for campers or staff.

**If you ever have a question about whether or not you should report, talk to your Dean, the Camp Director, or the camp nurse, and we can help sort things out. Never feel you are doing the wrong thing by bringing it to our attention.**

### **The reporting of suspected abuse or neglect or other violations to the appropriate designated authorities:**

- Camp staff are required to report any incidents of child abuse to Mechuwana’s executive director, in accordance with its licensing requirements and training.
- Mechuwana’s executive director or designee is then required to report suspected child abuse to the DHHS Mandated Reporter Hotline (1-800-452-1999), in accordance with 22 MRS § 4011-A (1)(A)(14).

- This mandated reporter hotline is the intake line at DHHS Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS). OCFS Intake then forwards those reports from Mechuwana’s executive director to the OCFS Out of Home (OOH) Investigation Unit, when any abuse is reported to take place outside of the home. (If inside the home, then the Intake would refer to DHHS Child Protective Services.) The DHHS Out of Home Investigation Team (OOH Unit) will conduct child abuse investigations at youth camps, in accordance with 22 MRS Chapter 1071, Subchapter 18.
- In accordance with 22 MRS §§ 4099-K(4) and 4099-L (2)(C), OOH will coordinate with licensing agencies like the Maine CDC Health Inspection Program (HIP) in performing its investigation when the setting is licensed. Upon receipt of notification from OOH, HIP will perform follow-up steps and work to ensure that the camp is not in violation of licensing rules related to this reported incident, like hiring of staff, ratios of staff to campers, appropriate age of staff, training of staff, and confirmation that camps are establishing and training staff on policies to protect campers from child abuse and to report incidents, should the staff observe anything.
- In summary, and in tandem to any required reporting to law enforcement, a youth camp is meeting its licensing requirements for reporting suspected child abuse by contacting the DHHS Mandated Reporter Hotline. That agency will reach out to HIP as part of its investigative work to alert licensing agencies.

**The youth camp’s course of action if allegations of abuse or neglect are made against the youth camp or its staff:**

- At the first report of abuse or suspicion of abuse, the staff person receiving the information will notify Mechuwana’s executive director.
- Mechuwana’s executive director or proxy will make a report in accordance with relevant state and local reporting requirements and will cooperate with any legal authority involved.
- The staff member who reported will receive written verification that the report was filed/not filed with the State within 24 hours. If the staff member is not satisfied with the decision, they may make the report themselves (unless they are a minor).
- If the reported incident(s) allege that a program volunteer or employed staff was involved in the abuse, Mechuwana’s executive director will, without exception, suspend the volunteer or staff person from the camp. The parents or legal guardian of the child(ren) involved in the alleged incident will be promptly notified in accordance with the directions of the relevant state and/or local agency. If Mechuwana’s executive director is reported to be involved, the Bishop will take over these responsibilities while Mechuwana’s executive director is suspended and investigated.
- Reinstatement of the employed staff person *may* occur only after all allegations have been cleared to the satisfaction of Mechuwana’s executive director.
- All camp staff and volunteers must be sensitive to the need for confidentiality in the handling of this information and, therefore, should only discuss the incident with the designated staff team and any and all outside authorities.

**The youth camp’s grievance procedures for staff, parents, or guardians regarding alleged abuse or neglect:**

## **Protocol for Complaints**

When a serious verbal complaint (which may include but is not limited to abusive or violent acts or language, sexual harassment, or discrimination based on membership in a protected class, or gross negligence resulting in injury) is made by a participant, employee, or other party regarding inappropriate conduct, the following actions will be taken:

