

POLICY: 21.01

SUBJECT: CHILD PROTECTION POLICY STATEMENT

ISSUANCE DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2021

EFFECTIVE DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2021

POLICY SCOPE

- EMPLOY MILWAUKEE AGENCY
- WIOA WDA 2 SYSTEM
- WIOA TITLE I-B PROGRAM(S)
 - ADULT PROGRAM
 - DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAM
 - YOUTH PROGRAM
- NON-WIOA PROGRAMS

REFERENCES:

1. United Way Policy of Protecting Children July 1, 2011
2. Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect (Attached)
3. A to Z Youth Center Child Abuse Prevention Policy

I. BACKGROUND Employ Milwaukee, Inc., “the entity,” is committed to protecting the safety of its employees and program participants. Employ Milwaukee encounters numerous youth throughout its’ programs, from In School and Out of School Youth to the Summer Earn and Learn program. It has become imperative that we set forth a Child Protection Policy.

II. PURPOSE The purpose of this policy is to empower staff members and community partners to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly about all forms of child abuse. It is the expectation that Employ Milwaukee’s programs take place in safe environments that foster healthy relationship building between adults and youth and between youth and youth. All youth and their parents or caregivers, including Employ Milwaukee staff member and board members must be confident that a positive environment exists.

III. DEFINITIONS DEFINITION 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 young person under the age of 18.

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 over-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, and all sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of whether there is deception or 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 above usually pertain to adults and caregivers. Within our Center, we are also concerned about youth-on-youth abuse, which can range from bullying to other forms of abuse. We are committed to preventing abuse from occurring at all levels.

Is it abuse – or just a different culture?

Just like the larger society, our Center is becoming more culturally and ethnically diverse. 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 are, the definition of abuse is not flexible. If a cultural practice seems to fall within the legal definition of abuse, it may be abuse and should be reported.

IV. POLICY

The Child Protection Policy includes procedures that ensure effective screening and selection of all employees. In order to prevent child abuse from taking place, the policy presents guidelines for interactions between individuals at Employ Milwaukee at all sponsored activities as well as off-program hours. The policy identifies concrete methods to ensure safe environments and offers training in prevention

strategies. The policy provides instruction on monitoring the behavior of the youth and staff. Additionally, written directives are provided for responding to inappropriate behavior, breaches in policy, and allegations and suspicions of child abuse if they should occur. This policy expresses Employ Milwaukee's commitment to child protection by taking reasonable steps to work with mandated reporters in reporting any child abuse and/or neglect that may occur in relation to any Employ Milwaukee activities.

1. Screening and Selecting Employ Milwaukee Employees

Goal: *to select the best possible individuals for staff positions and to screen out individuals who pose a potential risk.*

Professional Reference Checks

The applicant must sign a liability release that includes permission for Employ Milwaukee to conduct reference checks. Employ Milwaukee requires that references come from a variety of objective sources, and therefore excludes close friends and family members.

- Professional reference procedures include documentation of information:
 - Match references with employment and volunteer history. Is anything missing? Make certain that references come from a variety of sources. Always check former states where applicants may have been employed.
 - If a former employer will provide only basic information such as dates of employment, clarify whether the person providing the reference is limiting information because of company policy.

Criminal Background Checks

Permission must be obtained from applicants before completing the criminal background check. The Center has developed a BACKGROUND INFORMATION DISCLOSURE to be completed by all applicants being considered for employment. Online responses give immediate information to the Human Resources Manager regarding the criminal background of applicants. No applicant or volunteer may be permitted to work with youth until this process has been completed. If an applicant or volunteer has work experience in another state, the HR Manager will secure information from the appropriate state entities before the individual may begin to work or volunteer.

Employ Milwaukee has developed an indemnification clause to help protect Employ Milwaukee against false allegations or other legal issues. Employ Milwaukee also maintains professional liability insurance covering the actions of all employees.

Criminal background checks typically include name, social security number, and are conducted at the county and state level unless extra measures are necessary. Internet searches will be carefully conducted due to the possibility of more than one person sharing the same name. Employ Milwaukee will keep results of criminal background checks confidential. As with all personnel records for staff and volunteers,

background checks are maintained in the Human Resources Office in a locked cabinet with access by the HR Manager .

