

Sierra Service Project's

Safe Community Policy

1. Abuse Prevention
2. Non-Harassment & Anti-Discrimination
3. Responsibility & Reporting

Abuse Prevention

Our Commitment

Sierra Service Project is committed to creating and maintaining safe environments for young people and the adults and staff who work with them. This responsibility includes maintaining an environment in which all participants and staff are protected from emotional, physical, and sexual exploitation, and bullying or harassment of any kind.

Over the years, Sierra Service Project has developed a set of policies and practices aimed at creating this environment and reducing the risk to participants and staff. This policy document is a summation of those policies and practices.

Program Staff Selection and Training

SSP Program Staff employees are selected on the basis of their maturity, and their ability to function as a leader to teenagers who may be only a few years younger than they are. To serve as a program staff employee, individuals must:

1. Be at least one year out of high school / GED
2. Have a satisfactory reference(s)
3. All administrators, employees, and volunteers who are 18 years of age or older and who have direct contact with, or supervision of, children for more than 16 hours per month or 32 hours per year must complete a criminal background check through SSP. Screenings for California residents (and those participating in California) must be done through a Live Scan fingerprinting process, per California law. Results are automatically updated with any new activity as time goes on. All other participants' background checks must cover identity verification, multi-state criminal search (including the nationwide sex offender registry), county criminal search, and government sanctions and must be done at least every two years.
 - a. Individuals whose screening results include either a pending court case or a felony conviction involving violent crimes, sexual crimes, serious drug offenses, and crimes involving children will have their job offer revoked. Misdemeanors may also result in having the job offer revoked.
4. Provide a current copy of their driving record. Driving-related incidents may result in a non-driving staff position.

In assigning staff to site teams, we will ensure that every team contains staff employees of a variety of gender identities.

During staff training, all employees will undergo the following training:

1. Review of emergency procedures
2. Mandated Reporting
3. CPR/First Aid Certification
4. SSP's Safe Community Policy
5. SSP's guidelines on appropriate physical contact as outlined within this policy

Adult Participant Screening and Orientation

It is the responsibility of participating groups to select mature, committed, and responsible adults to accompany their youth and participate in SSP. Sierra Service Project will enforce the following policies with regard to adult participants:

1. All adult participants participating in youth-focused programs must be at least 23 years old unless they have been specifically approved by SSP's office. In approving exceptions to this policy, SSP will ask the group liaison to confirm that the participant is actively involved with youth and is a mature adult.
2. All administrators, employees, and volunteers who are 18 years of age or older and who have direct contact with, or supervision of, children for more than 16 hours per month or 32 hours per year must complete a criminal background check through SSP. Screenings for California residents (and those participating in California) must be done through a Live Scan fingerprinting process, per California law. Results are automatically updated with any new activity as time goes on. All other participants' background checks must cover identity verification, multi-state criminal search (including the nationwide sex offender registry), county criminal search, and government sanctions and must be done at least every two years.
 - a. Individuals whose screening results include a felony conviction involving violent crimes, sexual crimes, serious drug offenses, and crimes involving children will not be allowed to participate. Misdemeanors will be reviewed before approving participation. Driving-related incidents may result in a non-driving participant role.
 - b. Participants with pending court cases will be asked not to participate at SSP until all charges are resolved and a new screening is completed.
3. Before their program date, all adult participants are required to complete mandated reporter training.

At the beginning of each week at SSP, adult participants will be given a presentation and handout about SSP's Safe Community Policy.

Guidelines for Physical Contact Between Adults and Youth

Appropriate and caring physical contact is very important to the healthy development of young people, and can be a powerful way to affirm youth. Teens are often lacking healthy expressions of this in their own lives, so this is encouraged at SSP. Examples of appropriate physical contact between adults and young people are:

1. A response to the youth's need for comfort, encouragement, or affirmation, rather than the adult's emotional need.
2. Asking for verbal consent before any physical contact is initiated by the adult.
3. Shaking hands
4. High-fives
5. Fist bumps
6. Sideways shoulder hugs
7. Touching the upper back, arms, or elbows
8. Loose or A-frame hugs (with space between both people)

Teens can often be more comfortable with people they have known prior to their SSP session, but may not necessarily want to engage in physical contact. In any case, the following kinds of contact between adults and youth are inappropriate, can be invasive, and can easily lead to misunderstandings or feelings of being unsafe. These kinds of behaviors are not acceptable:

1. Any physical contact that an individual has expressed any level of discomfort with, whether verbal or non-verbal.
2. Patting on the head
3. Picking others up
4. One-to-one hand-holding or massaging
5. Lap sitting
6. Touching on the chest, hips, waist, legs, or buttocks
7. Butt slapping
8. Kissing

These guidelines regarding physical contact apply regardless of the gender identities of the people involved.

