



Children and Youth Protection Guidelines

Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Southeast (GSWISE) is committed to the safety of the girls we serve. All activities are planned and carried out in accordance with program standards and guidelines established by Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA), which are designed to safeguard the well-being of both girl and adult members. These program standards and guidelines also ensure that program activities are appropriate

for the age level of the participating girls. They are updated annually by GSUSA in Safety Activity Checkpoints, shared with volunteers through trainings and *Volunteer Essentials*, and posted on the GSWISE website.

These guidelines ensure the well-being of all youth served through GSWISE.

Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect

Child Abuse Defined

Abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional, or it can be any form of neglect. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) defines abuse as “any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.” This applies to any person 17 years or younger.

Physical Abuse Defined

Physical abuse is any physical injury caused by hitting, beating, punching, shaking, kicking, or biting – or any other physical harm to a child. The injury may or may not be intentional. It may result from excessive discipline or punishment.

Child Sexual Abuse Defined

Child sexual abuse involves any sexual activity with a child or youth. This includes sexual contact that is accompanied by enticement, force, or threat of force, regardless of the age of the participants. It includes any sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of deception or if the child understands the sexual nature of the activity. Sexual contact between an older and a younger child can be abusive if there is a significant disparity in age, development, or physical size. The sexually abusive acts may include sexual penetration, sexual touching, or non-contact sexual acts such as exposure or pornography.

Emotional Abuse Defined

Emotional abuse may involve verbal or psychological abuse or mental injury. It includes acts or omissions by parents or other caregivers that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders. Emotional abuse may also include extreme or severe acts of punishment. Physically or sexually abused children are usually emotionally abused as well.

Neglect Defined

While there are several forms of neglect, including educational, emotional, environmental, medical, and developmental, child protection agencies usually use the term to mean physical neglect. Physical neglect is the failure to meet a child’s basic physical needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and hygiene. Neglect is a form of abuse.

NOTE: The definitions provided usually pertain to adults and caregivers. Within GSWISE, youth-on-youth abuse can take the form of bullying or other types of abuse. We are committed to preventing abuse from occurring at all levels.

Recognizing Cultural Differences

GSWISE serves a multitude of members from varying cultural backgrounds. We are committed to understanding and providing an inclusive environment for everyone. There may be cultures, values, or customs within a community or family that vary greatly. Some practices may just be different; they may seem unusual, but not abusive. For example, there may be family rules about independence, obedience, or eye contact. However, no matter how different a family’s beliefs, the definition of abuse is not flexible. If a cultural practice seems to fall within the legal definition of abuse it should be reported.



GSWISE Child Abuse Prevention Guidelines

The Child Abuse Prevention Guidelines have been established to protect youth participating in GSWISE programming from incidents of abuse. The purpose of this policy is to empower staff members and volunteers to recognize, prevent, and react responsibly to all forms of child abuse. All programming through GSWISE takes place in safe, nurturing environments that foster healthy relationship building among girls and between adults and girls. All girls and their parents or caregivers, including GSWISE staff members and volunteers, must be confident that such a positive environment exists.

The Child Abuse Prevention Guidelines include procedures that ensure effective screening and selection of all employees and volunteers. In order to prevent child abuse from taking place, these guidelines were created for interactions between individuals participating in any GSWISE-sponsored activity. The guidelines identify concrete methods to ensure safe environments and offer training in prevention strategies. A curriculum-based training is required for staff, volunteers, and all others involved in direct service of girls served by GSWISE. These guidelines provide instruction on monitoring the behavior of girls, staff, and volunteers. Additionally, written directives are provided for responding to inappropriate behavior, breaches in policy, and allegations and suspicions of child abuse if they should occur. These guidelines include reporting child abuse that may be occurring outside and/or inside the GSWISE program environment if it is witnessed or reported by a child.

1. Staff and Volunteer Screening and Selection

All GSWISE staff and volunteers will be screened through background checks. In addition, staff references are checked prior to their work for the organization. Those who work regularly with children and youth will be trained on child protection issues before beginning their regular involvement with children and youth.

2. Child Abuse Prevention Training

Volunteer leaders and staff training:

- All Volunteer leaders and GSWISE staff will be required to complete the *Wisconsin Mandated Reporter Online Training*, a 45 minute training on responsibilities and procedures for abuse reporting.
- Any GSWISE staff who works directly with youth will be required to take the *Darkness to Light* Stewards of Children, a two-hour child abuse prevention training that teaches adults how to recognize, prevent, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse. Volunteers are also offered this training.
- Any paid staff member and/or volunteer leader will be provided the GSWISE Child & Youth Protection Guidelines and required to abide by them.
- Annual child abuse educational courses will be conducted and/or equivalent trainings.
- GSWISE supervisors and/or Membership Experience Specialists will enforce all training requirements.

