

# VOLUNTEER POLICIES

This section is a reference guide for all GSEP volunteers. It contains information concerning regulations, policies, facilities, and other practical information about your assignment. The policies outlined here are applicable to all volunteers and supersede any prior statements, policies, procedures and other representations. Be aware that the policies and procedures contained here are to be considered as guidelines only. This is not intended to be a contract, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with any volunteer. Thus, the contents may change from time to time as legislation, economic conditions, and other circumstances dictate. The Council may, at its sole discretion, change, delete, suspend, or discontinue any policy at any time with or without prior notice to volunteers. No statement or promise by a manager, supervisor, or employee may be interpreted as a change in policy, nor will it constitute an agreement with any volunteer. The Council will endeavor to communicate and distribute any new or modified policies in a timely manner. Should you have any questions regarding any of the policies or procedures, please contact Member Services at [memberservices@gsep.org](mailto:memberservices@gsep.org) or 215-564-2030.

## Section I: Policy Statements

### Council Philosophy

Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania (the “Council” or “GSEP”) is committed to a work environment in which relationships are characterized by dignity, honesty, courtesy, respect, and equitable treatment, and in which there are opportunities for participation, challenge, broadening experiences, and advancement. The Girl Scout mission is to build girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place. As part of the GSEP team, you will discover the pursuit of excellence is truly a rewarding aspect of your volunteerism. The ultimate responsibility for the Girl Scouts Movement rests with its members. Volunteers are essential to the strength and capacity of our movement. A volunteer is anyone who, without compensation or the expectation of compensation, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of the organization. All Girl Scout volunteers shall abide by the policies and principles of GSEP and Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). Volunteers are critical to the success of GSEP and are essential for the organization’s day-to-day operations. Volunteers, along with employed staff, are considered partners in implementing the mission and programs of the organization, each with complementary roles to play. All volunteers of GSEP are expected to maintain high standards of cooperation, attendance, efficiency, honesty, integrity, fairness, and responsibility in fulfilling their volunteer work for GSEP. Volunteers must be willing to serve all members of the organization regardless of race, age, color, ethnicity, sex, creed, national origin or ancestry, sexual orientation, family status, qualified disability, citizenship, or socioeconomic status. No volunteer may undertake any activity while on GSEP premises, or while engaging in GSEP business, that is, or gives the appearance

of being improper, illegal, or immoral or that could in any way harm or embarrass the Council.

## **Equal Opportunity**

The Council, in recognition of its responsibility to its volunteers, staff, and the girls it serves, is committed to the following principles: Equal opportunity for all persons regardless of age, citizenship, color, qualified disability, family status, national origin or ancestry, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, veteran status, or socioeconomic status in the recruitment, selection, assignment, development, and recognition of volunteers; Fair and equal treatment for all persons; Making Girl Scouting accessible to all girls and adults in all communities within the Council's jurisdiction; and Conducting all Council business and other relationships in a manner which affirms these policies. This policy statement governs the action of all volunteers, members, and staff of the Council.

## **Harassment**

The Council is committed to an environment and climate in which relationships are characterized by dignity, respect, courtesy, and equitable treatment. It is the policy of the Council to provide all volunteers with an environment free from all forms of unlawful or unwelcome harassment, including implied or expressed forms of sexual harassment. The Council expressly prohibits any form of harassment on the basis of age, citizenship, color, qualified disability, family status, national origin or ancestry, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, veteran status, or socioeconomic status or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law. Any volunteer who feels that s/he has been subjected to harassment of any type, whether by another volunteer, Council staff member, member, or any agent of the Council, should promptly report the incident to a volunteer supervisor or Council staff member. Upon receiving such a complaint, an investigation will be conducted and, based on the findings, appropriate action will be taken.

