Implementing the Shambhala Child Protection Policy with a View Toward Preventing Abuse

View

The "view" that inspires these recommendations is that Shambhala programs where children participate should be designed to prevent child abuse from occurring. Such abuse could be physical, emotional, sexual, or spiritual. It is essential that each young person’s essential nature is treasured and has the opportunity to bloom.

Practice

This section describes the overall approach as well as specific core practices that serve as barriers to abuse in Shambhala programs where children are participating. A list of "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)" offers suggestions on how specific situations might be handled and provides some resources to help with implementing the CPP in your local environment.

These recommendations are intended to help prevent many types of abuse by eliminating the conditions where they are most apt to occur. However, their effectiveness will vary depending on the nature of the abuse. Some aspects of the CPP focus specifically on Child Sexual Abuse. Leaders implementing the CPP should be aware that mandatory abuse reporting requirements may include types of abuse in addition to child sexual abuse.

This set of recommendations is NOT an official Shambhala policy. The guidance has been created by a group of volunteers to help Shambhala leaders, staff, volunteers and families offer and participate in programs where children are held in a safe and supportive container. This implementation guidance will be expanded and updated as Shambhala develops more experience implementing the CPP. Please refer to the "Caveats" section near the end of this document for a partial list of topics that are NOT addressed here.

Approach

This document recommends practices designed to eliminate opportunities where child abuse could occur during Shambhala programs. Many of these recommendations are
modeled after the Youth Protection Program of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). The Youth Protection Program (YPP) establishes core policies that create barriers to abuse. The BSA policies have been refined by 30+ years of experience and have reduced new incidents of child abuse by adults in BSA to near zero.

The intention is that these recommendations should be implemented in the context of the Shambhala vision of basic goodness. Wisdom and compassion are the tools that help discern the proper action in a specific situation. By adapting practices from the BSA Youth Protection Program, but interpreting them in the context of the Shambhala vision, Shambhala can be confident that they will still be effective in preventing abuse, but will allow leaders to respond to specific situations skillfully.

**Core Practices (Barriers to Abuse)**

**Adequate Adult Supervision**

Abuse during youth programs is most apt to happen when there is one-on-one interaction between a child and an adult who is not their parent or legal guardian. By designing programs to eliminate this type of unsupervised one-on-one contact, we can significantly reduce the opportunity for abuse to occur.

- There should be at least two adults present with each group of children during any program. At least one of the adults should have completed the background check process and have received training in the CPP and in these recommendations. Ensuring that two adults are present also serves to protect adults from potential false accusations of abuse.
- Children needing assistance or supervision to use the bathroom should be accompanied by their parent or their parents’ designee, rather than another adult or older child.
- Refer to the “FAQ” section for additional guidance.

**Leader Selection and Background Checks**

Screening interviews and background checks are important safeguards that may reveal potential issues that should be considered before allowing someone to work with children during Shambhala programs.

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1 The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) and the organization that created their Youth Protection guidelines have granted permission for Shambhala (and other youth-serving nonprofit organizations) to copy, utilize and adapt the policies and resources of the BSA Youth Protection Program for their own use.
Screening Interviews

Shambhala Families & Children leaders should meet with all potential new children’s program volunteers and paid staff to explain the view, aspiration, and content of the programs where they may be participating. Some suggested agenda items are listed below.

- It is often helpful to ask why an applicant is interested in helping with the program and to learn about their relevant experience working with children.
- Cover all of the points listed in the “Community-wide Training” section below.
- Explain that ongoing children’s program volunteers are required to complete a background check and are required to self-report any history that may be relevant.

Consider inviting the new candidates to participate as an assistant at the next children's gathering. Be aware of how they interact with the youth and other leaders and notice any concerns. Ask them to share their experience after the program.

Background Checks

The Shambhala Child Protection Policy requires background checks “for those people who are assigned responsibility for working with children." Background checks help reveal aspects of a person’s past conduct that may be cause for concern. The CPP describes how to proceed when potential issues are identified and offers a path of dialog to decide if and/or how the person should be allowed to participate. By itself, the background check requirement may be sufficient to dissuade would-be abusers from applying.

When the Families & Children and/or other Center leaders have screened a potential new staff member or volunteer, the local person responsible for background checks will contact the candidate with the information necessary to complete the background check process.

While waiting for a background check to be completed, a person may continue to participate as a volunteer as long as another background-checked staff member or volunteer is present, and no other concerns have been observed or reported.

