

# LIBRARY ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

The Muhlenberg Community Library (hereafter referred to as the Library) does not permit or allow abuses of any kind to occur in the workplace or at any activity sponsored by or related to it. To make this zero tolerance policy clear to all employees or volunteers, we have adopted procedures that employees and volunteers must follow in this Abuse Prevention Policy. Unless otherwise specified all policies herein pertain to the time a volunteer or employee is directly working on behalf of the Library.

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions apply:

A **volunteer** is defined as any individual over the age of 14 that serves in any capacity on behalf of the Library on a reoccurring and consistent basis without monetary remuneration, including members of the board of trustees and members of the weekly volunteer pool.

An **employee** is any individual employed by the Library on a permanent full-time or part-time basis. It does not include temporary or independently contracted employees.

A **patron** is defined as any individual of any age who uses Library services and/or Library programs.

## I. Code of Conduct with Patrons

The following policies are intended to assist employees and volunteers in making decisions about interactions with patrons. For clarification of any guideline, or to inquire about behaviors not addressed here, contact your supervisor or library director.

The Library provides our patrons with the highest quality services, within our means. We are committed to creating an environment for patrons that is safe, nurturing, empowering, and that promotes growth and success.

No form of abuse will be tolerated, and confirmed abuse will result in immediate dismissal. All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior or allegations of abuse with patrons will be taken seriously. The Library will fully cooperate with authorities if allegations of abuse are made that require investigation.

The Code of Conduct with Patrons outlines specific expectations of employees and volunteers as we strive to accomplish our mission together.

- Patrons will be treated with respect at all times.
- Patrons will be treated fairly regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identification, age, disability, or religion.
- Employees and volunteers will adhere to uniform standards of displaying affection as outlined.
- Employees and volunteers will avoid affection with patrons that cannot be observed by others.
- Employees and volunteers will adhere to uniform standards of appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions as outlined by the Library.
- Employees and volunteers will not inappropriately stare at or comment on patrons' bodies.
- Adult employees and adult volunteers will not date or become romantically involved with patrons, volunteers, or employees under the age of 18.

- While working, employees and volunteers will not use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of patrons.
- Employees and volunteers will not engage in inappropriate electronic communication with patrons.
- Employees and volunteers are prohibited from working one-on-one with a patron in a private setting.
- Employees and volunteers will use common areas when working with individual patrons.

Employees and volunteers will not abuse patrons in any way including (but not limited to) the following:

*Physical abuse:* Examples include, but are not limited to, hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessarily restraining or confining an individual, or causing endangerment to an individual.

*Verbal abuse:* Examples include, but are not limited to, degrading or threatening an individual, or cursing at someone.

*Sexual abuse:* Examples include, but are not limited to, inappropriately touching another, exposing oneself, conversations meant to cause sexual arousal or response, as well as any type of sexual contact or behavior.

*Mental abuse:* Examples include, but are not limited to, shaming, humiliation, or cruelty towards another. As well as, causing a child to be fearful, agitated, depressed or anxious in a severe way.

The Library will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of patrons by other patrons, while on Library property or while attending any on or offsite Library event. Nor will the Library tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior.

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:

- Physical bullying* – when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
- Verbal bullying* – when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another person hurtful names.
- Nonverbal or relational bullying* – when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip. This type of bullying also includes intimidating another person by using gestures.

Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying. This policy applies to all patrons, staff, and volunteers.

All employees and volunteers must follow state-specific mandatory reporting requirements. Employees and volunteers who are mandatory reporters according to the PA Child Protective Services Law should be trained to be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse. These employees and volunteers will:

- Be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse.
- Know and follow the Library policies and procedures that protect patrons against abuse.
- Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by

state- mandated reporter laws.

- d. Follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken.

Employees and volunteers will report abuse concerns or complaints about other staff, volunteers, or patrons to the Library Director and/or Board President.