## **Sexual Harassment**

It is against the Council's policies for any individual, male or female, to sexually harass another volunteer, employee, or Girl Scout member of the same or opposite sex. The Council reserves the right to refuse membership endorsement or reappointment and to release or suspend from affiliation with the Council any volunteer who, in conducting a Girl Scout program, sexually harasses another volunteer, employee, or Girl Scout member of the same or opposite sex. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual acts or favors, abusing the dignity of another through insulting or degrading sexual remarks or conduct and threats, or suggestions that a volunteer's status is conditioned upon toleration of or acquiescence to sexual advances. Some examples of sexual harassment that could create a hostile work environment include the telling of sexual jokes or stories; the presence of sexually explicit photographs or other materials; touching of another person's clothing, hair, or body; making sexual comments about another person's body; making sexual comments or innuendoes; asking personal questions about another person's social or sexual life;

staring; leering; and making sexual gestures. Any volunteer who feels that s/he has been sexually harassed should promptly report such behavior to a volunteer supervisor or a Council staff member. Upon receiving a complaint, an investigation will be conducted and, based on the findings, appropriate action will be taken.

## **Child Abuse**

The Council supports and maintains environments that are free of child abuse and neglect as defined by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. Child abuse and neglect are unlawful acts, and it is against GSEP's policy for any volunteer, male or female, to physically, sexually, mentally, emotionally, or verbally abuse or neglect any girl member. The Council reserves the right to refuse membership endorsement or reappointment, and to dismiss or exclude from affiliation with GSEP, any volunteer facilitating Girl Scout program who is charged with an act of child abuse and/or neglect or has been convicted of child abuse and/or neglect. Per GSEP's policy, mandated reporters must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis) or by calling 1-800-932-0313. After making the report to ChildLine, reporters MUST ALSO IMMEDIATELY notify GSEP by calling the Emergency Hotline 215.564.2030, and pressing 7 when prompted.

If an oral report was made to ChildLine, a *Report of Suspected Child Abuse* form must also be completed and forwarded to the county children and youth agency within 48 hours after making the report. The form can be found here at [http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/form/c\\_137044.pdf](http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/form/c_137044.pdf). If a report is made electronically, no form is required to be completed. The website Keep Kids Safe should be used as a point of reference and provides contact information for assistance.

As it pertains to GSEP, the following adults are considered mandated reporters and are required to report suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse:

- An individual paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity, or service, accepts responsibility for a child.

## **Confidentiality of Information**

Information relating to Girl Scout members, including addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers, and other personal information, shall not be shared with other Girl Scout volunteers or staff without permission or with organizations or individuals outside of Girl Scouts. This information is to be stored in a secure location and used only for the purposes for which it is provided. Volunteers are not permitted to use, for personal advantage or for the advantage of any private business or other business organizations, confidential information or material acquired during the course of her or his assignment. This prohibition includes rosters, mailing lists, e-mail lists, telephone directories, and any other personal information related to members.

## Code of Conduct

The Council expects and requires honesty and integrity in all volunteer interactions. Girl Scouts is an organization founded on trust and confidence and holds all volunteers to high standards in personal and professional conduct.

The Council's Code of Conduct includes:

- Complying with the letter and spirit of all applicable laws.
- Faithful adherence to policies, rules, and regulations.
- Dealing honestly, fairly, courteously, and respectfully with girls, staff, other volunteers, and the general public.
- Respecting the Council's ownership of all property, equipment, supplies, records, and proprietary information.
- Preserving the confidentiality of all proprietary information, plans, decisions, member information, and any other information that is not designated for knowledge outside of the intended parties.
- Complying with all Council policies and procedures, including those set forth herein.

## Section II: Volunteer Assignments

### Recruitment

Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania recruits volunteers for the purposes of promoting, directing, and coordinating Girl Scouting throughout the Council. Volunteers are encouraged to recruit others to assist in this process.

