



Cyber-Behavior Guidelines for Staff

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INTRODUCTION:

YMCAs are growing in their Internet presence and sometimes in ways they are not prepared for. YMCA staff is actively engaged in Cyber-communities with Blogs, Websites and other forms of personal communication and expression. Certainly e-mail and instant messaging (IM) are useful tools, but as it is with any tool, if used for the wrong purpose, it can be harmful.

It is important for YMCAs to embrace the facts of today's world and actively work to ensure that staff, parents and children enjoy positive experiences and receive the image that the Y intends to project. Included in this document you will find some general information about current trends, resources and a sample Code of Conduct for use with staff at your YMCA. The sample code may be adapted to be included in your general code of conduct or designed as a stand-alone document. In either case, it should be signed and included in an individual's personnel file. Staff may include both employees and volunteers.

In addition to individuals, it is important for YMCAs to understand and monitor any associated group's Web-presence. This may include swim teams, gym teams, and other active groups that are part of the YMCA. Any group that is engaged as part of the Y's program is indeed part of the YMCA and should provide a consistent message and image with that of the association.

This information is provided as a resource for YMCAs to utilize as they develop practices and policies that are comfortable for their community and situation. This information is provided by YMCA Services Corporation in support of effective YMCA risk management practices. Risk management includes protecting a YMCA's assets. Your Y's staff, participants and community image are indeed worthy of protection.

TRENDS AND RESOURCES:

“Cyber World Invasion” *Risky Business E-newsletter, At Risk Column – March 13, 2006*

There is a new world order and it is catching some Ys by surprise in a variety of ways. Social networking sites, such as Myspace.com and Facebook.com, raise important issues for YMCAs protecting themselves, children and staff from some of the realities that exist in the Cyber-world. Traditional concerns about online behavior have quickly become outdated with this new venue for “hanging out” and networking online.

These free forums provide easy and anonymous access for anyone to establish a personal Website; complete with descriptions, message boards and pictures. *Dateline NBC* recently reported of teen pages found with scenes of binge drinking, apparent drug use, and sex acts. High schools across the country are dealing with the rapid spread of teens getting caught in compromising positions, predators and a whole new level of cyber-bullying. Law enforcement officials in Connecticut are investigating the link between these sites and incidents of sexual assault.

But what does this mean to YMCAs? First, Ys need to establish a proactive and open response to protecting youth. Children, staff and parents need to know what the issues are and how to protect themselves.

The Central Connecticut Coast YMCA (CCCY) recently experienced even another issue involving MySpace.com. A young staff member had the Y's name included on her site which also listed both inappropriate language and activities. A local parent, while researching camps in the area, found the site and brought it to the attention of the YMCA. The Y obviously had concerns about the staff person's image and behavior, as well as the image of the YMCA.

A normal initial reaction might be to terminate the employee, but the CCCY handled it differently. "This was new territory for us and we wanted to research our rights and responsibilities as well as any precedence." noted Suzanne Friedbacher, Director of HR. The management team is working closely on this issue; reviewing the collected information and deciding to encourage understanding of the issues and voluntary policing of staff personal sites. Doug Lisk, COO added: "We do not want to be Big Brother and generate an adverse response. We want to use the core values to educate the staff and give them the opportunity to see how they were representing themselves and the Y." In addition Friedbacher shared: "We are working to educate leadership staff and have discussions about implications. We are asking questions like: Do our current policies address this issue sufficiently? What education and training does our staff need? How should we involve parents?" The Y has recently added discussions about Internet use in its Child Abuse Prevention training for staff.

The [American Camping Association](#) recently provided the following ideas on keeping youth and camps safe in the online world:

- ◆ Establish and disseminate policies regarding the posting of personal information online.
- ◆ Prohibit the use of images (pictures or logos) of or from your camp.
- ◆ Visit the sites to monitor compliance.
- ◆ Notify campers and their parents about violations of your policy.
- ◆ Follow through with consequences.

[Wiredsafety.org](#), a non-profit group that works to educate and provides resources for online safety has additional information on how organizations and parents can raise their awareness and protect youth.

The [Society for Human Resource Management](#) has a sample policy on Personal Web Sites and Web Logs. Some courts across the U.S. are involved in legal battles over whose rights (employer vs. employee) prevails and this sample policy walks the fine line between employer rights and civil liberties.

YMCAs should review their staff conduct or behavior policies to see if language about values, mission and image needs to be updated. Policies for staff behavior might include prohibiting any online exchange that would be considered inconsistent with the Y's values and/or the posting of any inappropriate information or photos. Ys also need to ensure that parents are aware of the Y's position on internet use.

Ignoring the issues is not a good course, the Cyber-world is here and moving quickly all around us. Neither Huxley nor Shakespeare envisioned this Brave New World.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PERSONAL WEB SITES AND WEB LOGS

Families entrust their children to the YMCA's care for child care, camp and other youth programs. Our promise to these families is that we will provide a safe environment in which all participants are treated in a caring, honest, respectful and responsible way. Our mission commands us to "build a healthy spirit, mind and body for all."

It is every staff member's responsibility to deliver on this promise and to project and further the mission. This includes all dealings with the community; inside and outside of our workplace and both on and off duty. Y staff members should avoid any inappropriate speech or behavior in the presence of our community members at all times. No one should have reason to be offended or embarrassed by YMCA staff's speech, appearance or conduct.

The YMCA's **Code of Conduct** and personnel policies detail the Y's expectations and your responsibilities as a staff member; however the advent of Personal Web Sites and Web Logs (EX: myspace.com or facebook.com) as well as other uses of technology have increased our exposure and the risks to our reputation. For this reason, the YMCA has developed these standards for behavior in virtual public forums.

Your telephone answering message, your Website, your e-mail address and text messages are all accessible to the community at large. Therefore, they must be consistent with the YMCA's mission and philosophies.

If you choose to post a personal Website, to participate in Web-groups or Blogs, please note the following policies:

- ◆ The use of photos, logos or images of the YMCA or its programs is prohibited. If you use the YMCA's name (including names of camps or other programs) in any such communication, you should be especially careful to support and certainly not to harm or ridicule the YMCA's image or mission.
- ◆ Staff must uphold the YMCA's value of respect for the individual and avoid making defamatory statements about YMCA employees, members/participants, clients, partners, affiliates and others, including competitors.
- ◆ Make it clear to the readers that the views expressed are yours alone and that they do not necessarily reflect the views of the YMCA.
- ◆ Do not disclose any information that is confidential or proprietary to the YMCA or to any third party that has disclosed information to the Y. Consult the YMCA's confidentiality policy for guidance about what constitutes confidential information.
- ◆ Staff should promote the core values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility in their speech and behavior at the YMCA, with the community and in any public forum.

Of course, the YMCA does not mean to interfere with anyone's private life, but publicly observable communications, actions or words are not private. Staff needs to use good judgment and discretion. If you want something to be private, do not expose it to public access. If you or your words are in public, make sure they are not interfering with your role at the YMCA.

The YMCA will be communicating with parents and participants about our **Code of Conduct** as well as educating members about the potential threats posed by these social networking sites. We will also be monitoring various sites and responding to complaints made by parents, youth, prospects, etc. As with any breach of YMCA policies, consequences for substantiated violations will be imposed. Please sign and date as indication of your receipt of these guidelines.

Signature

Date

Adapted from guidelines developed by the Central Connecticut Coast YMCA – April 2006