

# **Society of Young Magicians**

## **YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY**

### **Non-Discrimination**

SYM membership is open to youth from the age of seven *through* the age of 17 with a demonstrated, serious interest in magic who are able to function age-appropriately in a cooperative group environment. The S.A.M. and the SYM complies with all applicable anti-discrimination laws and does not illegally discriminate against or give preferential treatment to any individual or group on the basis of age, race, gender, color, economic status, ethnicity, linguistic heritage, cultural background, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability or ability, medical condition, religious creed, marital status, employment status, housing status, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other characteristic, status or distinction that is protected by law in the selection of members and volunteers for SYMs youth programs and services. The SYM is committed to providing a balanced, safe and educational environment for all participants and volunteers. SYM firmly believes that everyone should be treated equally and fairly.

### **Youth Protection**

The SYM strives to create a safe and secure environment for its youth participants. We encourage participants and parents who may have concerns to let us know so we can ensure the issues are addressed. The guidelines and procedures set forth below represent our effort to ensure all SYM leaders, volunteers and youth members understand the expectations of the SYM. All SYM Assemblies are responsible for creating their own Youth Protection Policies and adhering to them; the following guidelines and procedures apply to everyone, including leaders, volunteers and SYM members.

### **Zero Tolerance Policy Against Abuse**

Abuse of any kind shall not be permitted within our organization. SYM does not tolerate any form of abuse, whether physical, sexual, emotional or verbal, or any other misconduct from our leaders, volunteers or youth members. Physical or sexual abuse is strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, hitting, kicking, biting, spitting, indecent gesturing, lewd remarks, indecent exposure, unwanted physical contact, any form of sexual contact or inappropriate touching, innuendo or suggestions. Emotional or verbal abuse is strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of foul, demeaning, threatening or bullying language or making abusive statements about a person's race, gender, religion, nationality, color, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age or any other characteristic.

### **Barriers to Abuse**

Every activity sponsored by the SYM should be monitored to ensure no youth or group of youth is alone without an SYM leader or other approved adult. Unless an emergency exists, no adult shall take a youth alone to bathrooms or any other secluded setting. When traveling with youth participants, youth should be paired with other youth of the same gender and similar age group. Sleeping, bathing and clothes-changing accommodations must respect the privacy of the youth. Youth shall be empowered to trust their feelings, and SYM leaders and volunteers shall make clear that their concerns are important by listening to them. Open communication between youth and parents or between youth and other adults in the organization may help reveal early warning signs of abuse.

### **Mandatory Reporting of Abuse**

Part of your leadership responsibility is to be alert to any activity or condition that could threaten the safety of our youth. All persons involved with SYM shall immediately report to local law enforcement authorities any good faith suspicion or belief that a youth is—or has been—physically, sexually or emotionally abused or neglected or exposed to any form of violence, threat or sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation includes the possession, manufacture or distribution of youth pornography, online solicitation, enticement, or showing of obscene material.

The reporting party shall also submit a written report to the SYM Executive Director within 24 hours of first notification. The report shall include a narrative of the reported abuse or concerns, actions taken by the reporting party, witnesses to any inappropriate conduct, and any other relevant information. Finally, leaders, volunteers and SYM members are encouraged to contact the S.A.M. National Administrator to address any questions about this policy, its purpose, or the SYM's expectations.

### **Responding to Reports of Abuse**

The SYM will respond promptly to any and all allegations of abuse within this organization. Information will be communicated to law enforcement authorities for investigation and shall be reviewed by the organization's directors. The alleged offender may be notified of the allegations and dealt with appropriately, after consideration given to guidance by law enforcement authorities or other professionals on appropriate notification measures.

Any person accused of sexual or physical abuse may be asked to resign voluntarily. If the accused member does not resign voluntarily, a majority vote during an executive session at any regular or special meeting of the S.A.M. National Council may suspend that member immediately, until further notice. Such suspension may occur regardless of any civil or criminal finding relating to the alleged abuse because the continued presence of the accused person could damage the reputation of the organization and could be construed as being harmful to the participants.

An accused person who is later cleared of the charges may apply to be reinstated within the organization. Reinstatement is not a right, however, and the S.A.M. makes no guarantee that he or she will be reinstated to his or her former role.