CAUTION: Because many cases of abuse, especially sexual abuse, go unreported and offenders are not identified, the criminal background check is not always fully accurate. The initial check may not identify offenders and ultimately give a false sense of security. Extra screening measures may be necessary with ongoing monitoring of all personnel recommended.

In-person Interview

The Employ Milwaukee staff interviewer is encouraged to ask follow-up questions from previous steps in the screening and selection process including the applicant's written application.

Example:2. Guidelines on Interactions Between Individuals.

Goal: *to ensure the safety of youth in their interactions with Employ Milwaukee staff and with each other.*

Employ Milwaukee supports positive youth development, helping youth to feel valued, and providing the caring connections that serve as protective factors for youth. Guidelines are provided to ensure positive and appropriate interactions among youth and between staff and volunteers. In promoting and ensuring such positive interactions, Employ Milwaukee 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**
 - Employ Milwaukee promotes activities that help youth develop socially, emotionally, and cognitively. These written policies and procedures 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.
- Employ Milwaukee requires that, whenever possible, more than one adult is present with one or more youth. The policy discourages one-on-one interactions.
- In the event that one of the two adults temporarily leaves a room in which there are youth, the door must be fully open and, when possible, an extra floater adult will be made available. Appropriate choices would be the Administrative Assistant, HR Coordinator, or another youth worker.
- Similarly, Employ Milwaukee requires that two (or more) youth will not be left without adult supervision. This helps to reduce the risk of unsupervised youth emotionally (bullying), physically, or sexually abusing other youth.
- As with all programming, adults are encouraged to help safeguard youth from all types of inappropriate situations.

This is not an all inclusive list of appropriate and inappropriate actions.

3. Ensuring Safe Environments

Goal: *to keep youth from situations in which they are at increased risk for abuse.*

- Employ Milwaukee encourages staff and volunteers to engage in ongoing, active interaction with youth. This ensures a higher level of youth supervision and monitoring. Periodic, unscheduled observation of these interactions are conducted as a quality control measure. When warranted, unusual, or questionable behaviors occur, there will be a review which will be recorded in the personnel files (HR Ofc).
- Employ Milwaukee 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.
- On-going, year-round academic (homework) assistance is offered. All academic assistance will be conducted onsite at the Center unless authorized by the Center's Program Director. Off-site meetings, even those held in public areas, are discouraged to avoid at-risk situations.
- Employ Milwaukee provides use of computers for job search and job application purposes. The computers are kept in an open lab area. Staff will closely monitor youth's use of the Internet. As a minimum, youth will be:
 - instructed on not sharing personal information with strangers, posting on websites, and cautioned about the use of social networking

- required to advise Employ Milwaukee staff if he or she receives sexual emails or other online messages
- required to sign an agreement that they will comply with all Internet safety guidelines established by Employ Milwaukee.
- In the case of an organized activity or fieldtrip, two or more adults will be required for chaperoning youth. Ideally, the ratio of adult to youth will be at least 1:8, based on the activity, ages of youth, and the level of risk.
- Transportation policies prohibit the transportation of any client. Details are provided in the Employ Milwaukee Employee Handbook.

Critical Strategies for Ensuring Safe Environments

Employ Milwaukee 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 youth a safe environment:

- Center is landscaped to ensure open, visible spaces with no concealment.
- Areas not used for programming are secured to prevent youth from being isolated.
- Privacy is provided for toileting, showering, and changing clothes to reduce risk.
- Off-site adult supervision is enforced with an assigned staff coordinator.

4. Monitoring Behavior

Goal: to prevent, recognize, and respond to inappropriate and harmful behaviors and to reinforce appropriate behaviors.

Employ Milwaukee uses formal and informal supervision to observe, monitor, and document staff 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 prescribed protocol in promptly responding to and reporting of inappropriate or harmful behavior, potential risk situations, and boundary violations. Further directives are provided in the training section.

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

Goal: to respond quickly and appropriately to inappropriate or harmful behavior, infractions of child abuse prevention policies and procedures, and evidence or allegations of child abuse.