The Library cooperates fully with the authorities to investigate all cases of alleged abuse. All employees and volunteers shall cooperate to the fullest extent possible in any external investigation by outside authorities or internal investigation conducted by the Library or persons given investigative authority by the Library. Failure to cooperate fully may be grounds for termination.

Employees and volunteers may not have engaged in or be convicted of abuse, indecency, or injury to patrons or children. As well, staff and volunteers cannot have engaged in any activity that would be grounds for denying employment or participation in a program, activity, or service according to the PA Child Protective Services Law.

## II. Policies

### A. Physical Contact

The Library’s physical contact policy promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting patrons, staff, and volunteers. The Library encourages appropriate physical contact with patrons and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact. Any inappropriate physical contact by staff towards patrons while working at the Library will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

The Library’s policies for appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions are:

<i>Appropriate Physical Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Side hugs</li><li>• Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs</li><li>• Pats on the shoulder or back</li><li>• Handshakes</li><li>• High-fives and hand slapping</li><li>• Verbal praise</li><li>• Pats on the head when culturally appropriate</li><li>• Touching hands, shoulders, and arms</li><li>• Arms around shoulders</li><li>• Holding hands (with young in escorting situations)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Full-frontal hugs</li><li>• Kisses</li><li>• Showing affection in an isolated area</li><li>• Lap sitting</li><li>• Wrestling</li><li>• Piggyback Rides</li><li>• Tickling</li><li>• Any type of massage given by or to a patron without written permission.</li><li>• Any unwanted affection</li><li>• Inappropriate compliments relating to physique or body development</li><li>• Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas</li></ul>

## B. Interaction

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to patrons in a way that is coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Staff and volunteers must not initiate conversations meant to cause sexual arousal or response with patrons. The Library's policies for appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions are:

<i>Appropriate Verbal Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Verbal Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive reinforcement</li><li>• Appropriate jokes</li><li>• Encouragement</li><li>• Praise</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name-calling</li><li>• Discussing sexual encounters or in any way involving patrons in the personal problems or issues of staff and volunteers</li><li>• Cursing</li><li>• Off-color or sexual jokes</li><li>• Shaming</li><li>• Belittling</li><li>• Derogatory remarks</li><li>• Language that threatens or humiliates patrons.</li><li>• Derogatory remarks about the patrons &amp; or his/her family</li></ul>

## C. One-on-One Interaction

Most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with another adult or a child. The Library aims to eliminate or reduce these situations and prohibits private one-on-one interactions unless approved in advance by the Library.

In those situations where one-on-one interactions are approved, staff and volunteers should observe the following additional guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

<i>Additional Guidelines for One-on-One Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When meeting one-on-one with a patron, always do so in a public place where you are in full view of others.</li><li>• Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high-fives, and handshakes.</li><li>• If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.</li><li>• Inform other staff and volunteers that you are alone with another individual or child and ask them to randomly drop in.</li><li>• Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.</li></ul>

## D. Off-site Contact

Many cases of organizational abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. This contact outside of regularly scheduled activities may put staff, volunteers, and the Library at increased risk.

The Library strongly recommends that staff and volunteers do not have outside contact with children known solely through the Library. If offsite contact occurs while working on behalf of the Library (such as during a field trip), the Library has determined that the following forms of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate:

<i>Appropriate Outside Contact</i>	<i>Inappropriate Outside Contact</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking groups of patrons on an outing</li><li>• Attending sporting activities with groups of patrons</li><li>• Attending functions at a child's home, with parents/guardians present</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking a child on an outing without a parent's/guardian's written permission</li><li>• Visiting a child known solely through the Library in the child's home, without a parent/guardian present</li><li>• Entertaining a child known solely through the Library in the home of staff or volunteers</li><li>• A lone child known solely through the Library spending the night with staff or volunteers</li></ul>

In addition, the Library will ensure that the following steps are followed:

1. The Director or a supervisor should identify for staff and volunteers what types of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate.
2. Ensure that staff or volunteers have a parent's/guardian's signed permission and release-of-liability statement for Library field trips.

