YMCA Northumberland Protection and Safeguarding Policy

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1. Introduction / Objective

YMCA Northumberland is inherently committed to safeguarding the welfare of all children and teens in its care and accessing YMCA programs and services. We all share a responsibility to protect children and teens from harm. The YMCA recognizes its responsibility to promote safe environments and practices to protect children and teens from abuse and exploitation.

2. Policy Statement

YMCA Northumberland recognizes its responsibility to promote safe practices and to protect children and teens from abuse and exploitation. YMCA Northumberland staff and volunteers encountering a situation they believe is one of concern will immediately respond according to section 125(1) of Ontario's Child, Youth and Family Services Act 2017 (CYFSA) "Duty to Report" and refer any concerns, that a child might be abused or at risk of harm, to the appropriate Child Protection Authority.

To fulfill the above policy statement, the YMCA is committed to:

- providing safe environments for children and teens;
- identifying any child and/or teen who is suffering, or likely to suffer harm;
- reviewing and evaluating implementation of this policy regularly for effectiveness.

YMCA Northumberland is committed to an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment where all Board Members, staff, volunteers, members, participants and stakeholders feel respected and valued regardless of gender; age; race; ethnicity; national origin; language differences; family or marital status; religion; socio-economic status; sexual orientation or identity; physical, mental or development abilities; and education. We are committed to being non-discriminatory and providing equal opportunities.

The YMCA Northumberland Protection and Safeguarding Policy applies to all YMCA staff. The YMCA Northumberland Protection and Safeguarding Policy applies to all YMCA volunteers 18 years of age and over and who volunteer for more than 10 hours per year.

3. Definitions

The following terms are used in this policy:

Child under provincial child protection legislation is someone who is or appears to be under 16 years of age, or someone who is 16 or 17 years old and a prescribed circumstance or condition exists.
Child Abuse can be of a physical, emotional or sexual nature, or neglect. It may consist of just one incident or it may happen repeatedly. Vulnerable persons also may be at risk of abuse or neglect.
See Vulnerable Persons - Types of Abuse below for more information. A child can be subjected to more than one form of abuse:

Physical abuse could result from a parent or person in charge causing physical injury to a child or failing to adequately supervise a child or from a pattern of neglect of the child.

> *Examples of physical abuse include beating, slapping, hitting, pushing, throwing, shaking, burning. A child who is physically abused may have burns, bite marks, cuts, bruises, or welts in the shape of an object; not want to go home; be afraid of adults; wear inappropriate clothing (e.g. long sleeves on a very hot day).*

Sexual abuse happens when a parent or other person in charge sexually molests or uses a child for sexual purposes or knowingly fails to protect a child from sexual abuse.

> *Examples of sexual abuse include any sexual act between an adult and a child, including intercourse; fondling; exposing a child to adult sexual activity; sexual exploitation through child prostitution or child pornography.*

A child who is sexually abused may have an inappropriate knowledge of sexual acts; be very compliant or extremely aggressive; be afraid of a certain person or a family member; have difficulty walking or sitting.

Emotional abuse occurs when a parent or other person in charge harms a child's sense of self. It includes acts or omissions that result in, or place a child at risk of serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental health problems.

> *Examples of emotional abuse include yelling at, screaming at, threatening, frightening, or bullying a child; humiliating the child, name-calling, making negative comparisons to others; showing little to no physical affection (such as hugs) or words of affection or praise; saying that everything is the child's fault; withdrawing attention, giving the child the 'cold shoulder'; confining a child in a closet or a dark room, or tying the child to a chair for long periods of time; or exposing a child to domestic violence, allowing the child to be present during violent behaviour of others, including the physical abuse of others. Some level of emotional abuse is present in all forms of abuse.*

A child who is emotionally abused may show signs of serious anxiety, depression or withdrawal; show self-destructive or aggressive behavior; show delays in physical, emotional or mental development.

Neglect happens when a child's parent or other person in charge fails to provide for basic needs. Examples of neglect include failing to provide proper food, clothing suitable for the weather, supervision, a home that is clean and safe, medical care as needed; failing to provide emotional support, love and affection.

A child who is neglected may not wear clothing that's suitable for the weather; be dirty or unbathed; be very hungry; or not be properly supervised.

Any of the above signs of child abuse noticed by a staff or volunteer must be reported immediately to a child protection authority (CAS). See Appendix A for child protection authority contact information.

Duty of Care is a legal principle that identifies the obligations of individuals and organizations to take reasonable measures to care for and protect their participants.

Duty to Report is defined under section 125(1) of Ontario's Child, Youth and Family Services Act 2017 (CYFSA) and sets out what must be reported to a child protection authority (e.g. Children's Aid Society - CAS). A report must be made immediately if a child is or appears to be suffering from abuse or is at risk of harm. Duty to report applies to the public and includes special reporting responsibilities for professionals whose work involves children.

Child in need of protection is defined under section 74(2) of Ontario's Child, Youth and Family Services Act 2017 (CYFSA)as a child who is or who appears to be suffering from abuse, neglect or risk of harm. Anyone who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must promptly report the suspicion to a CAS.

- Risk of harm is the risk that a child is likely to be physically, sexually or emotionally abused or neglected.
- *Reasonable grounds* refers to the information that an average person, using normal and honest judgment, would need in order to decide to report. It is not the person's responsibility to prove or have proof of abuse; investigation is the role of child protection authorities.

Refer to section 6 for more information on 'duty to report' suspected child abuse.

Offense Declaration is a form that must be submitted by Child Care staff, on an annual basis and must be current within 15 days of the one-year anniversary of the previous declaration. This declaration states whether or not a Child Care staff has any criminal convictions under the Criminal Code of Canada for which a pardon has not been issued or granted.

Police Record Check (PRC) is a search of the records held in the information database of a police agency. It may include a check of national or local and regional police records. Basic types include a Criminal Record Check or Criminal Record Check and Judicial Matters Check or Vulnerable Sector Check. At the end of the process, a report is issued.