- (1) Mechuwana's executive director will obtain a written statement from the person making the complaint within 48 hours, specifying the details of any incident, behavior, other persons present, etc. If no written statement is made, no further action is needed. Upon receipt of a written complaint, statements will also be taken from all parties with first-hand knowledge of the allegation.
- (2) After Mechuwana's executive director has received the written complaint, they shall respond in writing to the complainant, informing the complainant that a complaint has been received and that an investigation will be undertaken.
- (3) Mechuwana's executive director will immediately inform the Chairperson of the Site Board of Directors, the Director of Connectional Ministries, and any other appropriate Conference personnel as to the details of the complaint.
- (4) Within seven days, Mechuwana's executive director will investigate the complaint, reasonably and fairly, to determine the facts surrounding the allegations. These facts will be shared with the Director of Connectional Ministries. Together Mechuwana's executive director and the Conference staff will determine what action, if any, is appropriate.
- (5) If the allegation is of a serious nature and if initial indications present a compelling case, Mechuwana's executive director (or, in the absence of the Executive Director; the Site Board Chairperson and their designee) may take immediate action to suspend a person, against whom a complaint has been filed, from their position or remove them from the site property. If the person being suspended is an employee, the person will continue to be paid through the time of the investigation. In some cases, the nature of the allegations will necessitate informing law enforcement or other agencies of further action. The results of any investigation by Mechuwana's executive director will be reported to the Director of Connectional Ministries, the chairperson of the Site Board of Directors, the person against whom the allegation has been made, and the person who has made the initial complaint. Depending on the investigation results, no further action may be initiated.
- (6) In response to the investigation, further action may include, but is not limited to, supervisory counseling, mediation, further training, written reprimand, or termination. Mechuwana's executive director is responsible for this action and may seek guidance from other professionals or through the Conference or CRM site Employee Assistance Program.
- (7) Throughout this policy, it is the intent of the CRM site to assume the innocence of the person charged, and to seriously consider any complaints that are made; appropriately investigating the validity or seriousness of any allegations; take necessary remedial actions; and seek reconciliation and restoration.

## **Protocol for Complaints against the Executive Director**

When a serious verbal complaint (which may include but is not limited to abusive or violent acts or language, sexual harassment, or discrimination based on membership in a protected class, or gross negligence resulting in injury) is made by a participant, employee, or other party regarding inappropriate conduct, the following actions will be taken:

- (1) The Chairperson of the Site Board of Directors (or their designee) or the Director of Connectional Ministry will obtain a written statement from the person making the complaint within 48 hours, specifying the details of any incident, behavior, other persons present, etc. If no written statement is made, no further action is needed. Upon receipt of a written complaint, statements will also be taken from all parties with first-hand knowledge of the allegation.
- (2) After the written complaint is received, the DCM shall respond in writing to the complainant, informing the complainant that a complaint has been received and that an investigation will be undertaken.
- (3) Mechuwana's executive director will be informed that a complaint has been filed against them and that an investigation is being undertaken. At that time, the DCM may suspend the Executive Director (with pay) pending the outcome of the investigation.
- (4) Within seven days, the DCM will investigate the complaint reasonably and fairly to determine the facts surrounding the allegations. These facts will be shared with the Chairperson of the Site Board of Directors, who will be consulted to determine what action, if any, is appropriate.
- (5) If the allegation is of a serious nature and if initial indications present a compelling case, the DCM may take immediate action to suspend the Executive Director from their position or remove them from Conference property. In some cases, the nature of the allegation will necessitate informing law enforcement or other agencies for further action.

The results of any investigation by the DCM will be reported to the Chairperson of the Site Board of Directors, Mechuwana's executive director, and the person who has made the initial complaint. Depending on the investigation results, no further action may be initiated.

- (1) In response to the investigation, action taken by the DCM may include (but is not limited to) supervisory counseling, mediation, further training, written reprimand, or termination.
- (2) The original complainant should be advised of their opportunity to invoke further procedures of complaint through the New England Conference's administrative and judicial processes.
- (3) Throughout this policy, it is the intent of the New England Conference to assume the innocence of the person charged, and to seriously consider any complaints that are made, appropriately investigate the validity and seriousness of any allegations, take necessary remedial actions, and seek reconciliation and restoration.