

Handling Suspected Child Abuse

Policy:

Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania supports and maintains environments that are free of child abuse and neglect as defined by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. Child abuse and neglect are unlawful acts and it is against the council's policy for any adult, male or female, to physically, sexually, or mentally abuse or neglect any girl member.

The council reserves the right to refuse membership endorsement or reappointment and to dismiss or to exclude from affiliation with the council, any adult who has been convicted of child abuse or neglect.

All Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania employees and volunteers are considered mandated reporters, which means that volunteers and staff are:

"required to report when they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child under the care, supervision, guidance or training of that person or of their agency, institution or organization is an abused child. In addition, any person may report suspected abuse, even if the individual wishes to remain anonymous." —The PA Department of Public Welfare

Procedure:

The adult who suspects child abuse is required to complete the following actions in the order presented:

1. Call Pennsylvania Child Protective Services at 800-932-0313 or make a report online at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>.
2. Contact his/her local council staff person or the volunteer relations coordinator to share any concerns or suspicions and report any action taken. The name of the child need not be shared with staff.
3. The council staff person or the volunteer relations coordinator will take notes and forward the documentation to the chief operations officer.

If the adult suspects the abuse of a child by another Girl Scout volunteer or staff member, they will:

1. Call Pennsylvania Child Protective Services at 800-932-0313 or make a report online at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>.
2. Contact the volunteer relations coordinator to share concerns or suspicions, and report the action taken. The volunteer relations coordinator will forward the documentation to the chief operations officer.

3. The chief operations officer will immediately open an investigation of the volunteer or staff member accused of abusing a child. During the investigation, the volunteer or staff member will be suspended from any duties involving children.
4. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, the adult may be dismissed from their volunteer or staff position.

It is not a mandated reporter's responsibility to establish guilt, but rather to report a suspicion or potential reasons for concern. If the adult needs help in assessing the requirement to make a report, they will:

1. Call their council staff person or the volunteer relations coordinator to discuss any suspicions and clarify the need to contact authorities.
2. Mandated reporters are kept confidential but are required to give their names when filing a report and may be called on to cooperate with an investigation.

Please note: Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania maintains an effective anti-retaliation policy that prohibits any form of retaliation against anyone who submits a report of suspected child abuse in good faith.