### **Mandatory Youth Protection Policies include:**

- Two-deep leadership (2 adults at all activities, at least one must be active adult S.A.M. member)
- No one-on-one contact
- Respect of privacy
- Separate accommodations
- No secret organizations
- Appropriate attire
- Constructive discipline
- Youth leader training and supervision
- Member responsibility
- Parent Responsibility
- Assembly responsibilities
- Prohibition of hazing
- Prohibition of bullying

All SYM leaders and volunteers must comply with these policies. Violations of these policies put the S.A.M. and SYM at risk and will result in disciplinary action, including expulsion from participating in SYM activities and revocation of membership in the S.A.M.

### **Meeting the Needs of Child Abuse Victims**

At some point, an SYM member may confide in you or tell you that they have been abused.

- DON'T panic or overreact to the information disclosed by the child.
- DON'T criticize the child.
- DON'T promise not to tell anyone.
- DO listen intently and obey the no one-on-one contact policy.
- DO respect the child's privacy.
- DO make sure the child feels that he or she is not to blame.

### **Sexual Molestation by Adults**

Child molesters are the people who sexually abuse and exploit children. They are usually not strangers but are most often adults or other juveniles who were trusted and known to or by the children they victimize. The SYM Youth Protection policies are designed to help you detect inappropriate behavior of molesters.

There are several methods child molesters use to persuade children to give in to molestation. Although force is used in a few cases, molesters most often use a "grooming" process. The grooming process is usually focused on the child's needs and vulnerabilities, but may often focus on the child's parents as well. The molester might offer the parents free babysitting services or make friends with them to gain their trust to be alone with the child. Characteristically, the grooming process with the child will begin with seeming innocent touching, such as nonsexual hugging, patting the back, and massaging the neck. The molester usually seeks a child who needs affection or attention and makes that child feel special by spending a lot of time with them and by giving gifts and money. The goal of this extra attention is to build the child's (and parents') trust.

When the molester senses that the child has been sufficiently conditioned to the physical contact and has an emotional bond, the physical contact becomes more intrusive. The contact may be under the guise of sex education or playing inappropriate games. It may prey on the child's emerging curiosity about sexuality or allow the targeted victim taboo access, i.e., violating rules, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes—all to create a "special relationship." Photography is often used, perhaps under the ruse of having the child pose for pictures. Molesters are skilled at manipulating children by incorporating the child's ambitions into their strategies. When an adult looks for opportunities to spend a lot of time alone with a child, attempts to isolate the child, or lavishes gifts and/or money on a child for no apparent reason, the child's SYM leader, assistant leaders and appointed volunteers need to intervene.

### **Sexual Molestation by Other Youth**

Approximately one-third of sexual molestation occurs at the hands of other children. Youth four to seven years older than the target victim might manipulate the younger child with coercion, size, or knowledge difference. If a child tells you about club initiations, gangs or the use of intimidation or coercion or bullying in which sexual activity is included, or if a child tells you about inappropriate sexual activity by other children, whether by deception, pressure, or force, this is a form of sexual abuse and you need to take steps to stop the activity by reporting it to the SYM leader or assistant leader. This form of sexual misconduct is serious and cannot be ignored. Children who molest other children need professional help. This activity is not just "kids being kids." It must be stopped and reported immediately to the SYM leader.

### **Youth Protection Strategies for Youth Members**

The Society of American Magicians has adopted age-appropriate personal safety messages for our youth. For all SYM members, we stress the 4 Rules for Personal Safety. For teenage SYM members, we teach the "3 R's" of personal safety.

**The 4 Rules of Personal Safety** encourage all children to seek adult help in making personal safety decisions. The rules are as follows:

1. Check first with a parent or another trusted adult before changing plans or accepting anything from anyone.
2. Go with a friend in order to be safer and to have more fun. For SYM members, the friend s. should be a parent, another trusted adult, or an older child approved by the parents.
3. It is my body, and I have the right to say “No” to anyone who tries to touch me anywhere that makes me feel uncomfortable or to do things that I think are wrong.
4. Tell a trusted adult whenever I am hurt, scared, or made to feel uncomfortable.