Youth Behavior

Sierra Service Project understands that maintaining a safe and harassment-free environment entails enforcing standards of behavior for teenage participants as well as staff and adults. Youth are expected to follow the same guidelines for physical contact as listed above.

Open Space Rule

At SSP, we want to eliminate situations where abuse is possible and situations which make an allegation of abuse possible. The Open Space Rule involves the following:

1. All gatherings of small groups of individuals will take place in open areas which are clearly visible to people not involved in the activity.
2. Private conversations involving one adult and one youth **will always** take place in an open area clearly visible to other people.
3. **Rule of Threes:** A single adult (staff or adult participant) will not be alone with a single youth unless there is another youth or adult present.

The only exception to the Open Space Rule includes youth who are alone with their parent or legal guardian.

Sleeping Arrangements

Every site's sleeping arrangements are different. No activity is allowed after "lights out." The SSP community honors the identities of transgender and gender nonconforming volunteers. Adults are asked to place themselves near entrances and the perimeter of sleeping quarters to ensure adequate safety and supervision for youth. Guests must undergo a background screening if they are staying overnight when youth are present.

Showers

Arrangements are made at each site so that participating youth and adult participants do not share group showers. However, there may be situations at public facilities, such as at a YMCA, in which youth and adults who are not part of SSP are in shower areas at the same time. In these instances, participating SSP youth will accompany each other to the shower areas in groups of three. SSP honors the identities of transgender and gender nonconforming volunteers and we do our best to accommodate shower needs.

Non-Harassment & Anti-Discrimination

Sierra Service Project is committed to providing a safe working environment for its employees and participants. This includes an environment that is free of harassment or any unlawful conduct. Accordingly, SSP will not tolerate any harassment or discrimination based on protected status which affects benefits, affects anyone's ability to work or participate effectively, or which creates an intimidating, offensive, or hostile environment.

Coverage

This policy applies to all relationships in the workplace and SSP programs, including employees, managers, supervisors, officers, directors, vendors, participants, and applicants.

Prohibited Conduct

Conduct prohibited by this policy - whether verbal, physical, or visual - includes any harassment, discrimination, or unwelcome conduct that is based on an individual's race, color, religious creed, sex, gender (which includes gender identity or expression and transgender identity), pregnancy, childbirth or related medical condition, and gender stereotyping), national origin (actual or perceived), age (40 and above), disability, ancestry, medical condition, marital status, military or veteran status, citizenship status, sexual orientation, genetic information, association with others who are in a protected class, or any other basis protected by federal, state, or local law.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a problem that deserves special mention. Harassing conduct based on gender often is sexual in nature, but sometimes is not. This policy forbids harassment based on gender regardless of whether the offensive conduct is sexual in nature. Any unwelcome conduct based on gender identity is also forbidden by this policy, regardless of whether the individual engaged in harassment and the individual being harassed are of the same or are of different gender identities.

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, physical, or visual conduct based on sex constitute unlawful sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct becomes an implicit or explicit term or condition of employment or program participation, (2) submission to or rejection of the conduct is used as the basis for any decision about employment or program participation, or (3) the conduct has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

Prohibited Behavior

While it is impossible to list all incidents that may violate this policy, some examples of behavior specifically prohibited by this policy are:

- Bullying
- Cyber-bullying or other forms of online harassment, even when occurring after return from SSP
- Verbal kidding, teasing, or joking of a sexual or racial nature, or which is related to any protected class
- Visual conduct including leering, making sexual gestures, or the display of sexually offensive objects or posters
- Epithets, slurs, or negative stereotyping
- Graphic or degrading sexually-oriented comments about a person's appearance or sexual activity
- Suggestive or obscene letters, notes, or invitations
- Intimidating acts, and the circulation or posting of written or graphic materials that show hostility against individuals because of their protected status
- Repeated unwelcome sexual flirtations or advances
- Offensive physical contact such as grabbing, patting, or pinching

Responsibility & Reporting

Everyone at SSP can help to ensure that our workplace and community are free from discrimination and harassment by not engaging in behavior or conduct that could reasonably be interpreted as prohibited.

Mandated Reporting

All administrators, employees, and volunteers who are 18 years of age or older and who have direct contact with, or supervision of, children for more than 16 hours per month or 32 hours per year must complete [child abuse and neglect reporting training](#). Employees are legally mandated reporters and must submit a report to the appropriate state Child Welfare Services agency if they have reasonable cause to suspect a child is a victim of abuse or neglect. If any staff person has reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect, that person must be the one to file a report. In the event that two or more mandated reporters are involved, a joint report can be filed.

