

Young Israel Shomrai Emunah
Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth (Policy)

I. Objective. Young Israel Shomrai Emunah (YISE) aims to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth (as defined in section II.B.) who attend the synagogue and participate in synagogue programs and activities. By being proactive and setting clear and objective standards, we seek to protect our children and youth from potential misconduct or inappropriate behavior and ensure that our synagogue provides a safe and secure environment for everyone.

II. Code of Conduct for Synagogue Activities and Personnel

A. Overview

This Policy is designed to ensure the safety of the children and youth of our synagogue during functions and activities taking place in the synagogue building as well as during synagogue-supervised events off synagogue premises. This Policy does not cover the Shomrai Preschool, which is covered by separate educational policies for student safety.

Our staff, group leaders, and volunteers

- shall not abuse any child or youth, whether physically, emotionally, sexually, or financially;
- shall seek to prevent abuse of children and youth while involved in synagogue activities;
- shall comply with this Policy regarding conduct with children and youth; and
- acknowledge their obligation and responsibility to protect children and youth by agreeing to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth or known or suspected Policy violations to appropriate synagogue leaders and state or federal authorities in accordance with this Policy and applicable law.

B. Definitions

For purposes of this Policy, the following terms have the meanings set forth below:

“child” means anyone under the age of 12 years.

“child abuse” or “abuse” means any action (or failure to take action) that endangers or harms a child or youth’s physical, psychological, or emotional health and development. In addition, abuse can occur among children and youth themselves if there is a significant disparity in the age, development, or size between the individuals involved or if one child or youth is in a position of responsibility, trust, or power over the other.

Child abuse can occur in different ways and includes the following:

- *Physical abuse* – any physical injury to a child or youth that is not accidental, including beating, shaking, kicking, burning, and biting.
- *Emotional/psychological abuse* – any actions that are likely to lead to emotional or psychological injury, including unwarranted or excessive criticism, belittling and persistent teasing or bullying, or creating or maintaining through action or inaction an environment that leads to or allows such behaviors.
- *Sexual abuse* – any sexual activity between a child or youth and an adult, including activities such as exhibitionism, incest, sexual contact, sexual communication, or any activity intended to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any child or youth, or the adult engaging in this activity with a child or youth, regardless of whether the adult or the child or youth is the initiator and even if there is no coercion involved.
- *Neglect* – depriving a child or youth of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.
- *Economic exploitation* - the deliberate misplacement, exploitation, or wrongful temporary or permanent use of a child or youth’s property or money.

“group leader” means a youth assisting with YISE’s child or youth activities. Group leaders may assist with such activities but are not considered adult volunteers and must be supervised by YISE’s staff.

“staff” means any adult employee of YISE hired to perform services on a scheduled or regular basis for the synagogue in exchange for payment or compensation. For the avoidance of doubt, staff shall not include group leaders, subcontractors, or vendors, as defined by this Policy.

“subcontractor” means any individual who is not a YISE employee and is either hired (i) by the synagogue to perform synagogue functions (such as, for example, maintenance and custodial workers) or (ii) by individual synagogue members to perform functions at private events held on synagogue property (such as, for example, caterers, event entertainment, and party planners).

“vendor” means any individual conducting personal business on synagogue property for personal gain (such as, for example, businesses participating in a pre-holiday boutique at YISE).

“volunteer” means any person performing services for YISE without payment or compensation.

“youth” means anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old. A youth shall also include any student in high school regardless of age.

C. Personnel Policy with Regard to Child Safety

1. All Staff Working With Children or Youth:

Personal interview: At least one face-to-face interview will be conducted with applicants to assess suitability for the position as well as to review this Policy.

Reference checks: Before an applicant is permitted to work with children or youth, he or she shall provide prior relevant employment history with references and at least two of the applicant's references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably (to the extent relevant to the position) from organizations where the applicant has worked with children or youth in the past.

Internet and criminal background checks: All applicants will also be subject to an Internet check and fingerprinting. Applicants will be asked to provide all email addresses, screen names, and other aliases. In addition, a national criminal background check is required for all staff, regardless of position. Applicants who have current Internet check, fingerprinting, and national criminal background checks on file with another employer may provide authorization for YISE to use the information on file with that employer rather than undergoing the same investigations again solely for YISE. However, YISE reserves the right to not rely on such background checks held on file by another institution.

Applicants must affirmatively disclose any convictions or criminal charges, at any time, for any offense involving children, and/or for offenses involving violence, fraud, sexual offenses, indecency, or any similar offense. Failure to fully and completely disclose will result in YISE not proceeding with the application for employment, or disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Before any background, reference, or Internet checks are run, prospective staff will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing YISE to run these checks. If an individual declines to provide authorization, YISE shall not hire the applicant. A disqualifying offense or alleged offense discovered during these checks that would prevent an individual from working with children will be determined by the synagogue president, in consultation with the Child Safety Committee (defined below), or the president's or the committee's designee, based on the particular circumstances, including the nature of the offense. Generally, criminal charges or convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, fraud, sexual offenses, or indecency will preclude an applicant from being hired by YISE. Failure to disclose a relevant conviction or criminal charge on the application form or information that would assist YISE in discovering relevant past behavior (including withholding screen names or aliases) will also be disqualifying.