Position of Trust or Authority is created when an individual's relationship with someone else has any of the following characteristics: decision-making power; unsupervised access; closeness inherent in the relationship; personal nature of the activity itself.

Staff means salaried, hourly (full-time and part-time), seasonal, contract and on-call staff.

Volunteers include program volunteers, policy (Board/Board Committees) volunteers, philanthropy/fundraising volunteers and student placements.

Occasional and Special Event Volunteers are defined as volunteers who have limited interaction and are not left alone with children; and ii) whose involvement with the YMCA is limited in duration - less than 10 (ten) hours annually and are not left alone with children.

Vulnerable person for the purposes of this policy and reporting means an adult at risk. **An adult at risk** is a person aged 18 or over who is or may be unable to protect themselves from abuse. The vulnerability of an adult is related to how able the adult is to make and exercise their own informed choices free from duress, pressure or undue influence of any sort, and to protect themselves from abuse. Refer to **Appendix B**.

4. Legislative Context

Child, Youth and Family Services Act 2017 (CYFSA)

We all share a responsibility to protect children from harm. We have a legal obligation to promptly report any suspicion that a child is or may be in need of protection. Section 125 of Ontario's Child, Youth and Family Services Act 2017 (CYFSA) states that the public, including professionals who work with children, must promptly report any suspicions that a child is or may be in need of protection to a child protection agency (CAS). The Act recognizes that people working closely with children have a special awareness of the signs of child abuse and neglect, and a particular responsibility to report their suspicions.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

YMCA Northumberland: The YMCA is committed to promoting safe practices to protect children and teens from harm or abuse.

YMCA Northumberland Board of Directors and Senior Management Team are responsible for protecting children and teens by:

- Providing oversight of a protection framework that includes establishing policies and procedures, and monitoring;
- Ensuring systems are in place for regular review, reporting and evaluation of effectiveness of child and youth protection initiatives;
- Appointing a member of YMCA management team (Manager, Administration, and HR) having special responsibility for advancing the objectives of this policy and child protection legislation. Appointing a member of YMCA Children Services or HFA Team as a secondary support for advancing the objectives of this policy and child protection legislation.

YMCA Northumberland Managers and Supervisors have additional responsibilities for maintaining a safe environment in all facilities and programs by:

- Ensuring all staff and volunteers receive training on this policy, and ensure re-fresher training in protecting children and youth is provided annually;
- Arranging advanced training for staff and volunteers working directly with children;
- Ensuring recruitment, screening including police check/re-check procedures are implemented;
- Ensuring programs are developmentally appropriate and well planned in advance;
- Maintaining physical security and other safeguards to protect children and teens accessing YMCA programs;
- Responding promptly to any complaints, reports or allegations against staff or volunteers.
- YMCA staff and volunteers are expected to abide by this policy that includes:
- Following the Code of Conduct for the protection and safeguarding of children and teens;
- Participating in mandatory and re-fresher training in protecting and safeguarding children and teens;
- Producing acceptable police records/re-check clearance letters;
- Reporting immediately any suspicions of child abuse directly to a child protection agency (CAS);
- Notifying their supervisor or staff contact that a report has been made to CAS;
- Contacting police services if a staff or volunteer suspects that a vulnerable person's safety is at risk.

YMCA Northumberland Staff and Volunteers also have responsibilities for maintaining a safe environment in all facilities and programs by:

- Ensuring they receive an orientation to child protection and safeguarding, training on this policy, as well as re-fresher training in protecting and safeguarding children and teens annually;
- Receiving advanced training if working directly with children;
- Ensuring programs are developmentally appropriate and well planned in advance;
- Maintaining physical security and other safeguards to protect children and teens accessing YMCA programs;
- Abiding by this policy that includes:
  - Following the Code of Conduct (section 6) for the protection and safeguarding of children and teens
  - Producing acceptable police records/re-check clearance letters;
  - Reporting immediately any suspicions of child abuse directly to a child protection agency (CAS);
  - Notifying their supervisor or staff contact that a report has been made to CAS;
  - Contacting police services if a staff or volunteer suspects that a child and/or teen's safety is at risk.
- Active Supervision
  - Staff and Volunteers operate at the correct staff to child ratio
  - A sign in/sign out system in place to ensure effective transfer of care & real time tracking of all

6. Duty to Report Procedures for Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect

In the event that a child or someone discloses, or a staff, volunteer or student placement suspects child abuse, the procedures outlined below must be followed. Supervisors shall ensure that staff, program volunteers and student placements are aware of their duty to report suspected child abuse to a Child Protection Agency (CAS).

6.1 If you (Supervisor, Coordinator, Manager, staff, volunteer, student placement) suspect child abuse:

- You are required to make the call immediately to a child protection agency (CAS).
- You are not to ask anyone for help in making the decision; you must call.
- You may inform your supervisor or manager of the intention to call CAS, if you need their support to ensure that you have the privacy and staff coverage required to immediately make the call.
- You may name the child, but no details of the suspicion or disclosure should be discussed with your supervisor or manager.
- If your supervisor or manager is not available, you must proceed with the report to CAS.
- Once you have made the call, notify your onsite Supervisor/Coordinator/Manager or the General Manager, Membership Centre who will notify the Manager, Administration and HR that a call has been made to a child protection agency.

***** No staff, student, volunteer or member of the Board of Directors shall advise someone not to report suspicions of child abuse, nor try to stop the person from reporting or consulting with a CAS.**

6.2 Seeking Medical Attention:

If the child has sustained injuries, seek immediate medical attention. If injury is suspected to have been caused by child abuse or family violence, do not inform the parent of the intention to seek medical care for the child until you have spoken with a child protection worker and have been given clear direction to do so.

If you think the child is in immediate danger, call the Police. Immediately after calling the police, contact a child protection agency (CAS).