### **3 R’s of Personal Safety**

1. Recognize that anyone could be a child molester and be aware of situations that could lead to abuse.
2. Resist advances made by child molesters to avoid being molested.
3. Report molestation or attempted molestation to a trusted adult.

### **Bullying**

Bullying always involves one person or group trying to intimidate a target (victim)—often repeatedly. It might involve a physical act: hitting, kicking, biting, or shoving. It might also involve verbal or emotional abuse: teasing, put-downs, name-calling, hazing, hurtful joking, or intimidation. Bullies also sometimes use racial or sexual slurs or make threatening gestures. Bullying usually takes place out of the sight of adults and away from meetings. As a result, children frequently don’t show how much bullying upsets them and often remain silent. The bully often threatens reprisals for “telling.” The victim also may think adults won’t or can’t help him, or they may feel ashamed for not defending them self. Bullying is not a “right of passage” or simply part of growing up. The fear and anxiety of bullying causes kids to not only avoid bullies but also the places where they hang out, including SYM activities. And far from “toughening up” targets of bullying, bullying can devastate their self-esteem and self-confidence. If the behavior continues, the victim may suffer long-lasting feelings of isolation and sadness—even depression. Bullying even affects groups, as other members might wonder if they will be the next targets. Bullying in all forms is prohibited in the SYM.

The National Council of The Society of American Magicians has determined that various chat rooms and social media have been improperly utilized as outlets for cyber bullying which targets magic, magicians and youngsters who are interested in magic. The Society of American Magicians opposes and condemns cyber bullying in any and all forms, including but not limited to, all forms of hate speech, the use of words that attack physical appearance, gender, religious belief, sexual orientation or nationality.

### **Steps to Stop Bullying**

- SYM leaders and support volunteers should always be on the lookout for bullying behavior.
- Stop the actions and protect the target from danger.
- Identify the behavior in a calm tone and say that it’s not OK.
- Speak with the target.
- Encourage the target to tell his or her parents and SYM leader.
- Tell the SYM leader or designated assistant leader of the bullying incident.

To reduce the likelihood of bullying in an SYM assembly meeting, create an antibullying culture throughout the meeting by always modeling mutual respect, kindness, and inclusion and never solving problems through aggression. SYM leaders, assistant leaders and appointed volunteers should always model positive feedback and demonstrate how to connect constructively with one another.

**Screening Adult Leaders**

All SYM leaders and assistant leaders who will be supervising youth shall undergo a complete background check at least every 3 years. Background checks may include, but are not limited to, multi-jurisdictional criminal record checks, an FBI fingerprint check, a National Sex Offender registry check, driver's license check, and a Social Security trace. The ability to work or volunteer with SYM is contingent upon satisfactory results of those checks. The national office of the SYM will initiate and cover the cost of all screenings for active SAM members. Non-member leaders and assistant leaders may be asked to pay the cost of their own screenings.

SYM leaders and assistant leaders will be required to participate in periodic youth protection training offered by the SYM. Adult volunteers and parents are also invited and encouraged to participate in these trainings. The national office of the SYM may cover the cost for any adult attending youth protection trainings.

**Conduct at the Conclusion of Meetings**

It is strongly urged that the adult leaders of assemblies adopt a strict policy with regard to the means of departure at the conclusion of each meeting, communicate that policy to S.Y.M. parents, and enforce the policy. The basic elements may include the following:

A requirement that members be picked up by a parent or other authorized adult, except in cases where other arrangements have been made (e.g., situations where all members go home by school activity bus or where older youth may appropriately depend upon themselves with prior policy or parental approval).

The use of a specified location for the members to wait, under leader or other adult supervision, until picked up and to assure that they are met by parents or other authorized adults. This commitment by the leaders will ensure that the assembly meetings will always be fun and safe.

It should be noted that although these policies are very important and prudent, it is not necessary to imagine a tragedy in order for these steps to make sense. Both adults and children can have unexpected needs for assistance (parent arrives late or forgets; child becomes ill), and it is both necessary and a great comfort to have supervising adults who are familiar with the youth in attendance. It is sometimes stunning, but understandable, the terror that can be felt by a child in a period even as short as five minutes when a parent is late and the child feels forgotten. Such fears can ruin for the child the wonderful experience of a successful assembly meeting.