## E. Electronic Communication

While working on behalf of the Library, all communication between staff and patrons must be transparent.

The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate electronic communication.

<i>Appropriate Electronic Communication</i>	<i>Inappropriate Electronic Communication</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating through “the Library’s official pages” on Facebook or other approved public forums</li> <li>• Keeping personal social media profiles “Private” to reduce what patrons can access</li> <li>• Posting appropriate pictures of Library participants on social media sites, with parental or guardian permission, when applicable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating comments</li> <li>• Sexually oriented conversations</li> </ul>

### 1. Cell Phone or other Electronic Device Use:

While working for the Library, with the exception of using cellphones to take photographs or recordings at program events, staff/volunteers are discouraged from using electronic communications devices except during approved breaks and emergency situations.

Text messaging patrons below the age of 18 known solely through the Library while assigned to work with them is strictly prohibited.

Use of personal electronic communication devices to contact (via voice, text, or pictures/video) patrons for inappropriate reasons shall be grounds for discipline up to and including termination of employment or expulsion from the Library Board or volunteer pool.

## F. Gift Giving

Molesters routinely groom by giving gifts, thereby endearing themselves to a child. They might instruct the child to keep the gifts a secret, which then starts teaching the child to keep secrets from parents/guardians. For this reason, staff and volunteers should only give gifts to groups of patrons and only under the following circumstance:

1. The Director must be made aware of and approve the gift.

### III. Responding

#### A. Responding to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors or Policy Violations

Because our library is dedicated to maintaining zero tolerance for abuse, it is imperative that every staff member or volunteer actively participate in the protection of patrons. If staff or volunteers observe any suspicious or inappropriate behaviors and/or policy violations on the part of other staff or volunteers, it is their personal responsibility to immediately report their observations.

##### *Examples of Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors on the Part Of Staff/Volunteers vis a vis Patrons*

- Violation of the abuse prevention policies described above
- Seeking private time or one-on-one time with a child
- Buying gifts for individual children
- Making suggestive comments to a child

All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with patrons will be taken seriously. Our procedures will be carefully followed to ensure that the rights of all those involved are protected.

#### 1. Employee and Volunteer Response:

If an employee/volunteer witnesses suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from another employee or volunteer, the employee or volunteer is instructed to do the following:

##### *Guidelines for Staff/Volunteers Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations*

- Interrupt the behavior.
- Report the behavior to a supervisor, director, or other authority.
- If you are not comfortable making the report directly, make it anonymously.
- If the report is about a supervisor or administrator, contact the next level of management.
- Document the report but do not conduct an investigation.
- Keep reporting until the appropriate action is taken.

## 2. Director/Administrator and/or Board Member response:

In the event that a Director/Administrator or Board Member receives a report of suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from a staff member or volunteer, that individual is instructed to do the following:

### *Guidelines for Directors/Administrators and/or Board Members Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations*

- Determine the appropriate administrator to respond to the concern.
- Determine the appropriate response based on the report.
- Speak with the staff or volunteer who has been reported.
- Review the file of the staff or volunteer to determine if similar complaints were previously reported.
- Document the report on the appropriate form.
- If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, contact the state authorities and file a report.
- Advise the person who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.

Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:

1. Increase monitoring or supervision of the staff, volunteer, or program.
2. If policy violations with patrons are confirmed, the staff or volunteer must be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and prosecution. Disciplinary action will follow the Employee Handbook, Personnel Policy, and the Volunteer Policy.

If more information is needed, interview and/or survey other staff and volunteers or patrons.

## 3. The Library's Response:

### *Guidelines for the Library's Response*

- Review the need for increased supervision.
- Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- Review the need for additional training.