Because SSP participants come from and serve in a variety of states, the reporting process varies by situation. In all cases of filing a report with the state, staff are asked to communicate with the SSP office to ensure all proper channels are being used, and for support in responding appropriately to each situation.

In addition, all volunteers are encouraged to file a report with the relevant state entities if they have reasonable suspicion that a minor is experiencing abuse or neglect.

Whistle Blower Policy

It is the responsibility of all board members, officers, employees, and participants to report concerns about violations of Sierra Service Project's code of ethics, suspected violations of law, or regulations that govern SSP's operations.

It is contrary to the values of Sierra Service Project for anyone to retaliate against any board member, officer, employee, or participant who in good faith reports an ethics violation, or a suspected violation of law, such as a complaint of discrimination, or suspected fraud, or suspected violation of any regulation governing the operations of SSP. An employee who retaliates against someone, who in good faith has reported a violation, is subject to discipline up to and including termination of employment.

Anyone filing a written complaint concerning a violation or suspected violation must be acting in good faith and have reasonable grounds for believing the information disclosed indicates a violation. Any allegations that prove not to be substantiated and which prove to have been made maliciously or knowingly to be false will be viewed as a serious disciplinary offense.

Sierra Service Project's Executive Director or the Chair of SSP's Board of Directors shall immediately notify the Finance Committee of any concerns or complaints regarding corporate accounting practices, internal controls, or auditing and work with the committee until the matter is resolved.

Internal Reporting Process

In addition to the laws around mandated reporting, SSP policy asks staff members and participants to report any incidents of inappropriate or prohibited behavior.

If you believe that another person is engaging in prohibited or inappropriate conduct, you are encouraged to tell that person in a clear manner that their conduct is unwelcome and that you want it to stop. If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe doing so, or you have expressed discomfort without seeing a change in behavior, you must notify your local Site Director, the SSP Executive Director, the Chair of the SSP Board of Directors, or the Chair of the SSP Personnel Committee.

When reporting inappropriate or prohibited conduct to SSP, it is encouraged, but not required, that you submit a written statement with information related to the following questions:

1. Who is the individual(s) in question engaging in the inappropriate or prohibited behavior(s)?
2. Who is the individual(s) that was affected by the inappropriate or prohibited behavior(s)?
3. Are any of the individuals under 18 years of age? If so, who?
4. What is (are) the inappropriate or prohibited behavior(s)?
5. At any point, were you concerned for your safety or the safety of others?
6. Was it a singular occurrence? If it is ongoing, how frequently?
7. When did the first occurrence take place?
8. Where did the inappropriate or prohibited behavior(s) take place?
9. Who witnessed the inappropriate or prohibited behavior(s)?
10. Was it addressed with the individual(s) in question?

11. How many times has it been addressed with the individual(s) in question?
12. Who addressed it with the individual(s) in question?
13. Was it in writing or verbally discussed?
14. Did it continue?
15. Any additional background information and details.

Reporting an incident to SSP involving someone under 18 years of age in which abuse is suspected or known does not replace the legal requirement for mandated reporters. If a minor is involved, please see the mandated reporting section for reporting requirements.

If you have experienced or witnessed inappropriate or prohibited behavior, you must report it to your local Site Director or:

SSP's Executive Director

- Megan Taylor 916-488-6441, director@sierraserviceproject.org
- P.O. Box 13009, Sacramento, CA 95813

If you are not comfortable reporting to the Executive Director, report to either:

Chair of the SSP Board of Directors

- Cindy Chow-Snavely 626-641-5583, cindychowsnavely@gmail.com

Chair of the SSP Personnel Committee

- Debbie Oshman 925-683-2023, debbieoshman@gmail.com

Employees may additionally notify a public agency such as the [California Civil Rights Department](#) or the [Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#).

Response to Internal Reports

The Executive Director, the Chair of the SSP Board of Directors, or the Chair of the SSP Personnel Committee will respond to a report of inappropriate or prohibited behavior(s) as soon as possible, and will conduct a fair, impartial, timely, and thorough investigation that will be documented and tracked to provide all parties with appropriate due process. Additional designees may be involved for follow-up discussions.

Although every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of all parties involved, SSP cannot guarantee confidentiality when responding to a report of inappropriate or prohibited behavior(s). Upon finding a reasonable conclusion, appropriate options will be reviewed and undertaken to resolve the matter, up to and including termination of employment or participation.

In most cases, the Executive Director and the Site Director will take action and respond to reports involving youth, adult participants, and program staff. The consequences will be in scale to the severity of the inappropriate or prohibited behavior. For incidents involving full-time employee-to-employee reports, the Executive Director and Chair of the Personnel Committee will take action and respond.