

NEWS! NEWS! NEWS!

JERRY SANDUSKY, BERNIE FINE, SEXUAL ABUSE, AND YOUR CAMP



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Once again the subject of sexual abuse and molestation has reared its ugly head and is front and center in the eyes of the nation. Every day, new details emerge about the alleged child abuse by prominent collegiate athletic directors. To add even more salt to the wounds, it appears there were cover ups at the highest levels of these institutions, similar to the cover ups by some elements of religious institutions that has attracted national attention for years.

The impact of this on your camp and your families cannot be understated.

You know how good you are at controlling sex abuse at your camp. But what do your parents think? Based on what we are hearing from our camps, families are rightfully concerned and some are asking pointed questions.

We thought it might be a good idea to have a script ready to answer parents concerns. Some of these may not apply to your operations specifically, and there may be other things you do that are not listed, but this should be a good working list:

- Our camp is fully accredited by the American Camping Association (ACA). The ACA is the leading industry standards setting organization, and its members must comply with rigorous standards and inspections. Part of those standards specifically address how staff are hired, trained, and monitored throughout the summer.
- We take great pride in how we select our staff. We conduct personal interviews, ask for written and phone references, and have an extensive employment application that asks among other things, if the applicant has ever been convicted of a crime including child abuse or sex related offenses.
- Some of our staffers are former campers whom we have known for years.
- We conduct criminal background checks on our staff members, which also includes a social security check and a check of the national sex offender registry.
- Our camp maintains a plan of supervision that monitors staff in day to day living arrangements with campers.
- All employees must attend a rigorous pre camp orientation program that spans several days. We discuss child abuse and sexual abuse, how to recognize the signs, and what to do if a staff member or camper reports an incident of abuse. As part of this orientation, we often bring in outside specialists to specifically address this topic, including the police, social workers, camp specialist child psychologists, attorneys, and even our insurance agent.
- All staff members must sign and adhere to our guidelines of conduct and code of ethics
- Staff members are instructed in the proper ways of touching children and are taught never to be alone with a camper.

- We have an absolute zero tolerance policy for any inappropriate behavior. Every incident is investigated immediately and appropriate actions are taken, including termination. In addition we are mandatory reporters under most state laws and therefore would involve the state and criminal authorities in any such investigation.
- Our camp and our insurers maintain relationships with camp specialist child psychologists and social workers who can respond immediately to an incident or allegation of abuse.

However, you should be cognizant that if you promise to do these things, and heaven forbid there is an incident at your camp and you haven't done all that you have promised, you will be in bigger trouble! Therefore we recommend that you do not detail this to your families in writing.

The attention of the Sandusky and other high profile sex abuse incidents has stirred the pot and released some forgotten, repressed, or latent memories of abuse.

Just last week one of our camps emailed their alumni campers and received a startling response from a man in his 70's who claims that he and other boys were abused at camp in 1951! Ultimately he only wanted to know if any action was ever taken against the counselor – who he named, and if still alive must be in his late eighties or even his nineties.

The obvious point is to be prepared in advance if you receive such a communication.

We suggest you be empathetic and explain that while you may not have any records that far back, you will attempt an investigation. You should become intimately familiar with your state mandatory reporting requirements which may very well obligate you to report such an incident to the authorities, even if the statute of limitations has long ago expired. The reporting obligation is the reporting obligation. It does not call for the exercise of judgment or the weighing of pros and cons. A mandated reporter must report whenever the statute calls for it.

You should also contact your insurance agent!

Remember, how you handle an incident, even if it happened years ago, will impact your reputation. You do not want to be seen as covering up something from the past. Attack it in a straightforward and sympathetic matter. We will also be here to help you through the process if something ever surfaces.

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