



Policy for the Protection of Children

DEFINITIONS:

“Guest” refers to a person who visits one of our camps for a period of time that does not exceed 3 consecutive hours, to give a presentation or to assist with camp operations.

“Management Team” refers to the CEO, the Executive Director, the Director of Operations, and the Program Director of STEM Camp.

“Staff” refers to the Camp Co-Coordinator, Camp Directors, counsellors and any other personnel who have not been listed as part of the Management Team; and who have a paid position with STEM Camp. “Volunteer” refers to a non-paid person who has agreed to assist in some way, for 3 hours or more,

with the daily operation of a particular STEM Camp, and who has been duly certified by the company to work with our campers.

1. THE NEED FOR A “POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN”.

STEM Camp has a mandate to ensure the safety of all children that are enrolled in its STEM Camps by following the guidelines outlined in this policy document.

The physical and sexual abuse of children has increasingly and properly claimed the attention of our society. In response, it is the commitment of STEM Camp to provide reasonable protective care to all children, youth, staff, guests, and volunteers involved in its STEM Camp programs.

Children are naturally trusting and readily place their faith in adults who care for them. It is the responsibility of STEM Camp to safeguard that trust.

The goal of STEM Camp’s “Policy for the Protection of Children” is to protect children in our care at STEM Camps, and avoid any possibility that a child will be a victim of any form of abuse from anyone.

2. UNDERSTANDING ABUSE

Abuse is characterized as follows:

- It can be physical, emotional or sexual;
- It always involves the misuse of power;

Misuse of power takes place when people take advantage of the authority or power they have over vulnerable people. Vulnerable people include adults with physical or mental disabilities and children.

Physical abuse is using physical force or action that results, or could result, in injury to a vulnerable person. It is more than reasonable discipline. Sometimes injury is caused by over-discipline. Injuring a child, youth or other vulnerable person is not acceptable, regardless of differing cultural standards on discipline.

- In 97 per cent of reported cases of physical abuse, parents are the perpetrators.
- The perpetrator of physical abuse is approximately 1.5 times more likely to be male than female.

Emotional abuse is a pattern of hurting an individual's feelings to the point of damaging their self-respect. It includes verbal attacks, insults, humiliation or rejection. A child, youth or vulnerable person who is emotionally harmed may demonstrate severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, self-destructive or aggressive behaviour.

Sexual abuse occurs when a child, youth or other vulnerable person is used by somebody else for sexual stimulation or gratification. Sexual activity between children or youth may also be sexual abuse if older or more powerful children or youth take sexual advantage of those who are younger or less powerful.

Sexual abuse includes behaviour that involves touching and non-touching aspects. Types of sexual abuse that involve touching include fondling, oral, genital and anal penetration, intercourse and rape. Types of sexual abuse that do not involve touching include verbal comments, exposure to pornography, obscene phone calls, e-mail or other communication, exhibitionism and allowing children to witness sexual activity.

Symptoms of Abuse and Molestation

STEM Camp staff should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioural and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit.

Physical signs may include:

- torn or bloody underclothing
- lacerations and bruises
- irritation, pain or injury to the genital area
- difficulty with urination
- discomfort when sitting

Behavioural signs may include:

- anxiety when approaching an activity area

- nervous or hostile behaviour toward adults
- sexual self-consciousness
- withdrawal from camp activities and friends
- “acting out” sexual behaviour

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- “(names a particular person) does things to me when we’re alone”
- “I don’t like to be alone with (names a particular person)”
- “(Names a particular person) fooled around with me”
- “I don’t like (names a particular person)”

The Effects of Sexual Abuse of Children

Child sexual abuse robs children of their childhood and can potentially scar its young victims for life. Too often, in the past, the effects of abuse were minimized or dismissed. Children were viewed as being resilient. Recent research has shown that children can suffer significant pain from even a single abusive incident. STEM Camp is aware of the pain and long-term suffering that can accompany such abuse. Abused children can display a wide range of negative symptoms in the aftermath of abuse. Abuse can result in abnormal fears, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), aggressive behaviour, sexual “acting out,” depression and poor self-esteem.

The degree of damage depends upon several factors including the intensity, duration and frequency of the abuse. In addition, the relationship of the perpetrator to the child matters. If the abuser is a known and trusted authority figure in the child’s life, the degree of impact increases dramatically.

3. PROTECTION PROCEDURES

Commitments

STEM Camp makes the following commitments to protect children, youth, staff and volunteers who participate in its STEM Camp program.

