



6 KEY QUESTIONS A PARENT SHOULD ASK OF A CAMP

As you are evaluating camps for your children, make sure to ask some specific questions of the camp to ensure the camp takes abuse prevention seriously.

1. What are the camps abuse prevention policies and procedures?

Answers to look for:

- They have a Staff Code of Conduct they can share with you that includes
- Limitation of one-on-one interactions
- Policies about electronic communication

The Santa Monica Family YMCA has a Code of Conduct all employees and volunteers must agree to and abide by. All interactions with youth must be observable and interruptible. One-on-one interactions outside the Y programs is strictly prohibited. Staff are not permitted to have contact with program participants as coaches, babysitters, etc. Employees are not permitted to communicate with program participants on social media platforms, via email, or via text. Developing a personal relationship with a program participant outside of the Y program is against Y policy and grounds for termination.

2. How does the camp screen counselors and counselors-in-training?

Background checks are industry standard, so they must be done. However, most offenders don't have a criminal history. For counselors-in-training, most juvenile records are sealed, so a background check will not reveal important information.

Answers to look for:

- Camps should use other screening methods – like interviews and reference checks – designed to assess for abuse risk.

The Santa Monica Family YMCA screens all employees with a criminal offender and sexual offender background check in addition to personal and professional reference checks. Candidates are interviewed with questions that are designed to assess for abuse risk and red-flag behaviors. All candidates for employment must complete a detailed employment application.

3. What abuse prevention training do counselors and counselors-in-training receive?

Answers to look for:

- Training in how to spot and respond to red flag behaviors and policy violations
- Training in how to prevent and respond to youth-to-youth sexual activity

The Santa Monica Family YMCA requires all staff to complete child abuse prevention training prior to working with youth. Training consists of the organization's policies and procedures, identification of abuse, peer-to-peer abuse prevention, and how to address red-flag behaviors and policy violations. Staff are required to update their training annually.

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4. How do you ensure consistent camper and counselor supervision?

Answers to look for:

- Campers are supervised at all times. The camp maintains the rule of three or more – there should never be one counselor alone with one camper. If for some reason this happens, the counselor is trained to report it immediately.
- Counselors are supervised by a lead staff who checks in randomly with the group to make sure counselors are following the correct supervision procedures.
- Specific procedures for monitoring shower times, bathrooms, transition times, free time, and other activities.
- Counselors-in-training are not responsible for the supervision of campers, but instead, assist counselors in group activities.

Staff supervision is a priority for the Santa Monica Family YMCA. Ensuring the youth in our care are supervised at all times and no one-on-one interaction occurs is a priority. Lead staff are constantly monitoring and checking in with counselors during the day. Staff are trained to follow specific procedures for shower times, bathrooms, transition times, free time and other activities. The purpose of the CIT program is to give older youth an opportunity to work with younger youth as a mentor and to assist the counselor. CITs are not given a supervisory role. Contact between staff and youth outside the Y program is strictly prohibited

5. How do counselors and campers report something that makes them feel uncomfortable?

Answers to look for:

- Counselors and campers are provided with multiple ways, including anonymous ways, to report any concerns.

The Santa Monica Family YMCA trains staff to report red-flag behaviors, warning signs of abuse, or any disclosure of abuse from a youth participant. The Y works closely with local law enforcement and child protective services when a report is made. Staff may report concerns to their supervisor, human resources or directly to the reporting agency. All Y employees are mandated reporters and must report suspected child abuse to the authorities. The Y is a safe place for youth and families, staff receive training in the event a youth discloses they are a victim of abuse. Staff are in place to help with the confidential reporting of abuse to the proper authorities.

6. Is your camp Accredited by Praesidium and/or ACA (American Camping Association)?

Answer to look for:

- **Yes**

The Santa Monica Family YMCA's Day Camp program is not accredited by ACA, however the Y's Resident Camp, Camp Big Bear, is ACA Accredited. The Y has a Certified Praesidium Guardian on staff who is responsible for all the Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Training for the organization.