Job application forms, reference checks, and background check authorization forms and results will be maintained in confidence on file at YISE.

Required Training: In addition to the above, rabbinical staff, and personnel hired for staff positions that involve directly working with children or youth (such as those involved with child or youth programming) will be required to undergo abuse recognition and reporting training, when at all possible, prior to beginning employment at YISE. If training cannot be fulfilled in advance of employment then it shall be completed no later than 30 days after beginning employment at YISE. Staff members who provide documentation that they have taken equivalent training within the last two years may be excused from the training. The structure and content of the training will be approved by the Child Safety Committee and reviewed annually by the Child Safety Committee. Before beginning to work with children or youth, each staff member who directly works with or supervises children or youth, and group leaders must sign a statement that he or she has read, understood, and agreed to abide by this Policy.

2. *Non-trained Volunteer Positions:* Volunteers serving in a position that does not involve directly working with or supervising children or youth shall be informed of this Policy, but no formal application process or training is required.

3. *Subcontractors and Vendors:* Often, individuals in paid positions providing services at YISE (including some with direct access to children) are subcontracted through vendors and/or hired by individual synagogue members (caterers, event entertainment, party planners, etc.). Accordingly, subcontractors and vendors will be made aware of YISE's commitment to the safety of children and youth and this Policy, and will be informed that no adult should be alone with a child who is not his or her child.

D. Training and Education

YISE will strive to provide periodic training (or approve off-site opportunities for training) related to this Policy to all YISE staff and group leaders. Such training shall be strongly encouraged.

E. Workplace Guidelines

Two-Adult Rule: As a general rule, a minimum of two adults should be in attendance at each program or activity in a supervisory capacity; provided that one adult or two older youths may perform this supervisory role upon the approval of the youth director(s) or the Child Safety Committee. While these supervisors may not necessarily be in every room used for programming at a given time, except for short durations, they should remain on the same floor as the program or activity, stay within hearing distance of each room for the duration of the program or activity, and occasionally check in on the activity by rotating in and out of the program rooms and/or observing through a window or open door. In addition, it is our goal that a minimum of two group leaders be in attendance at all times when children or youth are being supervised during YISE programs and activities.

It is understood that some child or youth activities may have only one adult in attendance during the activity; in these instances, the door to the classroom or activity room should remain open or, if doing so would be disruptive (such as for a shiur), the activity should be held in a classroom or other location that has a window so that the activity can be observed from outside. In addition, when possible, these programs should occur at times during which the building is in use by others, who may drop in unannounced and sporadically. Parents are welcome to stop into any program at any time.

In all circumstances, the Open Door Policy described below shall apply.

Open Door Policy: Classroom and activity room doors shall remain open when in use unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room, except during safety drills and emergency situations during which doors must be locked. In addition, doors shall be kept locked when rooms are not in use.

No Use of Force: YISE staff, group leaders, and volunteers are prohibited from using physical punishment in any way for management of behavior of children and youth. ***No form of physical discipline is acceptable.*** Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to an individual (child, youth, group leader, or adult), and the force utilized must be the minimal amount necessary to protect the safety and well-being of the individuals present. YISE staff, group leaders, and volunteers shall not use overly harsh language, degrading punishment, or mechanical restraint of any kind for behavior management. YISE staff, group leaders, and volunteers shall not participate in or tolerate any bullying or hazing activities relating to child or youth activities.

Bathroom Guidelines: Children five years of age and younger will be escorted to the bathroom as necessary. Whenever possible, the escort should remain outside the bathroom door (or stall, if a greater level of assistance is required) and escort the children back to the activity. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the escort should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the escort should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as he or she assists the child. If the only bathroom nearby is a single room bathroom (that is, one toilet, sink, and no stalls), the escort may assist a child who needs help but in no circumstances shall he or she lock the bathroom door.

Except as provided below, for children over the age of five, at least one male group leader or adult should escort boys to the bathroom and at least one female group leader or adult should escort girls. The escort should remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the activity.

YISE recognizes that children with special needs may be particularly vulnerable to abuse. If a child with special needs requires assistance, the escort should prop open the bathroom door

and leave the stall door open as he or she assists the child. If the only bathroom nearby is a single room bathroom (that is, one toilet, sink, and no stalls), the escort may assist a child who needs help, but in no circumstances shall he or she lock the bathroom door.

Older children who are deemed by the staff present to be able to safely use the bathroom without supervision will not require escorts. For the safety of these children, two adult staff members or volunteers will together make random bathroom checks during programming hours.

For the protection of everyone, staff, group leaders, and volunteers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door locked and never be in a locked bathroom stall with a child.

Social Media: YISE staff shall not connect with YISE youth or children on social media in their personal capacity without written (including emailed) permission from a parent or guardian. This does not prevent YISE staff advertising events to youth or children via YISE social media profiles (e.g., “YISE” or “YISE Youth Minyan” rather than a staff member’s personal social media profile). At all times, a staff member may, at his or her own discretion, decline or ignore a social media request from YISE children or youth.