### Selection

Every volunteer is selected on the basis of qualifications for membership, ability to perform in a volunteer assignment, and willingness and availability to participate in training for that assignment. Every volunteer is required to complete an application, sign a volunteer agreement, and complete GSEP's criminal background clearance process established by GSEP, and compliant with Pennsylvania state law, prior to receiving an assignment. GSEP is committed to a safe environment for all our girl members. Adult volunteers have an impact on the development of girls. The completion of criminal background clearances is one additional step to ensure their safety. Criminal background clearances are required for all adult volunteers. This includes, but is not limited to, leaders, co-leaders, assistant leaders, cookie and product sales managers, and any other adult helpers who interact with girls. Prior to assuming a volunteer assignment, each candidate must complete a volunteer application and consent form, and if appropriate, submit the required processing fee. Volunteer candidates whose verified record indicates a history of child abuse, violent crime, or sexual crime will be denied an assignment. At the discretion of GSEP, volunteer candidates may be denied an assignment for drug and/or alcohol related offenses or offenses related to fraud,

theft, or misappropriation. The response to any other reports will be at the discretion and judgment of GSEP management. Volunteer candidates who have completed background clearances compliant with the Pennsylvania state law within the preceding 60 months (five years) may submit a copy of these certifications with their application. Volunteers will be required to update their volunteer clearance every five years.

## **Membership**

All volunteers participating in the Girl Scout movement shall meet GSUSA membership standards, which include committing to the Girl Scout Promise, accepting the Girl Scout Law, registering annually through the Council as members of the Girl Scout movement (except for those adults who are lifetime members), and agreeing to abide by the policies and principles of GSUSA and the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania.

## **Assignment Description/Performance Appraisal**

Each volunteer assignment will have a written assignment description that defines specific responsibilities, minimum age requirement, and expectations. The assignment description, in conjunction with performance goals, forms the basis for periodic assessment of performance and determines reappointment, rotation to another assignment, or release.

## **Placement**

Every attempt will be made to place volunteers in assignments that meet both their needs and the needs of the Council. Individuals not placed in an assignment for which they applied may be recommended for other assignments and may request reassignment.

## **Appointment**

Operational volunteers are appointed for a specific time period as specified in the volunteer assignment description. Volunteers shall be appointed and released at the sole discretion of the Council. No volunteer assignment shall constitute employment with, or by, the Council.

## **Reappointment**

Prior to the completion of her or his term, each volunteer who is to be reappointed to the same assignment or rotated to a different assignment should receive confirmation of such reappointment or rotation. Reappointment is based on past performance, adherence to Council and GSUSA policies and standards, support of the Girl Scout purpose, values, and Council goals, as well as positive relationships with the community, parents, girls, other volunteers, and employed staff and subject to the needs of the Council. There must be mutual acceptance of assignment accountabilities, expectations, and time commitments.

## **Training**

All operational volunteers will complete training designated by the Council as mandatory for their assignments within the Council's specified timeline for an assignment, unless exempted by the appropriate supervisor.

## **Support for Volunteers**

GSEP is committed to maintaining a professional and enriching environment for its volunteers and providing the following support: training and other learning opportunities; support with assignments; Council publications; and liability insurance and supplementary accident insurance as a part of national and/or Council membership. Volunteers are encouraged to enhance and develop their skills while serving with the Council.

## **Release**

Either the Council or the volunteer may initiate a release from a volunteer assignment. A volunteer is requested to give as much notice as possible when resigning from an assignment. Such release shall be documented in writing by the Council. Situations may arise that making it necessary to release an individual from a volunteer assignment. The Council may release a volunteer for any reason including, but not limited to: restructuring of assignments, elimination of volunteer assignments, a volunteer's inability or failure to complete the requirements of the assignment, or the refusal to comply with Council or GSUSA policies and procedures.

## **Section III: Volunteering Day to Day**

### **Awards and Recognitions**

GSEP acknowledges the importance of recognizing volunteers for outstanding service and dedication to Girl Scouting and has established an adult volunteer recognition plan.

### **Financial Assistance**

Financial aid (based upon demonstrated need) for membership is available to individual adults who wish to participate in Girl Scouting. Financial aid for adults may be applied to membership registration. To apply for Financial Aid, please check the "request aid" box on the payment page when completing your GSEP membership registration. Full details about GSEP's Financial Aid offerings are available at [www.gsep.org](http://www.gsep.org). Click on "About Us" and then "Join" to reach the Financial Assistance page.