Refer to the Background Check Protocols published on the Code of Conduct Hub at the location listed below for details about the process.

https://code-of-conduct.shambhala.org/process/background-checks/

After passing a background check and completing the training below, each volunteer or paid Families & Children staff member may be considered “Qualified Children’s Staff.”
Training

Another essential component of a successful child protection program is educating the leaders, volunteers, parents, children, and community members on the Core Practices for safeguarding children.

Community-wide Training

- Training should include one-on-one or group discussions on essential aspects of the CPP.
  - The CPP is already in effect as of February 26, 2020. The official policy and supporting materials are available on the Code of Conduct Hub website. (See above. Consider posting a link to the CoC Hub on your local website.)
  - The CPP defines a child as anyone under the age of 18.
  - Background checks are required for people assigned responsibility for working with children.
  - Anyone who observes certain types of abuse may be required (by law) to report the incident to local authorities. If they are unsure if mandatory reporting applies, they should report it to local Shambhala leadership.
  - Everyone should know where they can look to find local reporting requirements and the contact information for both Shambhala leadership and local authorities. Include this information on your local website and physical bulletin boards. (Refer to the FAQ section for resources to help determine mandatory reporting requirements in your location.)
- These Core Practices for preventing abuse should be described to everyone in the local Shambhala community. In particular, they should understand that private one-on-one interaction between a child and an adult who is “unrelated” (not their parent or designated guardian) is a concern. (Refer to the FAQ for additional guidance.)

Additional Training for Families & Children Leaders & Volunteers

- All adult staff and volunteers should receive additional training before working with children.
- The “Screening Interview” should include the elements of “Community-wide Training.”
- Leader/volunteer training should include additional one-on-one or group discussions on more detailed aspects of the CPP.
  - All staff/volunteers should understand sections 5.1-5.5 of the CPP.
    - Make a special note of the record-keeping requirements and be sure program leaders know who will be responsible for recording the adults participating in each program.
Review Sections 2.4 and 3 of the CPP so that leaders understand what constitutes “sexual activity” and where and when the CPP applies.

Review Section 4 of the CPP and be sure that people working with children understand how to respond when there is a report of abuse.

- All staff/volunteers should understand the mandatory reporting requirements for your location.
- They should also understand the process that Shambhala follows in response to reported abuse, so they can explain what to expect to the interested parties.
- If a person observes an incident or receives a report of alleged abuse, they should carefully document the report and collect contact information for the person reporting the abuse. This information is confidential and should be given to the appropriate authorities if they are contacted and to the Shambhala leadership responsible for handling abuse complaints as soon as possible.
- A child should NOT be interviewed about any details of the incident until a qualified professional is available to conduct the interview according to the Shambhala CPP protocols.
- If the person receiving the report is able to confirm that there was some type of interaction between the child and the alleged abuser, record who confirmed the interaction along with their contact information.
- Gather contact information for any other people who may have knowledge of the incident.
- NOTE: In many locations, people are allowed to submit anonymous reports of alleged child abuse. At the moment, Shambhala does not have an internal process for receiving anonymous reports. If someone inquires about submitting an anonymous report, it would be appropriate to refer them to the proper local authorities to find out how to submit an anonymous report.

Youth Training

- Ideally, Shambhala would offer age-appropriate training to participating children to help them recognize situations where an adult is asking them to do inappropriate things or create a “special” relationship that should be kept secret from other people. Developing Shambhala-specific training may not be cost-effective, but other organizations have likely created training that could be helpful. If you are aware of such resources, please contact the Shambhala Director of Community Care and Conduct.
Action

Dissemination

We suggest that these recommendations be posted on Shambhala Global and Center web sites and be included in the training for those working with children.

Training

Refer to the “Training” section above for details on the suggested training for the community at large, for families & children program leaders, and (eventually) for Shambhala youth. All adults should receive at least the basic “Community-wide Training” before interacting with unrelated children.

Compliance

It is the responsibility of local leadership (e.g. the Center’s Director of Community Care and Conduct or program equivalent) to ensure that all with responsibility for children’s programs have training as “Qualified Children’s Staff.” Center leadership should also keep records of background checks and training status.

