

Keeping our child safe at camp

Camps run by Jewish community organisations and youth groups serve as a great activity for children during the school holidays. Participation in camp is a wonderful way for children to develop independence and resilience, gain invaluable social skills and forge lasting bonds with fellow campers. It is also a great way for children to develop a strong Jewish identity.

Camp organisers must, of course, provide a safe and secure environment for participating children. Tzedek, which strives to attain a Jewish community free of child sexual abuse, recommends that camp organisers comply with the required child protection policies. In Victoria, these policies are legislated through the Child Safe Standards.

Important facts and ideas about how to talk to your child about body safety

Prior to camp, parents/guardians should:

- Seek out education on issues relating to body safety and child sexual abuse.
- Talk to their child about body safety and child sexual abuse.
- Ask camp management if they have a child protection policy and a code of conduct; if so, request to view the document(s).
- Ensure camp management conveys rules to camp participants (and parents/guardians) pertaining to appropriate behaviour relating to the personal safety of campers.

Prior to camp, camp management should:

- Ensure they have a child protection policy and a code of conduct.
- Require all camp staff/volunteers to have a current Working with Children Check.
- Ensure that all prospective camp staff/volunteers are personally interviewed and provide professional recommendations that are duly checked.
- Ensure staff/volunteer training in the organisation's child protection policy.
- Clearly establish with parents/guardians/campers/staff/volunteers what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior around personal safety. This should be incorporated in a code of conduct.
- Ensure that staff/volunteers are appropriately educated on issues relating to the personal safety of children.
- Ensure that staff/volunteers are educated about child sexual abuse prevention, and how to recognise and react appropriately to allegations of child sexual abuse (or any form of assault). This includes being on alert for signs of abuse and inappropriate interactions between camp staff/volunteers and campers.
- Ensure that there are sufficient staff members/volunteers to enable the proper supervision of camp participants at all times. The ratio of campers/staff/volunteers should be published and adhered to at all times during camp.
- Ensure that staff/volunteers are prepared to answer questions from parents/guardians regarding the care and personal safety of children before, during and after camp. Examples of the types of questions that the staff/volunteers should be able to answer include:
 - What training do camp staff/volunteers receive about the personal safety of children and the prevention of child sexual abuse?
 - How are campers made aware of what to do if they feel unsafe?
 - Are camp staff/volunteers allowed to be alone with a camper? If not, how is this ensured?
 - How do the camp management/staff/volunteers monitor interactions between older and younger campers?
 - What are the sleeping arrangements for campers and staff/volunteers?
 - What are the camp's policies on parent/guardian-camper communication?

- Who is responsible for enforcing camp rules and regulations, and how are these implemented?

During camp, camp management should:

- Ensure all policies and procedures are being implemented in full.
- Ensure that all rooms within camp grounds that are not required for camp activities cannot be accessed.
- Ensure that all rooms that are required for camp activities are within clear visibility and easily accessible.
- Ensure that doors are kept open during camp activities to ensure visibility and access.
- Ensure that all activities can be easily observed.
- Monitor who is on the camp grounds and under what circumstances.
- Hold staff/volunteers accountable to report aberrant behaviour (and ensure they know how to properly report such a situation).
- Enforce a zero tolerance for alcohol and drugs.
- Ensure that camp staff/volunteers are never alone with a camper. Camp staff/volunteers should ideally be working in pairs (or more) at all times.
- Ensure that under no circumstances is any camp staff/volunteer alone with a camp participant in the sleeping accommodation or in bathrooms.
- Ensure camp participants are always given appropriate privacy while changing or showering.
- Ensure that older camp participants do not have unsupervised interactions with younger camp participants.
- Accommodate the needs of campers who may feel unsafe. This includes allowing them to contact their parents/guardians.

After camp, parents/guardians should:

- Discuss all aspects of the camp experience with their child.
- Observe and listen to their child's reactions.