

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

May 31, 2024

To all Regional Bahá'í Councils

Dearly loved Friends:

As our society-building activities expand and grow through the delivery of children's classes, study circles, camps, and junior youth and youth programs, we naturally find ourselves engaging with all strata of society. Therefore, we invariably find ourselves working with individuals, particularly youth, who are experiencing social forces that negatively affect them and their communities. Our challenge is to find a balance between supporting a spiritual journey for all participants while building a culture in which all participants are safe and free from harm to themselves and others. Inherently then, we face the need to ensure that these activities are enfolded in a culture of profound safety. Such a culture is built by every attendee, staff person, volunteer, and guest, and felt by every child, junior youth, and youth.

As institutions of the Faith, ours is a sacred and legal duty to protect the minors in our care. With that understanding, we are sending for your careful consideration the most recent version of the National Spiritual Assembly's "Policy for the Protection of Children, Junior Youth, and Youth," which includes updates related to overnight activities that involve minors and the training of those who are responsible for them (see #3-4 on pages 4 and 5, and #1 on pages 8-9). We ask that you promptly share this policy with your respective training institute boards and arrange to support them in the development of their own plans to ensure that minors directly under their care are safe. In this process, the boards will find it helpful at times to consult other institutions and agencies, including those representing the institution of the Counselors who can assist to ensure that the work of the Faith flows and progresses beyond potential difficulties and pitfalls. In addition, for activities held at the national and seasonal Bahá'í schools, collaboration with the staff of the Office of Education and Schools is strongly encouraged.

You may find the following questions useful for your consultations with others.

- What guidance and principles are useful when consulting about creating a culture of safety for children and youth? How can we cultivate the notion that everyone present at a camp, including guests, owns the safety and protection of every child?
- What needs to be done to ensure that every camp counselor, staff person, and supervisor has a unity of vision and action around implementing the national policies and guidelines?
- What systems, training, and routines are needed to reinforce a culture of safety at every session, camp, and activity, particularly overnight camps?
- Are other training materials and processes needed to ensure a deliberate and regimented execution of the polices and guidelines?

- Are there current challenges specific to the region or locality to understand and address systematically? For example, should each region retain legal counsel so that reporting requirements are handled systematically and expeditiously when the need arises?

As you pursue this vital endeavor, we encourage you to share your experiences with the Office of Community Administration, which we have asked to follow your learning. Your plans, questions, and comments may be emailed to community@usbnc.org.

Your dedicated services are vital to the society-building progress of the Cause, and the National Spiritual Assembly holds all of you in prayer as you forge ahead along the path of raising capacity for the administration of the Cause at all levels.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,



Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary

Attachment

cc: Counselors serving the United States
All Regional Training Institute Boards
Office of Education and Schools