- 1) Screening of those who work with children, youth and other vulnerable individuals is important.
- 2) All staff and volunteers will undergo police records checks.

- 3) All staff and volunteers who work with children and youth will be made familiar with the nature of child sexual abuse, and the guidelines contained in this policy.
- 4) This policy to protect children is regarded seriously and will be enforced.
- 5) All staff will sign a document agreeing to comply with this policy.
- 6) Staff will be permitted to work with children or youth only after they have successfully completed training that includes their demonstrated understanding of this policy.
- 7) A directory of names and addresses of parents and children attending STEM Camp will be carefully maintained.

Washroom Guidelines

A child eight years of age or younger should not be sent to the washroom alone, but should be accompanied by a staff member and a buddy. The washroom door should be left partly open to make sure that everything is in order. The staff person should then remain outside the washroom door and wait for the child before escorting him or her back to the group activity. The staff person will call the child's name if she/he is taking longer than seems necessary. The staff person will never go into a washroom cubicle with a child/youth and shut the door.

Proper Display of Affection

Touch is an essential responsibility in nurturing lives. Staff need to be aware of, and sensitive to, differences in sexual development, cultural differences, family backgrounds, individual personalities, and special needs. Physical contact with children should be age and developmentally appropriate. The following guidelines are recommended as healthy and positive activities.

Appropriate Touching

Love and caring can be expressed in the following appropriate ways:

- Bend down to the child's eye level and speak kindly; listen to him or her carefully;
- Take a child's hand and lead him or her to an activity;
- Put an arm around the shoulder of a child who needs quieting or comforting;
- Take both of the child's hands as you say, "You did such a good job!" (or "I'm so glad to see you. We've missed you!" etc.);
- Pat a child on the head, hand, shoulder or back to affirm him or her;

- Hold a child by the shoulders or hand to keep his or her attention while you redirect the child's behaviour;
- Gently hold a child's chin to help him or her focus on what you are saying;
- Hold and console a preschool child who is crying.

Inappropriate Touching

Staff and volunteers should avoid:

- Kissing a child or coaxing a child to kiss you;
- Extended hugging;
- Tickling
- Touching a child in any area that would be normally covered by a bathing suit
- Carrying older children or having them sit on your lap;
- Being alone with a child.

STAFFING AND SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

Staff and volunteers should always conduct themselves appropriately, by being an example of integrity, respect and honesty to those in their care. The desire is to provide a safe and loving environment where children and youth feel comfortable and are protected.

A. Supervision

Programs that involve children and youth must always include adequate supervision.

Supervision should also be maintained before and after the event until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians.

B. Parental Permission

Consent of a parent must be obtained before transporting or being alone with a child or youth.

C. Day Trips

Activities conducted away from the regular STEM Camp location must be pre-approved by a member of the Management Team.

- Parents should be notified at least one day prior to a day trip outing.
- An Activity Permission Form and a Medical Form are required for each child participating in day trips.
- Day trips must be supervised by all STEM Camp Staff.
- Any supervising adults must be approved volunteers.

- When transporting children is involved in an activity, all drivers must have a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance. The number of persons per car must never exceed the number of seat belts.

D. Overnight Trips

STEM Camp will NOT be holding any overnight trips, at any time, for campers.

Staff Duties re Care of Children

- a. All staff must wear STAFF t-shirts (provided by STEM Camp) so that they can be easily identified.
- b. If it is necessary for an adult to be alone with children, there must be a window in the door providing an unobstructed view of the children or the door must be left open.
- c. Drop off time each morning is between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m. Children should not be dropped-off each morning without a counsellor present.
- d. Pickup time is between 4:00 and 4:30 p.m. Children should be released at the end of each camp day only to a parent or adult family member known to the counsellor. Parents will indicate, in writing, who is eligible to pick up their child.

4. RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

All prospective volunteers must meet the following requirements:

- (1) completion of the Volunteer Application Form
- (2) attendance at a Skype Interview with a Management Team member; and subsequent approval of the volunteer applicant
- (3) a reference check, or police record check, if deemed advisable by the MT member.

Review of this Policy

All prospective volunteers working with children and youth must attend a training session to review this policy. A copy of this policy will be provided to all prospective volunteers with the expectation that they read the material and become familiar with the contents.

Volunteer Application

Preamble: To protect vulnerable people and to be protected from liability, STEM Camp must take reasonable

action in screening and supervising the volunteers involved in any work with children or youth.