Wisconsin Mandated Reporter Online Training

Our number one priority is the safety and well-being of all Girl Scouts. GSWISE staff, troop leaders and co-leaders are **required** to complete the *Wisconsin Mandated Reporter Online Training*. This one-hour session covers the responsibilities and procedures for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. GSWISE also recommends that volunteers complete the *Darkness to Light* supplemental training as an additional measure, but is not required. *Darkness to Light* teaches adults how to recognize, prevent, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

Visit gswise.org

- Click “MY GS” on the green navigation bar.
- Log In.
- Click the yellow “My Account” button in the top right corner.
- Navigate down the page to the menu on the left and click “gsLearn”.
- Once you are in gsLearn, click into 497 Start Here: Required Trainings for New Daisy Leaders.
- Scroll down to “497 Wisconsin Mandated Reporter Training” and click into the training.
- Complete the online training.
- Download and save your certificate of completion.
- Upload your certificate into the Wisconsin Mandated Reporter Training course.
- Questions? Contact Customer Care at **800-565-4475**.

3. GSWISE Employee Personnel Manual, Section 2: Employment at GSWISE, 2.I Child Abuse Policy, Approved by Board of Directors October 19, 2016

GSWISE is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment free from any threats or acts of child abuse or neglect. GSWISE will not tolerate threats or acts of child abuse or neglect directed by an employee or other individual toward any child involved in any GSWISE program. Child abuse or neglect is defined to include, but is not limited to, any act or failure to act resulting in imminent risk of serious harm, death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation of a child by a parent or caretaker who is responsible for the child's welfare. In accordance with this policy, GSWISE will neither condone nor tolerate any acts of child abuse or neglect including without limitation:

- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury upon any child involved in any GSWISE program.
- Physical neglect of any child involved in any GSWISE program.
- Emotional maltreatment of any child involved in any GSWISE program, including verbal abuse and/or verbal attacks.
- Any conduct involving a child that violates the Relationship Policy/Professional Boundaries Policy.

(See 2.E Relationship/Professional Boundaries Policy in the GSWISE Employee Personnel manual)



Wisconsin Statute 48.981 requires that certain people, within the course of professional duties, who have reasonable cause to suspect that a child or youth has been abused or neglected, or has been threatened with abuse or neglect, and believes that abuse or neglect will occur, are obligated to make a report. According to the law, specific professionals are mandated to report child abuse and neglect. The reporter must do so if they have reason to believe that a child seen in the course of their professional duties has been abused, neglected, or threatened with abuse or neglect and the person has reason to believe the threats will be carried out. All employees are considered mandatory reporters and will be oriented to their role as mandatory reporters at the time of their employment. They will be provided with a document titled, "Protecting Children and Youth from Abuse and Neglect Guidelines" outlining definitions and procedures that must be taken. If you witness or suspect that a child in a GSWISE program is or could be the subject of child abuse or neglect, whether by a GSWISE employee or a parent, guardian, or other individual, you must immediately report this to your immediate supervisor, Human Resources Director, and/or a senior staff member. Failure to immediately notify one of these individuals is grounds for discipline, up to and including discharge.

Any such report of abuse or neglect by a GSWISE employee or volunteer will be investigated following GSWISE procedures as a serious violation of GSWISE policy. Any child abuse or neglect is grounds for disciplinary action of GSWISE employees up to, and including, immediate termination. If such child abuse or neglect involves non-employees, GSWISE will take appropriate action to address the situation, including contacting law enforcement (if appropriate).

As allowed by law, GSWISE reserves the right to refuse membership, to dismiss or to exclude from affiliation with the organization any employee or volunteer who is found guilty of child abuse or neglect, or has been convicted of child abuse or neglect.

4. Guidelines on Interactions between Girls, Staff, and Volunteers

GSWISE provides a nurturing environment by supporting positive youth development, helping girls feel valued, and providing the caring connections that serve as protective factors for girls. Guidelines are provided to ensure positive and appropriate interactions among girls, staff, and volunteers. In order to promote and ensure positive interactions, GSWISE identifies behaviors that fall into the categories of appropriate, inappropriate, and harmful.