## **Uniforms**

A uniform is not required for participation in Girl Scouting. Purchase of a uniform, or other Girl Scout attire, is at the volunteer's expense and is encouraged. Volunteers are encouraged to wear the Girl Scout membership pin whether or not they are in uniform.

## **Health and Safety**

Girl Scout volunteers shall serve as role models for girls and are responsible for the health and safety of girls in their charge. Volunteers are responsible for reporting any threat to the health and safety of the girls and must immediately report any accident or incident affecting the health and safety of any girl, regardless of the severity.

## **Alcohol and Substance Abuse**

GSEP's policy on drugs and alcohol is intended to ensure a safe and productive environment for our volunteers, employees, girls, and others while ensuring the protection of Council property and the highest quality of service to all individuals associated with the Council. Volunteers under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or illegally using prescription drugs while on assignment, pose serious health and safety risks to themselves and to all those who come in contact with her/him, as well as to the Council. Therefore, using, being under the influence of, possessing, consuming, purchasing, distributing, manufacturing, dispensing, or selling alcohol or controlled substances, or illegally using controlled prescription drugs, or allowing girls to do so, on Council premises, while conducting Council business, or off premises or during non-volunteer assignment hours, if it affects the volunteer's performance, is strictly prohibited. Under no circumstances shall any volunteer who has consumed any alcohol or controlled substances, or illegally used controlled prescription drugs, of any type or amount, drive any vehicle in which girls are present. Any volunteer who is determined to have engaged in these activities is in violation of this policy and will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action up to and including immediate release from assignment. GSEP reserves the right to take any and all lawful actions necessary to enforce this policy including, but not limited to, drug testing, and the inspection of volunteers' personal property, Council-issued equipment, or other suspected areas of concealment. When alcohol is part of an adult event where girls will be present, prior approval of the Chief Executive Officer is required and must be available for review during the event. When girls under the age of 21 participate in an adult event where alcohol is being served, written permission of the girls' parent/guardian for their daughter/ward to attend such an event is required.

## **Smoking**

All buildings and facilities of GSEP are smoke-free and tobacco-free. Smoking on Council-owned properties may take place only in designated smoking areas and away from girls. Smoking in the presence of girls is prohibited.

## **Official Communications**

Only designated individuals are authorized to speak on behalf of GSEP. All media inquiries shall be directed to the office of the Chief Executive Officer.

## **Conflict/Grievance Resolutions**

The most effective way to solve problems and resolve disputes between volunteers, or between volunteers and others, is by open discussion between and among the parties involved. If a dispute cannot be resolved informally to the satisfaction of all parties, the procedure outlined in the Conflict/Grievance Resolution Policy will be followed. Initiation of the resolution procedure is not grounds for discipline or release from assignment; however, the Council reserves the right to take appropriate action with respect to volunteers. (See 'Appendix A: Conflict/Grievance Resolution Policy').

## **APPENDIX A:**

### **Conflict/Grievance Resolution Policy**

#### **Definitions:**

1. A “conflict” is any kind of disagreement between two or more people.
2. A “grievance” is a dispute over the interpretation or application of a Council policy, practice, or procedure.

### **Conflict Resolution**

The most effective way of resolving conflicts, complaints, and concerns is usually by calm, open discussion between the persons involved. GSEP encourages volunteers and staff to take positive actions to resolve conflicts quickly by having a personal phone call or meeting. E-mail is not recommended by Council.

**Procedure:** (At any time during this process, the volunteer(s) may seek the advice of their Service Unit Manager or Volunteer Support Specialist (VSS).)

**Step 1:** Volunteers should discuss concerns directly with the individual(s) involved, in the spirit of the Girl Scout Promise and Law. All discussions should be held outside of the girl environment. If this does not resolve the issue, volunteers should proceed to step two.