The 5-Step Process:

Step 1: Volunteer Application Form: Prospective volunteers working with children and youth must complete this form. The Volunteer Application Form is critical in protecting STEM Camp from legal action if a case of abuse occurs in which a staff member or volunteer is involved.

Step 2: Skype Interview

An interview, conducted by the Management Team, provides an opportunity to review the important items from the Volunteer Application Form in a personal setting. The interviewers can ask follow-up questions and questions of clarification. The information given in the interview will be available only to the Management Team. The interview will allow the prospective volunteer the opportunity to ask questions about the STEM Camp program and the reasons behind our child protection policy.

Step 3: Checks

Personal References

Two personal references are requested on the Volunteer Application Form. References that are acceptable are limited to (two) of the following:

- Former or present Minister, Pastor, Priest, etc.
- Long-time friend (minimum of 5 years)
- One parent (for minors)
- Teacher (for minors)
- Employer or Colleague

References will be contacted and asked to affirm the character of the volunteer.

Police Vulnerable Sector Check

STEM Camp reserves the right to ask for police records checks for staff and volunteers; the cost will be borne by each applicant.

The following are criteria to consider when evaluating the police record checks information:

- The number and type of convictions
- The age and circumstances of the offender at the time of the offence

- The length of time between past criminal activity and the present
- The conduct and circumstances of the individual since the offence and
- The likelihood of the individual repeating the offence

Kinds of criminal convictions which disqualify individuals from working with children and youth:

- A criminal conviction for a sexual offence involving a minor would disqualify an applicant.
- Other crimes may strongly suggest that a person should not be considered for work with minors at a STEM

Camp because they would not suggest a risk of abuse or molestation. For example, some property offences would not be included in this list, particularly if the offence occurred long ago and the individual has a long history of impeccable behaviour.

Step 4: Approval/Disqualification

A Management Team member will review the materials and approve the volunteer application. The information contained in the police records check report is considered strictly confidential. Only Management Team members will be privy to police information. All volunteer application materials will be kept in a confidential, secure, "Staff/Volunteer Placement File" at STEM Camp Head Office for a minimum of 7 years. There is no appeal process for volunteer candidates who are not approved.

Step 5: Training Session with Camp Director

Successful volunteer applicants will be expected to attend a short on-site training session with the Camp Director before their first volunteer day begins.

5. GUESTS

The term "guests" refers to site visitors who will be working with the children for a period of time less than 3 hours. An example of a guest is someone who comes to camp to make a presentation to the children about a subject area in which he/she has specialized knowledge. The Camp Director will be expected to ask for, and to contact, at least one reference person that can vouch for the reliability of such a guest.

6. INCIDENT REPORTING PROCEDURES

Anyone who has concerns regarding the safety of a child must report it to the Camp Director, who will facilitate the contact with the appropriate child protection agency. The Management Team will also be contacted. Abuse or neglect need not have already occurred for a child to be in need of protection; it is NOT necessary to wait until a child has been harmed to intervene.

Discuss Suspicious Behaviour Immediately

Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between a volunteer and a child, youth or other vulnerable person must be confronted immediately and investigated. Prompt warnings must be issued when appropriate, and the situation monitored very closely. The counsellor or volunteer's services should be terminated immediately by the Camp Director for violation of sufficient gravity.

When an Allegation Occurs

If any staff member has concern for the safety or well-being of any child, youth or other vulnerable person at the STEM Camp, s/he should report it immediately to the Camp Director who will offer support and assistance in reporting the concern. The Camp Director will also immediately notify the Director of Operations of STEM Camp and will obtain from the concerned person all information necessary to complete the Suspected Abuse Report form.

If the alleged perpetrator is a staff member or volunteer s/he will be advised of the allegation and suspended from his or her duties. S/he will be advised to seek legal counsel.

Confidentiality

In these matters, it is important to keep the information restricted to those who need to be advised. This means that all suspicions of abuse should be directed only to the Camp Director or STEM Camp Management Team. The only claim of confidentiality which overrides the legal duty to report may be that of solicitor-client privilege. Thus, physicians, clergy and others who consider their professional relationships confidential for certain purposes are not exempt from the duty to report child abuse or neglect.

Responsibility of the Camp Director, and/or the Management Team

As soon as possible after an incident is disclosed, one of these individuals shall:

- In conversation with the person who has made the disclosure, complete the Suspected Abuse Report form.
- Advise the person who has made the disclosure to maintain his/her own detailed notes including names, dates, times, places, etc.