## **B. Responding to Suspected Abuse**

### **1. Staff or Volunteer Response to Abuse:**

As required by mandated reporting laws, staff and volunteers must report any suspected abuse or neglect of —whether on or off the Library property or whether perpetrated by staff, volunteers, or others—to state authorities. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. A person who mistakenly reports suspected abuse is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith and without malice.

If the victim is an adult, the abuse should be immediately reported by the person witnessing the abuse to the state Adult Protective Services Hotline at 1-800-490-8505.

Employees and volunteers who come into contact with children (i.e., mandated reporters) are required to report immediately when they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child under the care, supervision, guidance or training of their agency, institution or organization is an abused child. To report suspected child abuse, call Childline at 1-800-932-0313, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or submit initial report of abuse electronically using the Child Welfare Information Solution portal available on the PA-pfa.org website.

After calling Childline to report suspected child abuse, mandated reporters must follow-up with an electronic or a written report on the CY-47 form – also available on the pa-fas.org website – within 48 hours of making the oral report. All mandated reporters must submit their name and contact information when making their report.

Any person may make an oral or written report of suspected child abuse, which may be submitted electronically, or cause a report of suspected child abuse to be made to the department, county agency, or law enforcement if that person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse.

In addition to reporting to state authorities, staff and volunteers are required to report any suspected or known abuse of patrons perpetrated by staff or volunteers directly to leadership so that immediate and proper steps may be taken to ensure the safety of alleged victims and others who may be at risk. Reports of suspected or known abuse may be made confidentially to the following:

- a. Immediate supervisor
- b. Directors/Administrators
- c. Board Members

*Additional Guidelines for Staff/Volunteer Response to Incidents or Allegations of Abuse*

- If you witness abuse, interrupt the behavior immediately.
- If abuse is disclosed to you, assure the individual disclosing that he or she was correct to tell to you.
- Protect the alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
- Immediately report the allegation or incident to the proper organization authorities (based on mandatory reporting requirements) and the Library Director or President of the Board.
- Be sure to document the incident, disclosure, or any circumstances causing your suspicion of abuse. State only the facts.
- It is not your job to investigate the incident but it **IS** your job to report the incident to your supervisor in a timely manner.
- Check back to make sure appropriate steps were taken. If not, report again to the Library Director or President of the Board.

**2. Directors/Administrators and/or Board Members Response to Abuse:**

In addition to the above response procedures, supervisors and administrators should ensure the following:

*Guidelines for Directors/Administrators and/or Board Members Response to Allegations or Incidents of Abuse*

- First, determine if the patron is still in danger and if so, take immediate steps to prevent any further harm.
- Gather as much information about the allegation as you can. For example, who made the report, who was allegedly abused, who was the alleged abuser, what was the nature of the alleged abuse, where and when did the alleged abuse occur, etc.
- Accurately record everything you learn in as much detail as you can. Remember your notes may be read by others. Stick to the facts.
- Contact the appropriate local authorities as indicated by your mandatory reporting procedures. Make sure you get a case number and the name and contact information of the person with whom you speak at the reporting agency.
- If the alleged abuse involves a staff member or volunteer, notify the Director and follow the Crisis Management Plan.
- Suspend the accused staff or volunteer until the investigation is completed.

## C. Retaliation

The library prohibits any retaliation against anyone, including an employee, volunteer, board members or individual, who in good faith reports abuse or molestation abuse, alleges that it is being committed or participates in the investigation. Intentionally false or malicious accusations of abuse or molestation are prohibited.

Anyone who improperly retaliates against someone who has made a good faith allegation of abuse or molestation, or intentionally provides false information to that effect, will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination.

### Employee and Volunteer Personal Obligations and Notification

1. If you are arrested for or convicted of an offense that is listed in this library abuse or administration policy or named as a perpetrator in a founded or indicated report, you must provide written notification of the same to the Library's office not later than 72 hours after the arrest, conviction, or notification that you have been listed as a perpetrator in the statewide database.
2. If the Library has a reasonable belief that you were arrested or convicted of an offense that is listed in a library abuse or molestation abuse administration policy or was named as a perpetrator in a founded or indicated report, the Library can require you to update your clearances before being permitted to continue to volunteer or be employed at the Library.
3. Willful failure to disclose this information is a misdemeanor in the third degree.