6.3 Avoid Discussing with a Parent or Guardian

A staff, volunteer or student placement who suspects abuse or family violence is not to disclose their suspicion or intention to call a CAS with the parent and/or guardian. Disclosing with the parent or guardian could jeopardize the child or contaminate the investigation. Therefore, do not talk with the parent or guardian unless you have been directed to do so by a child protection worker.
After consulting with a CAS and if given permission by CAS official to notify the parent and/or guardian, a Supervisor/Coordinator/manager or his/her designate will emphasize to the parent both the concern for the child and legal obligation to Report Suspicion of Abuse.

Remember: A CAS official will guide staff through this process if considered appropriate by CAS to speak with the parent or guardian. Do not inform the parent or guardian on your own, without first consulting with CAS.

6.4 Making the Call:

The call should be made to the CAS for the municipality in which the program is located. See contact information for child protection authorities in Appendix A.

If reporting to CAS after regular business hours, you will likely be required to leave a message, your name and phone number with an answering service. Indicate if your call is urgent. You will then need to wait to hear back from an after- hours protection worker.

***Leaving a message is not considered a report. You must speak directly to a child protection agency worker. If you think the child is in immediate danger, do not wait to be called back – Phone the police.

When placing a call to a child protection agency:

Provide your full name, your position, our Association name (YMCA Northumberland) and a number where they can reach you, along with the full details to the best of your knowledge of your suspicion(s). Ask for the name and phone number of the caseworker or manager you spoke with at the child protection agency.

If any further suspicion of abuse or new information with respect to a child occurs, then you must make another report to the child protection agency, regardless of any previous reports.

- Remember: The child protection agency (CAS) provides support. You can call to "consult" with CAS for guidance and agency staff will support you through the process. The goal of the YMCA and a child protection agency is to protect all children whose safety must be considered first.

Additional follow-up for child care staff:

- If a child care program is located in a school, staff shall inform the principal that a call has been made to CAS. In addition, suspected or witnessed abuse at a centre is a Serious Occurrence reportable within 24 hours to the Ministry. YMCA child care staff shall refer to YMCA Child Care Procedures for more information about Serious Occurrence reporting.

6.5 Documentation Guidelines

a) Documentation must be legible and written by hand by the person who reported the suspected abuse - do not type on a computer. Write with a ballpoint pen, not a marker or felt tip that might smudge/leak. Be factual, based on your observations.

b) Do not include or document your personal thoughts about how it might have happened. Include direct observations and indicators to support your statements. You may include what someone else has told you, as long as it is relevant and you have recorded who told you the information.

c) Description Details – Use the Suspected Child Abuse Reporting Form available onsite in the Suspected Child Abuse Reporting Kit. The child abuse reporting form outlines what you need to include when documenting suspected child abuse and your call to a child protection authority.

***If a kit is unavailable or you are unable to access a child abuse reporting kit at any time, it is very important that you still make a report by calling CAS immediately. Then document the report by hand, using a blank sheet of paper and place the report in a sealed envelope as outlined in e) and f) below.

d) Do not make a rough copy and then re-write 'in good'. Your original document is required. If you make a mistake, don't use whiteout. Simply cross it out with a single line and initial.

e) Make sure documentation is complete. Sign and date the report. Place the report in a sealed envelope marked CONFIDENTIAL. Write the child's name on the front and sign and date the envelope. On the back sign over the sealed part of the envelope.

f) Give the sealed envelope to your manager who will ensure the envelope is promptly and securely delivered to the Manager, Administration and HR for safeguarding and retention indefinitely. As received, these reports (envelopes) are tracked electronically by the Manager, Administration and HR on an annual basis.
**Accident/Incident Reports are also reviewed and tracked electronically by the Director, Children's Services, Centre Managers, Team Lead, Child and Youth and Manager, Administration and HR by way of reviewing trends that may be present

**Documentation with respect to suspected child abuse is not to be released to anyone unless there is a warrant, subpoena or court order to submit records or attend court. Any request for release of records is to be forwarded to the Manager, Administration and HR who will determine the action to be taken, in consultation with the President & Chief Executive Officer and legal counsel as needed.

6.6 If a staff, student placement or volunteer is suspected of abuse

If a staff/student/volunteer suspects another staff/student/volunteer of abusing a child or children who participate in the program, he/she will inform their onsite manager or general manager of the intention to immediately call a child protection agency (CAS).

If it is a parent who is making the allegation against a staff/student/volunteer, staff shall inform the parent of his/her Duty to Report suspected child abuse to a CAS. The supervisor also has a responsibility to call CAS. If the person suspected of abuse is the supervisor, the parent must make the call to a CAS and inform a YMCA Manager of his/her call to CAS. A staff/student/volunteer making the allegation will complete the required documentation as outlined in 6.5 above.

The person who is suspected of abusing a child will not be told by anyone about the suspicion, or the intention to report. Only under the direction and consultation with CAS is the information to be disclosed with the alleged person.

The Manager, Administration and HR will be notified by the appropriate departmental Manager that a call has been placed to CAS. The Manager, Administration and HR will promptly notify the President & Chief Executive Officer, who will inform designated members of management. Management will determine further action steps described in section 8 below.

6.7 Additional reporting requirements:

An allegation of abuse made against a Child Care staff, volunteer or student placement is considered a Serious Occurrence under the Child Care and Early Years Act. The centre Supervisor must contact the Manager, Program Integrity - Child Care immediately and the Ministry of Education within 24 hours and follow the Serious Occurrence procedure outlined in YMCA Child Care Procedures Manual.

For staff working in other program areas serving children or vulnerable persons, there may be additional reporting requirements and staff shall speak with their manager for more information.

6.8 Confidentiality

All information related to disclosure or an allegation of abuse will be treated confidentially to the extent possible.