Record Keeping

The CPP requires all programs to keep a record of volunteers and staff members who are present during activities with children. Determine who is responsible for keeping these records and how they will be stored. These records will be essential when reports of alleged abuse are received.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- **Who is required to have a background check?**
  - Staff and volunteers who are **assigned responsibility** for working with children during any Shambhala program.
- **Who is recommended to have a background check?**
  - All staff and volunteers who will be working with children on an ongoing basis should have a background check. Having more people who have completed background checks makes it easier to staff programs so that at least one adult with each group has completed a background check.
  - Parents who only participate with their children do not need to have background checks. However, it is helpful if parents who attend regularly do complete background checks, as this allows them to step in if the leader needs to leave for some reason.
Most of our leaders and families have been friends for a long time. Do we really need to have background checks?

- Longstanding familiarity with a person is NOT a substitute for completing a background check. It is common for abusers to be well known to their victims. They may even be long-term family friends.

What if we are short on staff?

- A parent can serve as the second adult, so long as there is a “Qualified Children’s Staff” member who accepts the responsibility of supervising the activity.
- If you have more than one group of children, but do not have enough staff for each group to have at least two adults, plan your activities to be in a common space where adults can observe the activities of other groups.

Can any one-on-one conversations occur between adults and children?

- There are situations where it is appropriate for a child to have a "private" conversation with an adult who is not their parent or guardian. For example, an older child may be taking one of the Shambhala “Levels” where participants meet privately with a Meditation Instructor as part of the program.
- The recommended solution is to have these "private" conversations occur in a public area where other adults can observe (but not hear) the conversation.
- [ONLINE] It is more difficult to facilitate a one-on-one conversation with supervision in an online (e.g. Zoom) setting.
  - If the child is participating from home, you can contact an adult in the home and ask them to observe any one-on-one meetings from a distance where they can see, but not hear the interaction.
  - Another approach is to allow the one-on-one meeting, but to require the adult to record the meeting and to forward the recording to the designated Families & Children contact for the program.

What if a child registers for a program that is not specifically tailored to families & children? What are the guidelines?

- Ideally, someone who is a “Qualified Children’s Staff” member would attend the program and be assigned responsibility for working with any children who are participating. It would not need to be the person responsible for the overall program.
- If nobody with a background check is available, the fundamental practice that serves as a barrier to abuse is to eliminate unsupervised one-on-one interaction between a child and an adult who is not their parent or legal guardian.
  - If the program is being held in-person and everyone will remain in the same room, you could potentially still have dyads. In that case, the other people in the room can observe the interaction without
listening. However a triad or other “small group” discussion is often more appropriate when children are participating.

- In an online setting consider small-group discussions instead of dyads or use the “recording” option listed in the question about one-on-one meetings.

- We are planning a field-trip to a local park, museum, etc. How do we handle transportation?
  - If children travel in a group (e.g. in a car, walking, biking, or on public transit) in which their parent or guardian is not present, a second adult should be present. Be sure you have enough adults present to ensure adequate supervision throughout the trip.
  - NOTE: Field trips require additional planning and preparation. Always consider whether you should collect signed permission forms from the parents/guardians. (Even better, invite them along.) Be sure that participants wear appropriate clothing and bring necessary supplies (water, sunscreen, etc.).

Additional Resources

- How can I find out about mandatory reporting requirements in my location?
  - In USA:
    - Child Welfare Information Gateway
      https://www.childwelfare.gov/
    - Mandatory Reporters (all states, PDF)
      https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/manda.pdf
    - State Child Abuse Reporting Phone Numbers
      https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction=rols:main.dspList&rolType=custom&rs_id=5
  - In Canada:
    - Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal
      https://cwrp.ca/
  - In other countries, consult your background check provider or your local authorities for additional information.

Selected Caveats

- For the most part, these recommendations assume that programs are being offered in person. The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted most programs online as of the time of this writing.
- These recommendations do NOT address additional risks associated with residential programs, nor situations outside of the context of Shambhala programming.
- Children’s staff members should be aware that children may be at risk for abuse during activities involving Shambhalians that occur in homes or other situations. In such off-site contexts, the “two adult principle” should be adhered to, and overnight events avoided.
- These recommendations do NOT address guidelines for phone/text conversations or social media connections between children and adults (or between children)
- Neither the CPP or these recommendations address sexual activity or any type of abuse between children under 18 years old.
- In some jurisdictions, additional certifications and staff training is required for youth “day camps” and residential camping programs.

_Prepared by the CPP Implementation Working Group_

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_Revisions:_

2020-10-24 - Initial external release to Shambhala Office of Care and Conduct.