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### Acknowledgment of Abuse Prevention Policy

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that I have received and read the abuse administrative policy immediately preceding my signature below. I understand that I am bound to follow the policy and understand the consequences in the event that I fail to do so.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Employee or Volunteer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Date(s) of Annual Review(s) (employee/volunteer to write date in his/her own handwriting) (Add additional sheets if necessary).

- |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ | 9. _____ |

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*Adopted by Board of Trustees to replace Child Abuse Policy and Sexual Abuse Policy on 09/09/2019.  
Reviewed by Board of Trustees on 01/17/2022*

# Critical Incident Management Plan for Abuse

## Prior to Allegation/Incident

- The leaders on the Critical Incident Management Team will be the Director and Board President.
- Educate all employees and volunteers on what to do if someone alleges current or historical abuse involving a patron, employee, or volunteer.
- All employees and volunteers should know how to fulfill their duties as mandated reporters (if they are mandated reporters according to the PA Child Protectives Law).
- All employees and volunteers should be trained on how to complete the appropriate incident forms.

## Immediate Safety

- Follow all mandated reporting requirements and contact the authorities as appropriate.
- Where applicable, prevent the accused from having further access to children until a thorough incident review is completed. Before beginning an internal incident review, verify with local authorities that this will not interfere with their investigation.
- If the accused person is an employee, follow Personnel Policy and Employee Handbook procedures accordingly. This may involve suspending the accused during the investigation.
- When applicable, notify other employees.

## Initial Communication Plan

- Designate a point person to respond to all inquiries from parents, the media, and other stakeholders.
  - Prepare a short media statement in advance of getting a media inquiry.
  - All oral and written communication should speak with a voice of compassion and confidence.
  - All employees and volunteers should know how to refer media inquiries to the appropriate person.
- As soon as possible, meet in person (not over the phone) with identified victims and their parents/guardians.
  - Reassure them that you are taking this seriously.
  - Find out what response they expect and be prepared to explain support you will offer, such as counseling, if applicable.
- Consider reaching out in writing to patrons and the public in general.
  - The message should communicate:
    - **Empathy:** Begin by stating that such incidents run counter to the Library's values.

- **Facts:** Include a summary of the incident, including information about the arrest, suspension, investigation, etc.
  - **Contact Request.** Ask parents to contact you or the specified authorities if they suspect their child may have been abused.
  - **Your Response:** Explain that you are fully cooperating with the authorities. Describe proactive steps you are taking such as offering resources to patrons, hosting meetings, training staff, and conducting an independent investigation to learn from this incident so you can prevent it from happening again.
- After an “event”, consider hosting a meeting to speak directly with concerned patrons and directly answer any questions before rumors or misinformation is spread.
    - Communicate as much information as you can about the incident.
    - Provide information regarding the proactive steps leadership is taking in response to the incident.
    - Describe resources you are providing, and give patrons a chance to ask questions.
    - Provide patrons information about how to talk to their children about abuse.

### **Ongoing Communication and Response**

- Determine how to manage ongoing relations with authorities, parents, the community, and media.
  - Consider adding a page to your website with updated details about the incident.
  - Designate specific individuals from the Library to handle various communications and outreach efforts.

### **Promote Prevention at All Levels of the Library**

- If resources and time allow, consider educating patrons on abuse prevention, i.e., a workshop during which parents can learn how to protect their child from abuse. This would be an educational session different from the parent meeting described above.
- If resources and time allow, provide a youth education program to all youths involved with the library on how to protect themselves from abuse and how to express concerns.

When feasible, train (or re-train) all employees and volunteers on how to identify and report “red-flag” behaviors that do not rise to the level of suspected abuse. This is an important part of the overall response and ongoing prevention effort.