6.9 Post Incident Review

A post-incident review (PIR) for child protection and safeguarding is a systematic evaluation conducted after a critical safety or safeguarding event. It analyzes root causes, checks compliance with policies like the *Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services Serious Occurrence Reporting Guidelines*, and updates supervision or training to prevent future harm.

Key Objectives of a Child Protection and Safeguarding Post Incident Review

- **Establish Factuality:** Document an objective, contemporaneous record of what happened, who responded, and the child's immediate condition without assigning premature blame.
- **Evaluate Mandated Compliance:** Verify whether mandatory reporting laws (such as contacting local Child and Family Services or police) and statutory timelines were strictly met.
- **Identify Systemic Gaps:** Look past individual actions to examine environmental factors, sight lines, staff-to-child ratios, shift transitions, or communication breakdowns.

Standard Review Steps

- **Immediate Stabilization:** Prioritize the physical and emotional safety of the child (and parents/guardians), ensure proper medical care (as needed), and notify emergency services or external authorities as needed. Also consider the staff and/or volunteers involved.
- **Information and Evidence Gathering:** Collect contemporaneous written notes, shift schedules, attendance logs, CCTV footage, and initial statements.
- **Stakeholder Debriefing:** Conduct separate or joint reflective sessions with staff, volunteers, internal committees (Board and staff) and external agencies (as applicable) to review what worked and where delays occurred.

- **Root-Cause Analysis:** Answer critical operational questions. For example: Were there clear lines of sight? Were safety checks or headcounts missed during transitions?
- **Action Plan and Policy Update:** Translate findings into concrete updates for staff training, physical facility controls, and supervision protocols.

7. Managing A Child To Child Allegation, Complaint or Claim of Abuse

In the event of an allegation, complaint or claim of abuse involving one child against a peer, the following procedures shall apply.
Examples of child-to-child incidents may include: physical aggression, verbal harm, bullying, sexual harassment or sexual acts, intimidation or threatening behavior, harassment based on identity, property damage or theft.

1 a) When responding to child-to-child incidents- Front Line Staff:

i) Intervene immediately
ii) Listen to understand the causes and motives of the behaviour
iii) Explain why the behaviour is inappropriate and unacceptable (coach, teach and support the children involved)
iv) Apply appropriate and consistent consequences as needed
v) Complete the applicable *Accident/Incident Report* if a call to Child Protection Agency was not required
vi) Follow up with your Supervisor or designate

If the incident involves a ***child that is in need of protection***, report immediately to a Child Protection Agency or local police department

1 b) When responding to child-to-child incidents- Supervisory Staff:

i) Work with the staff involved in the incident to understand the cause of the incident and identify next steps
ii) Ensure an *Accident/Incident Report* has been completed along with all documentation
iii) Contact the parents/guardians
iv) Evaluate the response of the incident
v) Create a plan with the goal to support the inclusion of all children
vi) Maintain regular communication with the staff and the families

***child that is in need of protection**: child displays sexual behavior that seems beyond their age and development suggesting exposure to or victimization of sexual abuse activity; a child or group of children were not adequately supervised, leading to injuries or putting them at risk of harm; a group of children are being bullied by a peer and no action is being taken by staff in response to the behaviours.

8. Responding to an Allegation or Complaint of Abuse against the YMCA

In the event of an allegation, complaint or disclosure of abuse against a staff or volunteer of the YMCA, the following procedures shall apply.

8.1 Reporting an Allegation or Complaint of Abuse against a staff or volunteer

Any complaint or allegation of abuse made against the YMCA is taken seriously and shall be dealt with by management.

If a staff or volunteer or student suspects or receives an allegation or complaint of abuse against another YMCA staff, volunteer or student, he/she must follow the procedures for reporting an allegation or suspicion of child abuse to a child protection agency (CAS) as outlined in 6.6 above.
Once the call has been made, the staff or volunteer or student shall immediately notify the appropriate departmental Manager that a call has been made to a child protection authority involving an allegation or suspicion of child abuse against a YMCA staff or volunteer.

The appropriate departmental Manager will immediately notify the President & Chief Executive Officer, and the Manager, Administration and HR who will respond in keeping with the YMCA's escalation protocol. Consequences of this escalation may include, but not be limited to, suspension of the employee (with pay) or volunteer from their duties while the allegation is being investigated.

In keeping with established YMCA procedures, senior management will ensure any additional child safety concerns, HR, insurance and other mandatory reporting requirements are addressed, and that the appropriate follow up steps are implemented once child protection authorities have completed their investigation.

In the event of an allegation of abuse of a vulnerable person against a staff, volunteer or student placement, report the suspicion immediately to the appropriate departmental Manager, who will notify senior management. If the vulnerable person's safety is at risk or in immediate danger, call the police as outlined in section 8 above.

8.2 Information Management

All information related to an allegation or disclosure of abuse will be treated confidentially to the extent possible. Supervisors shall ensure that all records including investigation related to allegations or complaints of abuse against a YMCA staff, student or volunteer shall be promptly delivered to the Manager, Administration and HR for safeguarding (secure storage) and retention indefinitely.

9. Recruiting, Screening and Training Staff and Volunteers

YMCA Northumberland offers a range of programs to a variety of age groups including children and vulnerable persons.

Proper screening of potential employees and volunteers is essential for matching people and YMCA roles or positions, for ensuring the quality of YMCA programs, for maintaining safe YMCA environments, and for reducing or eliminating the risk of harm to children and vulnerable persons.

Procedures established by the YMCA also ensure we meet regulatory requirements relevant to screening including Employment Standards and Eligibility to Work in Canada, Child Protection, Human Rights, Privacy, Youth Criminal Justice, and other legislated requirements.