Verbal Communication

- Appropriate: praise; positive reinforcement for good work or behavior.
- Inappropriate/harmful: sexually provocative or degrading comments or put downs; risqué jokes; or use of obscene language.

Physical Behavior

- Appropriate: pats on the back or shoulder, or high fives. Note that the use of any physical contact should be used with discretion.
- Inappropriate/harmful: patting the buttocks/intimate/romantic/sexual contact; corporal punishment (involving physical contact or inflicting pain or discomfort); or involving youth in any pornographic activities.

Additional Interaction Guidelines

- The Council promotes activities that help youth develop socially, emotionally, and cognitively. These guidelines will assist all staff members and volunteers to respond to actions or allegations of abuse. Staff and volunteers are trained in these directives.
- The youth must also be clearly instructed on how to promote positive interactions and what constitutes inappropriate or harmful interactions.
- GSWISE requires that, whenever possible, more than one adult is present with one or more youth. The guideline discourages one-on-one interactions.
- In the event that one of the two adults temporarily leaves a room in which there are girls, the door must be fully open and, when possible, an extra floater adult will be made available. Appropriate choices will vary and will depend on location of activity.
- GSWISE incorporates a buddy system to help prevent isolation of youth with staff or volunteers. Additionally, this system is monitored by staff or volunteers to prevent youth-on-youth abuse.
- As with all GSWISE programming, adults (including staff, volunteers, and parents) are encouraged to drop in unannounced. The unscheduled visits are known to help safeguard youth from all types of inappropriate situations.



GSWISE Child Abuse Prevention Guidelines

5. Ensuring Safe Environments

- GSWISE evaluates the level of risk by considering the location and time of day of each activity. Whenever possible, activities and programs will take place in open, visible, and well-lit buildings and outside areas in which multiple people can view activities.
- Privacy is essential when youth, employees, and volunteers are toileting, showering, and changing clothes, unless youth require special supervision for such activities.
- The Girl Scouts adult-to-girl ratios show the minimum number of adults needed to supervise a specific number of girls. This information is provided in GSWISE's Volunteer Essentials handbook, Quick Start section.
- If the class or program is in an isolated location designated solely for the staff, volunteers, and youth of GSWISE, ascertain that individuals from outside the program are excluded or monitored.
- Transportation: Limit one-on-one interactions between one adult and one youth whenever possible. Specific directives for transporting girls to and from activities and events are provided in GSWISE's Volunteer Essentials handbook.

Critical Strategies for Ensuring Safe Environments

GSWISE ensures safety through enhanced visibility of spaces that are open and visible to multiple people, along with the assurance of privacy, when appropriate. Strategies employed to provide girls with a safe environment include:

- Areas not used for programming are secured to prevent youth from being isolated.
- GSWISE recommends a "no closed doors" policy.
- Bright lighting is available in all areas.
- Privacy is provided for toileting, showering, and changing clothes to reduce risk.
- Staff will establish access control for admitting and releasing youth when reasonable.
- Limit one-on-one interaction whenever possible by having at least two unrelated adults present at all times with youth.

- If girls are engaged in an activity which requires use of the internet, staff, and volunteers will closely monitor girls' use of the internet.

GSUSA has established policies, standards, and guidelines for girls:

1. Do not give out personal information such as your address, telephone number, email address, or Girl Scout meeting locations and times without the permission of a parent or guardian.
2. Notify an adult immediately if you notice any information that makes you feel uncomfortable.
3. Never agree to meet with someone you have met online without first checking with a parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian agrees to the meeting, make sure that it is in a public place and never go alone.

GSWISE follows the guidelines of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), which protects the personal information of children under the age of 13. This applies to individually identifiable information about a child that is collected online, such as full name, home address, email address, telephone number or any other information that would allow someone to identify or contact the child. The Act and Rule also cover other types of information, hobbies, interests, and information collected through cookies or other types of tracking mechanisms—when they are tied to individually identifiable information. Staff, volunteers, and parents are all encouraged to read and understand COPPA.

6. Monitoring Behavior

GSWISE uses formal and informal supervision to observe, monitor, and document staff and volunteer interactions with youth. For such supervision and documentation to take place, staff and volunteers are made aware of their defined roles and responsibilities. Staff and volunteers will follow the Council's protocol in promptly responding to, and reporting of, inappropriate or harmful behavior, potential risk situations, and boundary violations.