- Assist the person who has come to you to contact appropriate authorities. An in-depth investigation will be left to professionals who are familiar with such cases.
- Take the allegations seriously without prejudging the situation and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support to prevent further hurt and extending whatever resources are appropriate. The care and safety of the victim is the first priority.
- Treat the accused with dignity, respect, and support. If the accused is a staff member or approved volunteer, that person must be suspended from his or her duties until the investigation is finished.

PROTECTION FROM LIABILITY

Both the Camp Director and a STEM Camp Management Team member are required to immediately report to the appropriate local authorities any suspected case of child abuse. It is not a breach of confidence between STEM Camp staff and the person involved.

Note: No staff member is personally liable for anything done or omitted in good faith in the exercise of his/her responsibility. The protection of children from abuse is most important.

As part of a child protection investigation, social workers are required under the Child and Family Services Act to assess:

- the child's current state of health;
- their sense of safety and their views of abuse;
- previous abuse, neglect or harm;
- the ability of the parent(s) to care for and protect the child.

The social worker will talk to people who have contact with the victim and family. They may request records or other types of information. They are entitled to whatever information is needed to complete an investigation. If denied access to a record, they can seek a court order.

Who Must Report

All persons who have "reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection" have an obligation to report.

Report Follow-Up

Detailed follow up notes must always be recorded on the Suspected Abuse Report form after a report of suspected abuse. Complete the Suspected Abuse Report form and keep it in a confidential file.

7. RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

Realistically, no practical prevention strategy is completely effective. An accusation of sexual abuse may occur in any location. This policy contains an approved strategy to respond to allegations of abuse. The STEM Camp response strategy recognizes the following underlying principles:

- All allegations are to be taken seriously.
- Situations must be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
- Full co-operation must be given to civil authorities
- Adequate care must be shown for the well-being of victims.
- The victim should not be held responsible in any way.

Records

Records of volunteer applications and related material will be maintained. Records shall be kept at least seven years in a safe and accessible location, honouring their confidentiality.

Spokesperson

The CEO, Executive Director, or Director of Operations, will speak to the media regarding an abuse matter in a discreet, informed, truthful and diplomatic way.

Position of STEM Camp

In the case of an allegation of abuse, the following points would be made until all the facts are uncovered and the case reviewed:

- It is always tragic when individuals are abused or exploited.
- STEM Camp is aware of the toll which any form of abuse takes.
- Careful precautions have been taken to protect the children entrusted to our care.
- Accusations of abuse are distressing.
- STEM Camp will do all in its power to address any needs in this situation.
- For the welfare of those involved, all information will be directed to the appropriate authorities.

Conduct and Counsel

STEM Camp will not engage in denial, minimization, or blame.

It will not be denied that the incident occurred; all allegations are taken seriously. Once a formal complaint has been made, even if there is clear evidence to the contrary, STEM Camp is under a responsibility to follow this

policy's process. The nature of the incident will not be minimized by saying such things as "It only happened once," or "It wasn't that serious." The victim or the victim's family will not be blamed.

8. ACCOUNTABILITY

The following key points about Protection of Children are emphasized:

Sexual abuse can happen anywhere, or anytime.

- One incident can devastate a child, and her/his family.
- A prevention program can reduce risk through relatively simple procedures.

Monitoring of the Policy

STEM Camp, and its staff, will review the guidelines set out in the policy as part of program planning. This monitoring will examine the following:

- Have volunteers/staff been trained regarding this policy?
- Are volunteers/staff following the required policies and procedures?
- What obstacles exist to compliance with these policies?
- What is the level of cooperation?
- Do sufficient materials exist for training and information?
- Is this policy available for immediate reference?

If problems exist in the policy, STEM Camp encourages the submission of helpful revisions that do not sacrifice the integrity of the policy.

Education of Staff and Volunteers

Routines will be established for the training of all new staff and volunteers who participate in our STEM Camps.

Staff, and volunteers, who will be working with children or youth will receive copies of this policy upon being hired. Police "Vulnerable Sector Checks" are mandatory for all staff and volunteers.

Accountability

STEM Camp will avoid any undue interference when a report of abuse has been filed with the appropriate authorities. A Management Team member will inform all appropriate agencies of instances of alleged abuse immediately. STEM Camp is committed to proper enforcement and review, once a year, of this policy.

9. SUMMARY

This policy has been drafted, and approved, by the STEM Camp Management team with the intent, and determination, to protect the children entrusted to our care at all STEM Camps. To that end, we welcome all suggestions that will help us to improve this policy and to ensure the safety of our campers.