All Supervisors, Coordinators, and Managers must follow YMCA Northumberland's Employee Relations Policy for recruiting, screening and selecting staff and volunteers. Screening procedures include conducting formal interviews with questions to determine suitability for working with children or in positions of trust and conducting a minimum of **two professional** reference checks for front line positions and **three professional** reference checks for positions of a supervisory/managerial nature. One reference must be the candidate's last known employer prior to their current employer if still employed. If a young candidate with little or no prior work experience, professional/personal references may include coaches, teachers, leadership facilitators etc. References contacted should be asked to confirm the nature of their relationship to the candidate. Assurance that police records checks procedures are followed, arranging orientation and mandatory child protection training, as well as maintaining records in keeping with established records retention procedures are conducted.
*Note: Occasional and special event volunteers are not required to have a police information check or police vulnerable sector check.

10. Strategies to Enhance our Commitment to Protecting and Safeguarding Children and Teens

YMCA Northumberland is committed to an ongoing strategy for the protection and safeguarding of children and teens and maintaining safe environments, which includes:

- Providing training that ensures staff and volunteers know their responsibilities and duty to report; monitoring YMCA's effectiveness in its commitment to protecting and safeguarding children and teens;
- Providing mechanisms for feedback and appropriate response to complaints or disclosures.
- Training and education increase knowledge and awareness of individual and organizational roles in protecting and safeguarding children and teens and ensures the effectiveness of this Policy. Through education tools and training that includes new staff orientation, mandatory and annual re-fresher training with sign-off requirements, the YMCA fosters awareness raising of staff and volunteers of their responsibilities 'to act' if abuse is suspected. Tools and resources are available on the YMCA Canada's intranet, or contact the Manager, Administration and HR for more information about tools and training resources available.

Monitoring: The YMCA has implemented a formal monitoring system that includes self-assessments, peer and third-party assessments of compliance with policies and procedures for the protection and safeguarding of children and youth. Assessments are completed at least annually to identify where further enhancements may be needed to maintain the safety of our program environments.

- In addition, Supervisors/Coordinators/Managers shall monitor programs regularly to identify any potential barriers and strategies for maintaining safe YMCA environments.

Strategies include:

- Fostering a culture of safety through safeguards including policies, training, education;
- Providing children and teens with support and guidance on what to do, and who to contact if feeling uncomfortable or afraid at any time;
- Adhering to HR and volunteer management procedures for recruiting, screening, supervising and training staff and volunteers;
- Conducting program area checks including regular building sweeps/tours to monitor bathrooms, locker rooms and any isolated areas;
- Maintaining building security through use of central point(s) of entry, sign in/out procedures, restricted access to child care or child minding areas, doors are locked that should be locked, etc.

Maintaining safe environments is a team approach. Supervisors and staff can speak with the appropriate departmental Manager or contact the Manager, Administration and HR for more information.

11. Protecting Children and Teens On-line

The safety and protection of children and teens is a top priority at YMCA Northumberland and this commitment extends to all YMCA digital communications, including email, social media and texts.

By setting these expectations, not only are we protecting children and teens in our care, we are also modelling good safety practices so they can protect themselves online. We can also protect ourselves from having our actions misinterpreted.

Below are acceptable and unacceptable forms of digital communication with minors, defined as children and teens under the age of majority. Age of majority in Ontario is 18 years old.

<u>Acceptable forms of digital communication</u>

Emails – Can be exchanged with minors ONLY when the minor's parent/guardian or a YMCA Supervisor is copied and ONLY regarding YMCA related matters. These messages must be sent and received from an official YMCA email address.

Online Groups – Set up a private group (e.g. Facebook group) that meets the following conditions:

- All groups must be organized under an official YMCA account
- All group members must meet the minimum age required by the platform to hold and account (i.e. need to be at least 13 to set up a Facebook account)
- There must be at least 2 staff members over the age of majority designated as administrators for the page or on-line group
- Must follow YMCA Northumberland *Privacy Policy* and *Internet Communication, Cell Phone and Acceptable Use Policy*

Text Messages – As a general practice, texting is not a recommended form of communication with minors as there can be limited to no ability to maintain a record of the communication, especially once deleted. If the decision is made to use texting, texts can be exchanged with minors ONLY when the minor's parent/guardian or a YMCA Supervisor is included and ONLY regarding YMCA related matters.

Unacceptable forms of digital communication

Connecting privately with minors on any online social media accounts or digital channels (other than as indicated above), both personal and work related, strictly prohibited.

Other unacceptable forms of communication with minors include:

- Private messaging and emails
- Following or "friending" children and teens
- Sharing details of your social media accounts and asking a minor to follow you
- App communications that do not include a parent/guardian or a YMCA staff member
- Exchanging personal cell phone numbers, email addresses or physical mailing addresses

  ***Should a child or teen initiate a request to communicate or connect, explain that there are policies that prohibit from this action occurring

Alternative ways to communicate

There are other ways to communicate with children, teens and their families. Consider using one of the following to share information:

- Public pages of our website or social media accounts
- Phone calls with parents/guardians. These calls must be made from a YMCA phone number and not a personal phone number

Reporting communications, connections or contact

If you become aware of another staff member or volunteer communicating inappropriately or trying to initiate outside contact with a minor, report this immediately to your supervisor. Additional steps may be required regarding reporting to the local child protection authority.

Ongoing relevancy:

The YMCA's child protection lead or designate shall review this policy annually to ensure effectiveness and ongoing relevancy in keeping with changing laws, evolving processes and public expectations.

YMCA Northumberland shall continue to instill a culture of shared accountability and responsibility across the Association for the protection of children and vulnerable persons.