Employ Milwaukee staff are required to know the policies and procedures for reporting suspected abuse, including to whom and in what format reports are made. This is covered in the required orientation for new employees and is provided annually for ongoing employees.

- Employ Milwaukee Staff must know the inappropriate/harmful behaviors that require internal response. Examples of verbal communication and physical behavior are presented in this document in the *Guidelines on Interactions Between Individuals* section.
- Inappropriate/harmful behaviors, regardless of the severity, must be reported on an **Incident Report** form by the staff or volunteer who first learn 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. The Incident Report typically includes:
 1. name, age, and address of the child
 2. names and addresses of alleged abuser, parents and other caregivers
 3. specific allegations, description of the injuries
 4. witnesses and contact information
 5. abuser's current access to the child
 6. condition of the child (is the child alone or in need of medical treatment?)
 7. description of alleged abuse provided by adult and child
 8. abuser's current mental, emotional or physical state
 9. location of the child
 10. concerns about the child's location (for example, are there weapons or dangerous animals?)
 11. actions already taken by you or other professionals
 12. your name – while you will generally remain anonymous, it is helpful if the caseworker has a way to contact you for additional information
- Staff reporting the initial allegation will submit the Incident Report form to the Employ Milwaukee Complaint Coordinator prior to reporting to authorities. Guidelines require the reporting staff contact their supervisor within 24 hours. If the situation appears to be an emergency (imminent danger to the child), immediately contact the Police Department.
- The Incident Report and related documentation will be kept confidential and maintained with limited access.
- Employ Milwaukee recognizes that child abuse is a crime. Employ Milwaukee will take all reasonable steps to ensure child protection and report good faith allegations of abuse and/or neglect to the proper authorities.
- Prior to submitting the report of suspicion or allegation to authorities, Employ Milwaukee may ask for clarification using open-ended questions such as *"Are you comfortable telling me what happened?"* Staff and volunteers are requested to minimize contaminating the child's memory and have the investigation conducted by a trained professional. Always support the child and reassure that it is not the youth's fault and that Employ Milwaukee's job is to protect youth.

- Employ Milwaukee will write a summary and submit a copy to the CEO. This copy will be kept confidential and maintained with limited access.
- Specifically, the formal report will be made to authorities of the appropriate outside agency. Employ Milwaukee reports:
 - All child abuse cases to the:
Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare - 414/220-7233
 - In addition, sexual assault cases to the:
Milwaukee County Police Department - 414/935-7405
 - In the case of a child abuse or sexual assault emergency - **911**

CONFIDENTIALITY is crucial in cases of child abuse. Employ Milwaukee’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.

Responses to Cases of Child of Abuse

- An allegation does not equate to guilt. However, Employ Milwaukee must take steps to protect the youth in its care. Immediately after the report of the case to external authorities, if the alleged offender is an employee, he/she will be placed on suspension until the case is resolved legally. Employ Milwaukee holds an appeal process in which individuals found not guilty of abusive behaviors may apply to return to their former program.
- Employ Milwaukee, when appropriate, provides referrals for victims and their families to child abuse organizations, therapists, or support groups.
- National resources include:
 - **Prevent Child Abuse America, 1-312-663-3520, www.preventchildabuse.org**
 - **Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-422-4453, www.childhelpusa.org**
 - **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1-800-394-3366, <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>**
- Employ Milwaukee also offers referrals for agencies that deal with a restorative justice approach. Southeastern Wisconsin centers include:
 - **Wisconsin Community Services, Inc. at 414-290-0400**
 - **Marquette University Law School at 414-288-7090**
 - **Community Conferencing Program at 414-278-4644**

6. Training for Child Abuse Prevention

Goal: to provide program staff with information and skills to help them prevent and respond to child abuse.

Child abuse is a complex issue that can have long-term consequences. Employ Milwaukee is privileged in the role of assisting youth through occupational and developmental training. In that role we strive for healthy environments for every young person in our program and beyond.

I. ACTION REQUIRED

SIGNED ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM FOR EACH EMPLOYEE

REVISIONS:

BOARD APPROVAL DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2021