

Grass Valley Aikikai Policy for Protection of Youth

One risk for any organization working directly with young people is youth sexual abuse. Youth sexual abuse policies protect youth from sexual abuse, and also protect adults and youth from allegations of sexual abuse.

“The same dynamics that create a nurturing environment, and may ultimately protect against child sexual abuse, can also open the doors to sexually abusive behaviors. Research has shown that youth who are emotionally insecure, needy, and unsupported may be more vulnerable to the attentions of offenders. By promoting close and caring relationships between youth and adults, organizations can help youth feel supported and loved and thus reduce their risk of child sexual abuse. But that same closeness between a youth and an adult can also provide the opportunity for abuse to occur. When developing policies for child sexual abuse prevention, organizations must balance the need to keep youth safe with the need to nurture and care for them. It can be difficult to find the balance between being vigilant and protective of youth and being so hyper-vigilant that the positive relationships between adults and youth are lost.” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - see references in the Grass Valley Aikikai Policies for Adults and Youth)

Definitions

Youth sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a youth. This includes sexual contact that is accomplished by force or threat of force as well as sexual contact between an adult and a youth that is not violent, regardless of whether there is deception, or if the youth understands the sexual nature of the activity, or gives verbal consent. Sexual contact between an older and a younger youth also can be abusive if there is a significant disparity in age, development, or size. Sexually abusive acts may include penetration, sexual touching, or non-contact sexual acts such as exposure or voyeurism.

Youth Abuse includes any of the following:

1. Physical Abuse: violent non-accidental contact which may or may not result in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts and burns.
2. Sexual Abuse: any form of sexual activity with a youth, whether at the dojo, home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult or another youth.
3. Emotional Abuse: a pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a youth’s spirit, attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

Harassment can be a single severe incident or a persistent pattern of behavior where the purpose or the effect is to create a hostile, offensive, or intimidating environment. Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical, written, or verbal behavior, including without limitations the following:

1. Physical or mental abuse
2. Racial insults
3. Derogatory ethnic slurs
4. Sexual advances or touching
5. Sexual comments or sexual jokes
6. Requests for sexual favors as a condition of membership
7. Display of offensive materials.

Screening

We can reduce the risk of accepting a youth sexual offender by learning all we can about an applicant for a leadership position. By letting applicants and members know our organization is serious about protecting youth, we may deter some people at risk of abusing youth from applying for teacher positions.

Teachers that have regular teaching assignments will be screened via a personal interview, and reference check. A criminal background check may or may not be performed depending on individual circumstances. Substitute teachers are not screened. Adult members are not screened.

Training and Monitoring

All teachers and members shall sign a statement that they have read, understood and agree to abide by the Grass Valley Aikikai Policy for Adults and Youth.

Teachers and members are responsible for preventing and responding to youth sexual abuse. Youth protection and supervision responsibilities and any questions or issues from the membership will be discussed as needed at dojo meetings.

Monitoring is done through informal, frequent, and random observation. All teachers and members are empowered to intervene or tell someone when they see inappropriate or harmful interactions between adults and youth, or between youths, or between adults. Youths are encouraged to tell a trusted adult about inappropriate or harmful things that have happened to themselves or their friends.

All aspects of the program are open to observation by parents at all times. Parents are encouraged to report any concerns to the chief instructor or to report suspicions of youth sexual abuse to law enforcement or Child Protective Services.

Responding to inappropriate behavior, breaches in policy, and allegations and suspicions of youth sexual abuse

Allegations of sexual misconduct should be taken seriously and reported to the appropriate authority. If someone is at immediate risk of harm, call 911. If there are indications of illegal actions, the proper civil authorities should be notified immediately. Child Protective Services is responsible for caretaker abuse, and law enforcement is responsible for abuse by all other individuals. All teachers and adult members are responsible for monitoring adult-youth behavior and interactions within the dojo. If an event occurs, teachers and adult members shall attempt to:

1. Stop the policy violation or abuse
2. Protect the youth
3. Separate alleged victim from alleged perpetrator
4. Call 911 if appropriate

5. Notify parents
6. Notify the chief instructor

The chief instructor is professionally and legally accountable for ensuring that all cases of abuse are reported to the proper authorities. The chief instructor will take appropriate action to ensure the participant's safety, make appropriate notifications, and follow up with investigating agencies.

Incidents that require an immediate report to the chief instructor:

1. Any questionable conduct toward youth or adult members
2. Any bullying, harassment
3. Any mention or threats of suicide
4. Any threats to harm another or use a weapon
5. Any reports made to authorities
6. Any negative behavior associated with race, color, nationality, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, or disability

If it is the chief instructor who is suspected of youth sexual abuse or other wrongdoing, a report may be made directly to law enforcement, or to a senior student who will contact law enforcement. A report must also be made to the Ethics Committee of Birankai North America via www.birankai.org.

Let Child Protective Services and law enforcement investigate allegations or suspicions. Do not conduct your own investigation, but depending on the circumstances, it may be appropriate to ask a few clarifying questions of the youth or the person making the allegation to adequately report the suspicion or allegation to the authorities. An organization's investigation can harm the youth or the legal investigative process. Cooperate fully in any investigation.

When an allegation of youth sexual abuse is made, the chief instructor will take all appropriate steps to protect the reputation of the accused until there is sufficient suspicion that youth sexual abuse has occurred, then law enforcement or Child Protective Services will be called. The chief instructor will take appropriate measures to remove the accused from training and place him or her on a leave of absence. The presumption of innocence does not preclude the organization from taking immediate, prudent action to protect the community in response to complaints and before an investigation is complete. Retaliation or discrimination against a person who complains or who reports sexual abuse is prohibited.

Records shall be maintained of all complaints, including anonymous complaints. However, in the absence of accompanying verifiable facts, anonymous complaints may not be investigated. The accused shall be informed of all complaints, including anonymous complaints.

No person falsely accused of youth sexual abuse should suffer any adverse consequences as a result of a false accusation. The chief instructor is responsible for teachers or members who are falsely accused of youth sexual abuse and shall provide continuing moral support to the individual as they return to active participation.