12. YMCA Related Policies/Procedures and Reference Documents

- **Suspected Child Abuse Reporting Kit** – includes documents to use and describes steps to follow when reporting/investigating suspected abuse or neglect of a child, available onsite
- **Screening Procedures of Potential Staff and Volunteers** in YMCA Northumberland's Employee Relations Policy Management Practices – relates to our obligation to conduct proper screening of potential employees and program volunteers to ensure appropriate matching of people with YMCA roles or positions, for improving quality and safety of YMCA programs, and reducing the risk of harm to children and vulnerable persons accessing YMCA programs and services.
- **Police Records Check Procedures** in YMCA Northumberland's Employee Relations Policy – relates to our obligation to confirm that a police records check (PRC) has been provided before starting work or volunteer service at the YMCA, and that the Manager, Administration and HR ensure PRC re-checks are conducted in keeping with established procedures consistent with

legislated requirements. For employees and volunteers under 18 years of age, an Employee Statement/Declaration will be signed by the following parties: Employee, Parent/Guardian, Employee's Supervisor, and Manager – Administration and HR. Upon turning 18, the employee/volunteer will be provided with the required letter of written consent for the request of a Police Record Check with the Vulnerable Sector. With wait times for securing renewal Police Vulnerable Sector Checks, an Exception Statement will continue to be signed by each Employee, the Employee's Supervisor, and the Manager- Administration and HR until the applicable Police Vulnerable Sector Document can be obtained and provided to the Association. Where possible every effort will be made to allocate 1 employee who will be at least 18 years of age to work within a program in order to mitigate risk to the employees and program participants.

- **Offence Declaration Procedures** in YMCA Child Care Policy Manual – relates to the obligation of Child Care Supervisors to ensure the form is submitted by Child Care staff on an annual basis and is current within 15 days of the one-year anniversary of the previous declaration. This declaration states whether or not a Child Care staff has any criminal convictions under the Criminal Code of Canada for which a pardon has not been issued or granted.
- **Reference Checks Procedures** in YMCA Northumberland's Employee Relations Policy - relates to the obligation of supervisors to ensure a minimum of two **professional** references have been checked for front line positions and three **professional** references for supervisory or managerial roles as a final step in the recruiting process for all full and part time employment and for volunteer positions before a position is offered at the YMCA.
- **YMCA Crisis Framework** – relates to the YMCA's Crisis Framework process and roles within local Association as well as the RDC and Y Canada when dealing with a critical incident (allegation of abuse; cyber breach) or crisis event (pandemic), to ensure appropriate situation assessment, investigation, decision-making and response by management.
- **YMCA Child Care Policy Manual** – outlines procedures and guidelines for YMCA Child Care staff.

13. Contacts and Other Resources

For more information about this policy, staff may speak with the Manager, Administration and HR.

The following sources provide additional information about child protection:

- To view Ontario's Child, Youth and Family Services Act 2017 (CYFSA), visit www.e-laws.gov.on.ca
- More information about child protection is available at www.ontario.ca/children, and at www.torontocas.ca/Publications for 'child in need of protection' and 'duty to report' information.
- Other online sources of information include: Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies at www.oacas.org; Boost Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention at www.boostforkids.org; Canadian Centre for Child Protection at www.protectchildren.ca

Appendix A: Child Protection Agencies Contact Information

Police Services Non-Emergency Phone Number and Website		
Cobourg Municipality	905-372-6821	www.cobourgpolice.com
Port Hope Municipality	905-885-8123	www.phps.on.ca
Northumberland Ontario Provincial Police		www.opp.ca
Brighton Detachment	613-475-1313	
Cobourg Detachment	905-372-5421	
Quinte West Detachment	613-392-3561	
Campbellford Detachment	705-653-3300	

Child Protection Agency Phone Number and Website		
Highland Shores Children's Aid Society	905-372-1821	highlandshorescas.com
Durham Children's Aid Society	905-433-1551	www.durhamcas.ca

Appendix B: Reporting Suspected Abuse of a Vulnerable Adult

Ontario does not have legislation to protect adults like it does for children, which means there are no protection agencies as such. Therefore, it is up to all of us to act.

Vulnerable persons may be at risk of one or more types of abuse including physical abuse or neglect (defined above), or emotional abuse, sexual abuse and financial abuse or exploitation.

- Emotional abuse of a vulnerable person is any act which may lessen the sense of identity, dignity or self-worth of a person, such as: confinement; physical and social isolation; verbal assault, harassment, humiliation, or intimidation; denial of information, privacy, visitors; coercion.
- Sexual abuse of a vulnerable person is any act involving unwanted touching/activity of a sexual nature, or a situation in which an adult consents or submits to sexual activity because a person in a position of trust or with authority has used that trust/authority to gain that consent. Such acts include: sexual assault, sexual harassment, any act designed to use the vulnerable person for the perpetrator's sexual gratification.
- Financial abuse or exploitation is any act involving the misuse or abuse of funds or assets belonging to a vulnerable person. Examples include obtaining property and funds without the person's knowledge or consent, or by using undue influence; or where a person is not mentally competent or not acting in the person's best interest.

Alleged, suspected or witnessed abuse of a vulnerable person may constitute a criminal offence and the police should be informed.

Reporting Suspected Abuse of a Vulnerable Person

Anyone who has a reduced capacity to look after their own interests, needs and well-being can be at risk of abuse. For example, an adult with a physical disability or mental health or developmental or intellectual disability, as well as some seniors may be at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Alleged, suspected or witnessed abuse of a vulnerable person may constitute a criminal offence under the Canadian Criminal Code and the police should be informed. As all adults are presumed to have mental capacity to make informed choices about their own safety and how they live their lives, all interventions in respect of vulnerable persons need to take into account their ability to make informed choices about the way they want to live and the risks they want to take.

If a staff or volunteer suspects that a vulnerable person's safety is at risk or in immediate danger, contact the local police services (see contact information in Appendix A), or dial 911 immediately. The police have the ability to check on the person's wellbeing.

Staff shall use the YMCA Incident Report form to record brief information, indicating the vulnerable person's name, the date the call was made to police services, and program location. In the description, record 'call made to the police regarding suspected abuse of a vulnerable person', then sign and date the incident report form. Forward a copy of the incident report to your departmental Manager who will forward it to the Manager, Administration and HR.

