

This policy should be shared with parents, and parents are encouraged to share these procedures with their daughters. Parents must sign off on receipt of Child Abuse Prevention Policy on Girl Registration Form.

**Mission**

To provide a healthy and safe environment for members of American Heritage Girls, through a program of education and prevention of emotional, physical and sexual child abuse and in compliance with state laws and federal regulations, and our guiding principles.

**Issue**

The emotional, physical and sexual abuse of children by adults and others is a widespread problem.

Abuse may be emotional, physical, and/or violent. Incidents may occur just once or be repeated many times.

Child abuse affects everyone - the victim, family/friends, all of us! We can prevent child abuse by giving children accurate information about physical and sexual abuse, teaching children how to protect themselves, encouraging children to communicate incidents, education adult members in prevention techniques and reporting incidents or suspected incidents to proper authorities.

A child abuser can be anyone - male or female, young or old, familiar or unfamiliar, or a former victim.

Child abuse can happen in familiar areas, public places, in unfamiliar or deserted areas. The abuser usually tries to control the victim by coercion, manipulation, or bribery.

Bullying can be another form of abuse and can result from adult and/or youth behaviors. Bullying can be physical, emotional or mental. Female bullying is becoming increasingly common and typically is in the form of verbal and emotional harassment. Cyber bullying (bullying via internet, email, text messaging, etc.) is also increasingly common and equally destructive.

**AHG Policy**

If an adult member learns or suspects that a youth member has been emotionally, physically or sexually abused, we can help by not questioning the validity of the incident, help is needed no matter the validity of the incident. Control emotions, give support, get information about the incident, get medical assistance, and immediately contact the appropriate social service agency and police in compliance with state and local laws and regulations, parents/guardians and the designated AHG Unit Leader. You are not required to know for certain that a child has been abused. All that the law requires is that you have a reasonable suspicion and are reporting in "good faith". It is the responsibility of the AHG Unit Leader to file an incident report with the Local/National Office.

**Guidelines for Youth Members**

To help prevent child abuse, our members should learn and follow these common-sense rules:

Be alert of other's behavior, don't believe strangers, avoid being alone with anyone who wants to touch a child in a sexual way, and don't be overly trusting.

- Avoid dangerous situations including playing alone in deserted or public areas, not opening doors or answering phones at home. Discuss problem encounters with parents, guardians, and AHG Unit Leaders. In the event of an incident, the member should not obey the abuser unless physically threatened, try to turn away, say no if someone tries to abuse them, tell abuser they'll tell someone, seek help as soon as possible, be told not to feel guilty, "it wasn't their fault."

**AHG Standards for Maintaining a Healthy and Safe Environment**

AHG has developed a plan to prevent child abuse and improve the environment in which our young members live. The key elements include:

1. Establish Unit Leader selection procedures to prevent individuals with a history of abuse from joining our adult membership or volunteering through effective screening of applicants. The AHG Leader Selection Process includes the following steps:
  - *Unit Leaders have been interviewed by the Troop Coordinator and Charter Representative.*
  - *Adult Volunteers must submit a completed adult volunteer application, three character references and a background check.*
  - *References should be contacted and verified by the Troop Coordinator.*

"Being a registered leader is a privilege, not a right." The quality of our program and safety of our youth members require selection of leaders to be taken seriously.

2. Educate leaders, volunteers, parents/guardians, and young members to aid in detection and prevention of child abuse.
3. Encourage girls to report improper behavior and to identify incidents and offenders promptly.

The following procedures have been established to provide additional security of members from situations in which they may be vulnerable to abuse, and to comply with federal, state, and local statutes and regulations.

1. Two-deep leadership: No less than two registered adult Leaders are required on all trips and activities. The Troop is responsible for ensuring sufficient leadership is provided for all activities.
2. No one-on-one contact: One-on-one contact between adults and youth members is not permitted. Any meeting or discussion on private matters or sensitive issues, must be conducted in view of other adults and /or members.
3. Respect privacy: Respect the privacy of youth members at all times, except to the extent of health and safety concerns.
4. Separate accommodations: At outdoor and overnight activities, youth members are not permitted to sleep with an adult other than parent or guardian unless adult and youth membership join as a group with two-deep leadership. Use of separate restrooms and shower facilities are encouraged or scheduled times arranged for use of facilities for youth members and adult members. If this is not possible, two-deep leadership must be maintained in restroom and shower facilities.
5. No secret organizations: AHG does not permit secret organizations. All programs and activities are open to observation by parents and adult members. Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited.
6. Appropriate attire: Proper, modest attire for all activities is required.
7. Constructive discipline: Discipline used in AHG should be constructive, positive, and reflect our values. Corporal punishment is not permitted.
8. Adult supervision: Adult Leaders must monitor and guide leadership techniques used by youth leaders.

To enhance the health and safety of all members of AHG, the following safety standards are to be followed:

- ❖ Controlled Substances: Persons under the influence of controlled substances or alcohol or in possession of same are prohibited from participation in any AHG activity or program.
- ❖ Fireworks: Persons are prohibited from using or possessing fireworks at any AHG activity or program.
- ❖ Firearms: Persons using or possessing firearms must comply with all local, state and federal laws during all AHG activities.
- ❖ Smoking: The use of tobacco products where members are present is not permitted at AHG programs or activities.

### **Procedures In the Event of Suspected Abuse**

In the event an act of child abuse is witnessed, reported, or suspected the following procedures are to be followed:

- ♦ Remove youth member from immediate danger and provide medical attention if needed.
- ♦ In the event child abuse is witnessed, promptly remove and report offenders to the local social services department and/or police immediately in accordance with state, local, and federal laws and regulations. (Refer to your county website for reporting abuse in your area.)
- ♦ If the suspected abuser is NOT the parent/guardian, notification should be made to Parents/Guardians and designated AHG officials as soon as possible advising them of situation and action taken.
- ♦ Leaders, having reason to believe a youth member(s) has suffered abuse, should report or cause reports to be made to the local social services department and police as soon as possible. The report should include: name and address of youth member(s), age, parent's/guardian's name, nature and extent of abuse, and any other information which would be helpful in investigating the situation. Upon notice to the social services and police, immediate notification should be made to AHG officials advising them of the situation and action taken.

Adherence to these policies and procedures not only enhances the protection of our members, but also ensures the basic values of American Heritage Girls while providing a healthy and safe environment.

**FOR READING ONLY - Please do not return to AHG, Inc.!**