F. Congregant Guidelines

Supervision of and Interaction with Children: In order to ensure the safety of children at YISE, all parents should supervise their children when on YISE property. No child may be alone in a closed room with an adult who is not his or her parent. No adult should touch children or youth except their own other than on their hands.

Playroom Guidelines: The purpose of the YISE playroom is to provide a place to play for children, accompanied by their caregivers. The playroom is not an appropriate place to sit or hang out for adults unaccompanied by children. In addition, children under the age of eight shall be accompanied and supervised by a responsible adult or teenager while in the playroom.

Candy distribution: YISE’s expectation is that each minyan will have at most one designated “candy man,” approved by the synagogue president and/or Rabbi. Candy should be peanut and tree nut free and of a type not to pose a choking hazard for young children. Regardless of this policy, individual parents/guardians are at all times responsible for ensuring that the food consumed by their children is safe and appropriate for each particular child.

G. Transition Period for Current Staff, Group Leaders, and Trained Volunteers

Following adoption of this Policy, the Child Safety Committee will set a transition period for the implementation of this Policy, including providing for abuse recognition and reporting training for current YISE staff during such transition period. The Board will be notified at the completion of the transition period of revisions to the policy that should be considered in light of the experience in implementing the policy

H. Waivers/Interpretation

Any waivers of this Policy shall be made by, and any questions regarding its application or interpretation shall be referred to, the Child Safety Committee.

III. Child Safety Committee

To help administer this Policy and address related issues, YISE has established and will maintain a Child Safety Committee, which shall include at least one member of the YISE Board of Trustees, one mental health professional, and one attorney, in addition to any other individuals chosen by the synagogue president. The names of the members of the Child Safety Committee will be posted on the synagogue's website, as well as relevant contact information.

In the event of any allegation of abuse, whether involving a staff member, a group leader, or a volunteer, or otherwise occurring on the synagogue premises or during an official synagogue event off-premises, the synagogue president and the rabbi, or their designees, in consultation with the Child Safety Committee and Ombudsman Committee, shall determine what course of action to take under the circumstances, in addition to reporting the allegations to the authorities and taking all other action required by applicable law. Neither YISE, nor the Child Safety Committee, will conduct its own investigation of the allegations, but will instead refer allegations to the appropriate authorities. Any internal investigation by the synagogue shall not impede or interfere with any investigation(s) by the authorities.

Subject to the requirements of the synagogue's Constitution, potential consequences may include denial or revocation of synagogue membership, restriction of entrance onto synagogue property or areas of synagogue property, restriction of kibbudim (synagogue honors), the imposition of a shadowing requirement while on synagogue property, and/or notification to other communal institutions. In certain circumstances, restrictions due to legal protective and/or peace orders may apply while on YISE property. The synagogue may determine to take action regardless of any action or lack thereof by the authorities notified pursuant to this Policy.

The synagogue's mandate to protect children and youth extends to other situations where abuse is alleged, not only within the context of YISE staff, group leaders, and volunteers, but

also within the general membership and/or visitors, whether or not on synagogue premises. In such an event, the procedures set forth in the preceding paragraph shall similarly apply.

IV. Responding to Allegations of Abuse; Mandated Reporting

If adult staff members or volunteers suspect the occurrence of abuse, they shall report their concerns immediately to their supervisor, an Executive Board member, a member of the Ombudsman Committee, or a member of the Child Safety Committee for further action, including explaining the cause for concern, clarifying the appropriate legal procedures and requirements, and reporting the event to authorities as may be mandated by state law. If adult staff members or volunteers are unsure about the appropriate legal procedure in a specific situation, they must discuss their concerns with their supervisor, an Executive Board member, or a member of the Child Safety Committee.

Group leaders and non-adult staff members or volunteers shall report suspicions of abuse immediately to their supervisor, an Executive Board member, a member of the Ombudsman Committee, or member of the Child Safety Committee for further action.

In the event that an incident of abuse is alleged to have occurred at YISE or during YISE-sponsored programs or activities, the following additional procedures shall be followed:

- The parent or guardian of the child will be notified. If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others will be followed.
- The appropriate authorities will be notified, and YISE will fully cooperate with their investigation of the incident and comply with all applicable legal requirements.
- The person alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will be, at the judgment of the president or designee, placed on leave from working with children and instructed to remain off the synagogue premises, until such person is cleared of the alleged abuse or misconduct or it is otherwise determined that such person is safe to return.
- The opportunity for a pastoral visit or referral to a mental health professional may be made available for those affected by the incident, if desired, including the alleged victim and other involved parties.
- The Rabbi will be consulted on all halachic questions.
- The sole spokespeople for the synagogue regarding incidents addressed by this Policy will be the synagogue president, the Rabbi, and their designees.

Reports of suspected abuse of children or youth may be made confidentially or anonymously. In Maryland, all reports of suspected child abuse are immune from civil liability unless they are purposefully erroneous or malicious.

V. Distribution of Policy

This Policy will be posted on the synagogue website. This Policy will also be distributed to all current synagogue members during the transition period.

VI. Review of Policy

This Policy will be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees or a member of the Child Safety Committee.