Protection and Safeguarding Code of Conduct

In the course of staff or volunteer work at the YMCA, even if not working directly with children, there are times when staff or volunteers will encounter and interact with children and youth. The YMCA is committed to treating everyone with respect and dignity, and to helping children and youth grow and develop to their full potential in a safe and caring environment.

Staff and volunteers are required to follow the **Code of Conduct** that describes good practices and includes practices to be avoided or never sanctioned. The practices outlined below clarify what is and is not acceptable behaviour when working with children and youth. By defining what is and is not acceptable behaviour, good practice can be promoted, and the potential for abuse or allegations of abuse minimized.

This means as a YMCA Staff or Volunteer, you commit to:

1. Duty to Report to a Child Protection Agency and/or Police

Report suspicions of abuse and disclosures of abuse to the appropriate child protection agency or police as required. Use our procedures to report any allegations involving staff or volunteers.

2. Reporting Internally

Notify your Supervisor or Manager of complaints or concerns raised by others, including allegations against staff or volunteers. Report concerns about child and youth safety, breaches of policy, and discriminatory or inappropriate behaviour, including behaviour between children or youth. Inform your Supervisor or Manager when a call is made to a child protection agency.

3. Providing a Safe and Inclusive Environment

Ensure YMCA's programs, services, and facilities are safe and inclusive environments free of harm.

4. Seek Assistance While Maintaining Confidentiality

Seek assistance from your Supervisor or Manager when clarification is needed while respecting the confidentiality of those involved. In instances of disclosure, only provide details of what was disclosed by you to a child protection agency or police.

Expectations of YMCA Staff and Volunteers:

1. Interactions

- Use language and tone of voice that positively impacts the well-being of the children/youth, fostering a supportive and caring atmosphere. When discussing children/youth, use language that fosters a positive relationship with families and caregivers
- Build positive, nurturing relationships, creating a safe environment for all.
- Foster healthy and social environments for children/youth to connect with their peers. **Peer-to-peer interaction within a child-safe environment** refers to children socializing and playing with one another in spaces explicitly designed and monitored to prevent physical, emotional, or psychological harm. It empowers children to build crucial social skills, empathy, and independence safely among equals.
- Empower children/youth by allowing them to make choices and express their opinions.
- Involve parents/guardians whenever possible and reasonable. Respect the child's/youth's rights to contact their parent/guardian if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable, during their time at program or the Y.

2. Supervision Practices

- At work, staff/volunteers must be clearly identifiable by uniform, name tag, or provide a direct introduction to families and children/youth.
- Staff must actively supervise children and youth according to age and program requirements and ensure they are accounted for.
- Use of phones for non-program purposes is prohibited while working with children/youth.
- Sign-in and sign-out procedures must be diligently followed according to program requirements.
- Children can only be released from Y programs/services to an authorized parent/guardian or approved individuals confirmed by government- issued ID.
- In cases where a legal custodial agreement exists, staff must follow the direction of the agreement.
- Staff must maintain program ratio requirements when working with children to ensure appropriate supervision. Volunteers must never be left alone with children/youth.
- Be aware of children/youth over 10 visiting a Y facility without a parent/guardian. (Note: Children/youth ages 10–15 are not permitted in the conditioning or weight rooms without parental supervision and/or participating in the Y Grow Program). Contact a parent or guardian if a child/youth is or appears to be under 10 years old and is without adult supervision.
- Visitors, vendors, contractors, and special guests must have their government-issued ID and/or work identification verified and sign in to a visitor log onsite detailing the time they enter, the time they leave, and their reason for visiting.

3. Physical Contact

- Staff and volunteers must always seek the consent of a child or youth before initiating any physical contact.
- Be vigilant and aware of how actions can be misinterpreted and always work in an open environment. Avoid private or unobserved situations with a child or youth unless personal assistance such as toileting, changing or behavioural support (child needs time away from program) is required.
- When children/youth are upset, staff/volunteers should provide comfort and appropriately attend to their needs.
- During physical activities, especially during sports or other activities involving playful behaviour, staff/volunteers should be aware of the impact of their actions and be cautious about the intensity of play.
- Temporarily touching or holding a child's/youth's hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, or back to prevent them from harming themselves or others when they are in immediate danger of doing so is permitted.

4. Safe Environments

- Programs and services for children/youth should be designed with the physical environment in mind. This includes choosing suitable spaces that promote child and youth safety, such as locations with adequate exits, proximity to washrooms, windows, and clear lines of sight.
- Recognize and address potential safety issues in program locations and respond appropriately to minimize risks to children/youth.

- Staff must ensure the safety of all individuals while addressing escalating behaviours promptly. Those encountering ongoing challenges should seek support from colleagues, supervisors, parents/guardians and community agencies (ie Five Counties Children's Centre) to develop individualized support plans.
- Staff must be appropriately trained when doing activities with elements of risk or bring in an approved expert to lead the activity. Safety measures must be in place to ensure a safe experience for the children/youth.

5. Establishing Boundaries
Staff/volunteers are required to maintain appropriate boundaries to ensure the safety and well-being of all children/youth involved in Y programs/services. The following guidelines must be strictly adhered to:

Interactions: Staff/volunteers must refrain from interacting with children/youth involved in Y programs/services outside the scope of the designated programs/services.

Private arrangements: Staff/volunteers should not initiate, seek, request, or accept private arrangements with parents/guardians of children/youth participating in Y programs/services while employed by the Y. This includes any arrangement outside of their work or voluntary roles.

Contact boundaries: Staff/volunteers must not engage in direct/personal/private contact with children/ youth outside of Y programming unless required by the specific program. No friending, following, tagging, or direct messaging on social media or communicating through mobile phone calls, texting, or email is permitted. *****See Section 11 Protecting Children and Teens On-Line**

Personal information: Staff/volunteers are not to share their or other's personal information that is or may be deemed inappropriate with children/youth or families.

Prior relationships disclosure: Staff/volunteers must disclose pre-existing relationships, such as friendships, relatives, or work connections, with families or children/youth attending their location to their supervisor. Supervisors will document and address any concerns as they arise.