**Step 2:** The parties should *jointly* discuss the situation with their Service Unit Manager or their Volunteer Support Specialist. In an effort to respect all parties involved, this step should be transparent and involve all parties in the discussion. If this is not possible, the SUM or VSS may individually interview all parties concerned and determine next steps and outcomes from those conversations. Once a resolution is reached, all parties will be informed of the decision(s) immediately (for urgent matters) or otherwise within 10 days of the initial discussion/meeting. It is expected that most, if not all, situations will be resolved at this step. If no resolution is reached, the conflict will be escalated within the Volunteer Training and Support Team as detailed in Step 3 below.



**Step 3:** Volunteers should complete the Conflict/Grievance Support Form (found on the [Forms page of www.gsep.org](http://www.gsep.org)). The Volunteer Training and Support Team will review the form, investigate all concerns, and facilitate a conversation or mediation between the concerned parties. If another GSEP staff member has been involved up to this point, the Volunteer Training and Support Team will request written documentation from the staff member with a timeframe of the events. The Volunteer Training and Support Team will contact all parties immediately (for urgent matters) or otherwise within 10 days of receiving the form with their recommendation/proposed resolution.

**Step 4:** If no resolution is reached, a volunteer may escalate the issue to the Senior Director of Volunteer Training and Support (SDVTS) in writing for review. The SDVTS or her designee will render a decision immediately (for urgent matters) or otherwise within 10 business days. All decisions are final and will be documented with the outcome in writing. It is the responsibility of the SDVTS or designee to implement the decision.

## **Grievance Resolution**

A grievance involves a sense or feeling of being treated unfairly or not by the rules. A grievance may also be caused by misinterpretation of policies and/or procedures. Volunteer Essentials is the primary guide for all of GSEP's volunteer policies, but situations may arise that require help in interpreting the information.

**Procedure:** (At any time during this process, the volunteer(s) may seek the advice of their Service Unit Manager or Volunteer Support Specialist (VSS).)

**Step 1:** If a volunteer has questions or needs help with understanding or interpreting a specific policy they may contact their Service Unit Manager or their Volunteer Support Specialist for assistance.

**Step 2:** If a resolution is not reached, a volunteer may complete the Conflict/Grievance Support Form (found on the [Forms page of www.gsep.org](http://www.gsep.org)). The Volunteer Training and Support Team will contact all parties within 10 business days of receiving a form, will investigate all concerns, and may facilitate a negotiation/dialogue between all concerned parties.

**Step 3:** If it is decided a violation of policy has been committed, the appropriate steps will be taken (depending on the severity of the violation) to correct the problem by:

1. Educating the volunteer on the appropriate policy (i.e.: a day trip was taken without notifying the SUM),
2. Correcting the issue via meetings and corrective action (i.e.: parents felt there was no financial accountability regarding the troop funds),
3. Removing the volunteer until corrective action is completed (i.e.: the volunteer owes money after cookie season), or
4. Removing the volunteer from their role at GSEP (i.e.: misappropriation of funds, behavior that puts the girls' well-being in jeopardy, etc.).

**Step 4:** The Volunteer Training and Support Team will notify all parties within 10 days of their proposed outcome/recommendations and next steps for the volunteer. If a volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome, they may escalate the issue to the Senior Director of Volunteer Training and Support (SDVTS) for review. The SDVTS or her designee will render a decision within 10 business days. All decisions are final and will be documented with the outcome in writing. It is the responsibility of the SDVTS or designee to implement the decision.

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **Child Abuse and Mandated Reporting Procedures**

The Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania is proud of its tradition of promoting the health and welfare of its girl members. It is the policy of the organization to provide an environment that is free of child abuse, exploitation, or neglect and that safeguards the health and well-being of all its girl members. We will not tolerate any behavior by employees or volunteers that physically, emotionally, or sexually abuses, exploits, or neglects our girl members. Sexual advances, improper touching, and sexual activity of any kind with girl members are forbidden. Physical, verbal, and emotional abuse of girls is also forbidden.

Child abuse, according to the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL), means intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly doing any of the following:

- Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Fabricating, feigning, or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.
- Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act.
- Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.
- Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Causing serious physical neglect of a child.
- Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.

