

The Girls Friendly Society in the United States of America

Standards, Guidelines, Sexual Misconduct Policies

1995

Purpose

The Girls Friendly Society takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and secure environment for all participants in all GFS activities. The fundamental basis for all that follows rests on what it means to uphold the standards of Christian respect and dignity in all relationships. To this end, the National Board of the GFS/USA has adapted these standards to protect all children, youth and adult participants. These standards will be in place and used at all activities involving children and/or youth. The National Board encourages all branches to adopt similar policies for their events. Of particular note are the standards that deal with abuse and sexual misconduct. These guidelines are designed to promote a safe Christian community while minimizing the opportunity for misconduct to occur. Any and all allegations will be taken seriously and a uniform protocol will be used to ensure justice and consistency.

We also recognize the possibility that wrongful allegations may occur. Therefore, a shared approach involving the priest, bishop, legal, mental health, and pastoral approaches is highly desirable. Open communication between all involved will be encouraged, while respecting privacy, which precludes involving anyone who is not directly involved or needed in evaluating a case. Anyone interested in further information regarding these standards may contact the National GFS Board. We are committed to continuing dialogue and communication on all of these issues. These standards will be evaluated and updated as needed.

Standards

These standards apply to all GFS events that involve youth. For the purposes of this document, youth is understood to be any person below the age of 18. Adults are understood as ages 18 and above. Only adults may be leaders.

- 1) No person attending any GFS event is to be physically, emotionally, or sexually abused. Physical abuse is defined as bodily injury of one person by another. Emotional Abuse is the devaluing of another such as name calling or indicating to another that she is worthless. Sexual abuse is any sexual activity between a youth and adult or between youth when there is an unequal distribution of power, such as when one person is significantly older or larger. In addition, sexual misconduct will not be tolerated. Sexual misconduct includes sexual abuse, exposing a youth to a sexually provocative material, inappropriate physical exposure by an adult to a youth, etc.
- 2) Illegal drugs and alcohol may not be used by or be in possession of any adults or youth at GFS activities. Anyone found with these substances will be excluded from the activity and sent home.
- 3) All GFS youth activities prohibit smoking.
- 4) Youth left at a site for an activity are required to remain there under the supervision of the leaders until they have been picked up by their parents or guardians. GFS leaders who participate in the activity and bring their youth to an event are required to maintain supervision of the youth.
- 5) No one will be discriminated against at any GFS activity on the basis of their race, color, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability, origin, ancestry or religion.
- 6) No youth event in GFS shall have less than two adult leaders. At the minimum, the National Church standard of one adult for every ten youth will be followed.

- 7) Adult leaders are to avoid dropping of and/or picking up youth without being accompanied by another adult. Families are encouraged to arrange their own transportation.
- 8) At times when one on one interaction with youth cannot be avoided, another adult is to be present or at least aware of the place of consultation and who is being counseled. Every attempt will be made for counseling to take place in a public place such as a corner away but in clear view of others. Seclusion is to be avoided.
- 9) All youth must have parental/guardian permission to attend GFS events.
- 10) All adult leaders are to refrain from giving personal gifts or money privately to youth without first consulting the parents or the GFS diocesan Board.
- 11) No GFS event is to function with a closed door policy. Clergy, parents, church staff and members of the congregation all have a right to observe any activity any time.
- 12) GFS leaders will meet openly to discuss problems, accountability, policy clarification, personal feeling and issues that interfere with GFS ministry efforts.
- 13) All adult workers should be screened. An interview with the GFS Branch Advisor and clergy, the checking of references and a probation period is recommended.
- 14) A person convicted of prior incidents of sexual misconduct or abuse will not be used in any capacity for GFS programs. Any person who is accused of improper behavior is to be removed from positions that would give them access to members, until the situation is resolved.
- 15) No one is to strike or hit anyone at any time. No weapons of any kind are to be brought to GFS meetings or activities. Anyone in possession any weapon will be sent home.
- 16) No one is to be deprived of the basic human needs of food, shelter, sleep or clothing at any GFS activity.
- 17) Any person who believes she has experienced improper behavior is strongly encourage to report it to the proper legal authorizes, an adult advisor and/or the parish priest as soon as possible. Any advisor who receives a report of any suspected or actual misconduct or abuse must report it to the diocese within 72 hours. If anyone has question about a specific situation and whether to report it, she is encourage to report it anyway. Questions may be direct to the child abuse hot line.

Protocol

1. In addition to the appropriate legal authorities, a report should go to a bishop in the diocese. All reports of improper conduct or abuse, whether from conversation, phone call or letter – accidental or purposeful - must be reported to a bishop immediately and forwards to a bishop in writing within 72 hours of the verbal report. All allegations will be handled professionally and be kept strictly confidential.
2. Reports should include the following information:
 - Name of the person making the report – address, position and telephone number
 - Name of the alleged victim – address, date of birth and telephone number
 - Names of the alleged victim’s parents or guardians
 - Name of the alleged offender – address, position and telephone number
 - Detailed report of time, place and descriptions of the event
 - Physical, behavioral and any other indicators, observed, reported or know
 - Signature and date of person making the report
3. The bishop will meet with all of those involved. At the Bishop’s discretion, such meetings may involve other staff member or consultants as deemed necessary. The bishop will detail the next steps at the end of the meeting.