6. Life-Threatening Allergies and Medical Conditions
Protecting children/youth with life-threatening allergies and/or medical conditions is critical, as is the Y's approach to minimizing exposure to known allergens and gathering detailed emergency response information from parents/ guardians. Fragrance-free environments, where refrain from using perfume and scented products, is also encouraged. It is necessary to have clear communication and up-to-date information so Y staff can provide a safe and supportive environment for all children/youth, including those with allergies.

Y staff: Team members who work directly with children/youth must recognize the signs of allergic reactions or medicals conditions and know how to respond promptly and appropriately. This may involve calling for help and administering first aid for severe allergic reactions and/or medical conditions (anaphylaxis, asthma).

Y staff/volunteers should maintain an allergy-safe environment for all individuals. This involves implementing policies and practices to reduce cross-contamination of allergens in food preparation

areas and common spaces. This includes not permitting non-program provided food as well as peanut/nut free products in Child Care and Camp programs. Allergy awareness provided to children, youth and their families creates a more supportive and understanding environment.

7. Washroom/Change Room Practices

- Staff must provide the appropriate level of supervision to children/youth when they use washrooms or change rooms. Extra vigilance is required in areas accessed by the public, such as universal changerooms.
- Staff must respect the privacy of children/youth when changing clothes and showering. Staff/volunteers must protect their own privacy in similar situations.
- Staff/volunteers should avoid being alone in situations with a single child/youth in a washroom/change room area. If children require assistance with washroom or change room use have two staff members present when in situations with children and young people where it is necessary to change or undress (i.e. swimming) so this activity is not misconstrued. This does not include licensed programming, as within Child Care

8. Photography and Digital Requirements

- Photos or videos for specific programs or activities can be taken only using Y-approved equipment and with parent/guardian permission through a signed *YMCA Photo Consent Form.*
- Photos shared exclusively with individual families should only contain images of their own child/youth. Some exceptions may be made if permission is received in writing from the parent or guardian.
- Never upload or share photos/videos to personal or unofficial YMCA social media platforms. Once photos/videos are uploaded to a YMCA-approved platform, they must be deleted from the device.
- Staff must take reasonable steps to ensure members of the public do not take photos/videos of children/youth at a Y program.

***See **Section 11 Protecting Children and Teens Online** for more related information

9. Travel and Use of Personal Vehicles

Staff are not permitted to transport children/youth in their personal vehicles. In an immediate life-threatening situation emergency medical services (EMS) is activated. In extreme circumstances alternate transportation such as a Y vehicle may be used for transport to a medical facility.

Unacceptable Practices at the Y
A prohibited practice is any behaviour by a staff/volunteer/placement student that puts children/youth at risk or inhibits a child's/youth's growth, self-esteem, or healthy development. The following practices and behaviours are unacceptable and prohibitied:

Abuse and neglect: Engaging in any form of abuse — physical, emotional, or sexual — or neglecting a child/youth's basic needs, such as food, drink, shelter, sleep, toilet use, clothing, bedding, and emotional support. This also includes any form of punishment involving physical force intended to cause pain or discomfort, including forcing children/youth to eat or drink against their will. All types of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, and bullying are also included.

Derogatory language: Deliberately using harsh or degrading measures/threats or use of derogatory, culturally insensitive, violent, or sexually suggestive language directed at or used in the presence of a child that would humiliate, shame or frighten the child or undermine his or her self-respect, dignity or self-worth.

Disciplinary actions: Disciplining children/youth through emotional abuse, favouritism, physical punishment, verbal abuse, referencing cultural differences, swearing, or any other offensive/inappropriate action.

Initiating against wishes: Initiating physical contact against the wishes of the child/youth, as well as doing things of a personal nature for children such as toileting, dressing, that they can do for themselves.

Locking exits and using locked rooms: Locking exits to confine a child/youth or leaving them in an area or room without adult supervision, except during a crisis that puts them or others in danger and/or necessary for an emergency response. Using a locked or lockable room or structure to confine a child/youth by separating them from other children and without adult supervision.

Physical restraint: Physically restraining a child/youth, such as holding them down, confining them to a space (e.g. closet, storage room) or any device (e.g. highchair, stroller, car seat) for disciplinary purposes is not permitted, unless the restraint is necessary to prevent immediate harm to the child/youth or others. Physical restraint should be the last resort and only until the risk of injury is no longer imminent. Any physical restraint should be reported to supervisory staff promptly.

Redirection of behaviour Physical contact, including but not limited to arm-grabbing, head tapping, body-steering, and grabbing a backpack or clothing, to redirect a child/youth is not permitted.

Sexual behaviour and exposure: Engaging in any sexual behaviour or conversations of a sexual nature with or in the presence of children/youth. Exposing children/youth to pornographic material through discussions, internet/social media, or printed materials is not permitted.

Unsupervised children: Leaving children unsupervised in any situation.

Any reports involving breach of the above Protection and Safeguarding Code of Conduct is taken seriously and will be dealt with by management. Individuals who violate the Protection and Safeguarding Code of Conduct and this policy are subject to disciplinary or corrective action up to and including termination of employment or volunteer assignment.

Acknowledgment and Agreement

I, _____ (Employee/Volunteer Name), acknowledge that I have read and understand the *Protection and Safeguarding Policy* and have participated in specific training for this policy. I agree to adhere to this agreement in its entirety and for this I understand that if I violate the rules set forth in this Policy, I may face legal, disciplinary, or corrective action.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____

Acknowledgment and Agreement

I, _____ (Employee/Volunteer Name), acknowledge that I have read and understand the *Code of Conduct* in relation to YMCA Northumberland's *Protection and Safeguarding Policy.* I agree to adhere to this agreement in its entirety and for this I understand that if I violate the rules set forth in this Code of Conduct, I may face legal, disciplinary, or corrective action.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____