Child abuse also includes certain acts in which the act itself constitutes abuse without any resulting injury or condition. These recent acts include any of the following:

- Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing, or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
- Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location, or the duration of the restraint or confinement.
- Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.
- Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age.
- Interfering with the breathing of a child.

- Causing a child to be present during the operation of a methamphetamine laboratory, provided that the violation is being investigated by law enforcement.
- Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the parent knows or reasonably should have known was required to register as a Tier II or III sexual offender or has been determined to be a sexually violent predator or sexually violent delinquent.

"Recent" is defined as an abusive act within two years from the date the report is made to ChildLine. Sexual abuse, serious mental injury, serious physical neglect and deaths have no time limit.

As outlined here, any volunteer who has reason to believe that a girl member is being in any way abused shall make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine, either electronically at [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis) or by calling 1-800-932-0313. **Then – you must also notify GSEP by calling the Emergency Hotline at 215.564.2030, and pressing 7 when prompted.**

Suspected child abuse is a confidential matter and those reporting must not discuss their suspicions with anyone except the appropriate agency and/or GSEP staff member. The law is designed to protect the child, the family, and the reporter. When a volunteer reports suspected abuse in good faith, he or she is protected by the law. When a volunteer inappropriately discusses such information with others, he or she is not protected by the law.

## **Signs and Symptoms of Possible Abuse and Neglect in Children**

### ***Possible indicators of physical abuse:***

- Fear of adults
- Fear of parents
- Fear of going home
- Human bite marks
- Overly aggressive or withdrawn behavior
- School problems
- Unexplained bruises or welts
- Unexplained burns
- Unexplained cuts and scrapes
- Unexplained fractures
- Unexplained stomach injuries

### ***Possible indicators of sexual abuse:***

- Bed-wetting or sleep problems
- Depression or withdrawn behavior
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Pain or itching around genitals
- Poor peer relationships

- Stomach aches
- Sudden onset of behavior problems
- Unusual knowledge of or interest in sex

### ***Possible indicators of neglect:***

- Begging or stealing food
- Constantly tired
- Constantly unclean
- Drug or alcohol problems
- Growth rate below normal
- Lack of supervision
- Poor school attendance
- Underfed or constantly hungry
- Unattended medical needs

### ***Possible indicators of emotional/psychological abuse:***

- Antisocial or destructive behavior
- Dramatic mood swings
- Habit of sucking, biting, or rocking
- Learning difficulties
- Long-term depression
- Loss of appetite
- Sexual acting out
- Slow mental or emotional growth
- Slow physical growth
- Speech problems
- Sleep problems
- Suicide attempts

## **When a child shares the pain...**

Children now receive information about child abuse and neglect from many sources: television programs, news stories, and school programs. As a result of this information “blitz,” a long overdue message is finally getting through: “If it happens to you, tell someone. Don’t keep it a secret.” A child may come to you and disclose that she has been or is presently being maltreated. Listening to a child’s disclosure is never easy, but if you understand how to cope with the information in a manner which will bring about a significant, positive change in this child’s life, it may be a little easier.

## **What can you do?**

Tell the child you understand what she is feeling. Talk to the child about how “some people” might feel in a given situation. This leaves her to agree or to express different feelings. Without question, listening to the child describe maltreatment can be a painful,

difficult experience. Seek the support and expertise of the Child Protection Hotlines and the Council to help you deal with the needs of the child and with your own anguish.

## **DO's**

**Be Calm.** Try to control your own feelings and listen carefully to what the child is saying. Showing your rage or discomfort may make the child feel she has done something wrong.

**Find a Quiet Place to Talk.** Keep in mind that the child may be hurt, in pain, fearful, or apprehensive. Remember, behind even a seemingly brash exterior may hide a frightened child. She should be made as comfortable as possible. If you are uncomfortable discussing this subject, help to arrange for the child to talk with someone else she knows and trusts. In cases like this, you are still required to follow reporting procedures. Follow-up to make sure that everyone is providing the necessary help.