7. Responding to Inappropriate Behavior, Breaches in Policy, and Allegations and Suspicions of Child Abuse

A. Who Must Report

Wis. Stat. 48.981 requires that certain people, within the course of professional duties, who have reasonable cause to suspect that a child or youth has been abused or neglected or has been threatened with abuse or neglect and believes that abuse or neglect will occur, are obligated to make a report.

Persons Required to Report Abuse and Neglect:
Mandated Reporters ~ s. 48.981(2): *

- Physicians
- Coroners
- Medical examiners
- Nurses
- Dentists
- Chiropractors
- Optometrists
- Acupuncturists
- Medical or mental health professionals
- Social workers
- Marriage & family therapists
- Professional counselors
- Public assistance workers, including financial & employment planners, as defined in s.49.141 (1) (d), Stats.
- School teachers
- School administrators
- School counselors
- Mediators under s.767.11, Stats.
- Child-care workers in a day care center, group home, as described in s.48.625 (1m), Stats. (a “second chance home”), or residential care center for children and youth
- Day care providers

- Alcohol or other drug abuse counselors
- Member of the treatment staff employed by or working under contract with a county department under s. 46.23, 51.42, or 51.437, Stats., or a residential care center for children and youth
- Physical therapists
- Physical therapist assistants
- Occupational therapists
- Dieticians
- Speech-language pathologists
- Audiologists
- Emergency medical technicians
- First responders
- Police and law enforcement officers
- Court-appointed special advocates (CASA)

*Last Revised: March 10, 2015 **

- **All employees of GSWISE are considered by GSWISE to be mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect and GSWISE expects them to make and document such reports.**
- GSWISE staff and volunteers are required to know the GSWISE Child Abuse Guidelines and Wisconsin State Law for reporting suspected abuse, including to whom, and in what format, reports are made. This is covered in the required staff and volunteers’ child abuse trainings (see page 3).



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B. How to Report Child Abuse and Neglect

- If you are concerned about the safety and well-being of a child living in Milwaukee County, call **(414) 220-SAFE** immediately or **911** for emergencies.
- To report alleged child abuse and/or neglect of children outside of Milwaukee County, contact the Department of Human and Social Services for that county. (<http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/Children/CPS/cpswimap.HTM>)
- To report families outside Wisconsin, call the **National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD** and provide the name of the municipality in which the family resides. You will be given the number for the responsible child protective service agency in that area.
- The information gathered during the call determines if the incident constitutes the legal definition of child abuse/neglect and how soon an Initial Assessment Worker will be sent to check on the child. Some reports assessed as possible child abuse or neglect are investigated within two hours; all reports must be investigated within five days.
- When a staff person needs to make a Child Abuse report they should immediately call the appropriate county department (typically, the Child Protective Service unit) or law enforcement agency. Law enforcement should be called immediately if a child is in imminent danger. It is suggested that when possible and practical the staff person contact their immediate supervisor, Human Resources Director, or senior staff member prior to making the report. However, if supervisory review is not possible prior to completing the report, staff should report it to GSWISE supervisory staff as soon as possible.
- A GSWISE **Incident Report** form must be filed within 24 hours by the staff or volunteer who first learned of the abuse. The staff member or volunteer will not investigate allegations or conduct their own investigations. The Incident Report must include the nature and extent of the abuse, the alleged perpetrator, and other relevant information required on the Incident Report as well as when the report was made to the

proper authorities. The staff member or volunteer reporting the initial allegation will submit the Incident.

- The Incident Report and related documentation will be kept confidential and maintained in GSWISE's locked personnel cabinet with limited access.

CONFIDENTIALITY is crucial in cases of allegations of child abuse. GSWISE's confidentiality policy is consistent with state legal requirements which includes withholding the names of potential victims, the accused perpetrator, the individual who made the report to authorities, and reporting the case only on a need-to-know basis to the appropriate individuals. This shall hold true for both employees and volunteers regarding an allegation of abuse.

C. Responses to Cases of Child Abuse

An allegation does not equate guilt. However, GSWISE must take steps to protect the youth in its care. Immediately after the report of the case to external authorities, the alleged offender, either employee or volunteer, will be placed on suspension until the case is resolved legally. GSWISE holds an appeal process in which individuals found not guilty of abusive behaviors may apply to return to their former program.

National resources include:

- Prevent Child Abuse America, 312-663-3520, www.preventchildabuse.org
- Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline, 800-422-4453, www.childhelpusa.org
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 800-394-3366, <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

Summary

Child abuse is a complex issue that can have long-term consequences. GSWISE is privileged in the role of nurturing and caretaking of youth. In that role, we strive for healthy environments for every young person in our care and beyond.