**Believe the Child.** Victims rarely lie, especially about sexual abuse. The child may have tried to tell others who wouldn't listen and is now in special need of your trust. The perpetrator may have told the child "No one will believe you." Convey to the child that you believe her and will try to help. If you doubt her, she may stop talking about the problem.

**Stress that it is Not the Child's Fault.** Children often believe that they are to blame for the maltreatment. Frequently, the perpetrator tells them they are at fault and it wouldn't have happened if they had behaved differently. Reassure the child she is not at fault. Be careful, however, not to make negative statements about the perpetrator. Most children know their perpetrator and feel a strong loyalty to them. Maltreated children may have mixed feelings about the perpetrator and may even feel protective.

**Respect the Child's Privacy.** Let the child know you will respect her confidence (you won't tell other children about the abuse). Explain you are required to report the abuse to the proper authorities.

**Be Supportive.** Assure the child she is doing the right thing by disclosing this information. A child who divulges such painful facts is putting herself at great risk. Word your questions in a non-judgmental, open-ended way. Let the child tell you the story in whatever manner she is most comfortable. Always be accepting of what and how she tells you.

**Be Truthful.** Abused children need to learn to trust adults again. Never make promises you cannot keep. Tell the child you are required to tell the authorities, whose job it is to protect children and help their parents. You may not be able to answer all the child's questions about what will happen, but let her know that you will try to find the answers. Assure the child of your support and assistance throughout the process and follow through on the assurance. **Make a Report Immediately.** Don't wait until the end of the day or the week to report the case. It is imperative that you notify the proper authorities immediately for the sake of the child.

**Be an Advocate.** The child will continue to need your support even after a report has been made and the child protection authorities are handling the case. If the child remains in the group, do your best to quell rumors and gossip. Provide a shoulder for the child to lean on. Listen to what the child has to say. You may need to advocate for community sponsored programs such as counseling, remediation, or support groups so the child receives professional help.

## **DONT'S**

### **Do not...**

- Allow the child to feel “in trouble” or “at fault” for the abuse.
- Criticize the child’s choice of words or language.
- Try to be an investigator or press for answers that the child is not comfortable providing.
- Try to be a therapist. Be a sympathetic listener and a supporter to the child, but recognize your limitations in dealing with this complex, emotionally-charged situation.
- Display shock, anger, or disgust regarding the situation.

## **Child Abuse and Mandated Reporting Procedures**

Per GSEP’s policy, mandated reporters must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis) or by calling 1-800-932-0313. After making the report to ChildLine, reporters are required to immediately thereafter notify GSEP by calling the Emergency Hotline 215.564.2030, and pressing **7** when prompted.

Information that will be requested when reporting:

- child’s name
- birth date/age
- parents’ names
- address/phone—location is essential
- names of siblings (when available)
- what abuse/injury is being reported
- name of suspected abuser/relationship
- facts relating to the suspected abuse

If an oral report was made to ChildLine, a *Report of Suspected Child Abuse* form must also be completed and forwarded to the county children and youth agency within 48 hours after making the report. The form can be found here at [http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/form/c\\_137044.pdf](http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/form/c_137044.pdf). If a report is made electronically, no form is required to be completed. The website Keep Kids Safe should be used as a point of reference and provides contact information for assistance.

In the event the reported incident involves a volunteer, it will be considered violation of policy and grounds for disciplinary action, including separation or dismissal from the Council. Volunteers and staff may not contact children or parents involved in an alleged child abuse incident without the permission of the appropriate GSEP staff member. Upon request, GSEP will arrange to have a professional assist a leader or troop to cope with disclosure of abuse.

## ***Child Protection Offices by County***

Call the county in which suspected abuse occurred.

**Berks** 610.478.6700

**Bucks** 215.348.6950

**Carbon** 570.325.3644

**Chester** 610.344.5800

**Delaware** 610.713.2000

**Lehigh** 610.782.3064

**Montgomery** 610.278.5800

**Northampton** 610.559.3270

**Philadelphia** 215.683.6100

**PA Child Abuse Line (Child Line)** 800.932.0313