

Rotary District 6290

Youth Programs

Abuse and Harassment Allegation Reporting Guidelines

Introduction

The most powerful force in the promotion of the ideals of peace and service is our development of our Youth.

Rotarians, their families, and non-Rotarian volunteers engaged in Rotary youth programs are expected to use their best efforts to safeguard the welfare of and prevent the physical, sexual or emotional abuse or harassment of every student with whom they come into contact.

Rotary International is committed to protecting the safety and wellbeing of Youth and will not tolerate their abuse or harassment. All allegations of abuse or harassment will be taken seriously and must be handled according to the following guidelines.

The safety and well-being of students should always be the first priority.

Definitions

Sexual abuse: Sexual abuse refers to engaging in implicit or explicit sexual acts with a student, or forcing or encouraging a student to engage in implicit or explicit sexual acts alone or with another person of any age, of the same sex or the opposite sex. Additional examples of sexual abuse could include, but are not limited to:

- 1 Non-touching offenses
- 2 Indecent exposure
- 3 Exposing a child to sexual or pornographic material.

Sexual harassment: Sexual harassment refers to sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. In some cases, sexual harassment precedes sexual abuse and is a technique used by sexual predators to desensitize or “groom” their victims.

Examples of sexual harassment could include, but are not limited to:

- 1 Sexual advances
- 2 Sexual epithets, jokes, written or oral references to sexual conduct, gossip regarding one’s sex life, and comments about an individual’s sexual activity, deficiencies, or prowess
- 3 Verbal abuse of a sexual nature
- 4 Displaying sexually suggestive objects, pictures or drawings
- 5 Sexual leering or whistling, any inappropriate physical contact such as brushing or touching, obscene language or gestures and suggestive or insulting comments

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse is defined as the use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. Physical abuse may include but is not limited to such acts of violence as striking (with or without an object), hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, kicking, pinching, and burning.

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse refers to any act including confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, infantilization, or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth.

Is it Abuse or is it Harassment?

Whether the alleged conduct amounts to abuse or harassment is not to be determined by the adult to whom allegations are made. After ensuring the safety of the student, all allegations should be immediately reported to appropriate law enforcement authorities. In some areas, this reporting is required by law.

Allegation Reporting Guidelines

For use by all adults to whom a student reports an incident of abuse or harassment

Any adult to whom a student reports an incident of abuse or harassment is responsible for following these *Allegation Reporting Guidelines*.

1. Report from Student

a **Listen attentively and stay calm.** Acknowledge that it takes a lot of courage to report abuse. It is appropriate to listen and be encouraging. Do not express shock, horror or disbelief.

b **Assure privacy but not confidentiality.** Explain that you will have to tell someone about the abuse/harassment to make it stop and to ensure that it doesn't happen to other students.

c **Get the facts, but don't interrogate.** Ask the student questions that establish what was done and who did it. Reassure the student that s/he did the right thing in telling you. Avoid asking 'why' questions. Remember, your responsibility is to present the student's story to the proper authorities.

d **Be non-judgmental and reassure the student.** Do not be critical of anything that has happened or anyone who may be involved. It is especially important not to blame or criticize the student. Assure the student that the situation was not his or her fault and that he or she was brave and mature to come to you.

e **Record.** Keep a written record of the conversation with the student as soon after the report as you can, including the date and time of the conversation. Use the student's words, and record only what has been told to you.

2. Protect the Student

Ensure the safety and well-being of the student. Remove the student from the situation immediately and all contact with the alleged abuser or harasser. Give reassurance that this is for the student's own safety and is not a punishment.

3. Report to Law Enforcement Authorities

Immediately report all cases of abuse to the appropriate law enforcement authorities first and then to the club and district leadership for investigation. In District 6290, the appropriate law enforcement office is the police of the local municipality or the nearest sheriff's department. In most situations, the first Rotary contact is the District **Youth Protection Officer** who has responsibility for seeking the advice of and interacting with appropriate agencies. If the allegation involves the conduct of the Youth Protection Officer, the district Youth Exchange chair or District Governor should be contacted. All allegations must be reported to RI within 72 hours; the person responsible

for doing so is the Youth Protection Officer.

District 6290 will cooperate with police or legal investigations.

District 6290 has researched local, state, and national laws related to child abuse and harassment prevention.

4. *Avoid Gossip and Blame*

Do not tell anyone about the report other than those required by the guidelines.

Care must be taken to protect the rights of both the victim and the accused during the investigation. District 6290 maintains the privacy (as distinct from confidentiality) of any accused person by enforcing the following procedures: *The incident shall be reported to and discussed only with those necessary to cooperate with the police or legal investigation, those necessary for the protection of the student against additional harm, and those necessary to provide continuing support for the student.*

5. *Do Not Challenge the Alleged Offender*

The adult to whom the student reports must not contact the alleged offender. In cases of abuse, interrogation must be left entirely to law enforcement authorities.

In cases of non-criminal harassment, the district youth exchange chair and district governor are responsible for investigating, and will be in contact with the alleged offender after the student has been moved to a safe environment.

6. *Follow-Up*

After reporting allegations, the Youth Protection Officer will follow up to make sure steps are being taken to address the situation. Specifically, District 6290 will see that an independent and thorough investigation is conducted into any claims of abuse or harassment. Any adult against whom an allegation of abuse or harassment is made will be removed from all contact with youth until the matter is resolved.

Post Report Procedures

For Use by Club and District Program Chairs

The student's Club or District Youth Program chair is responsible for ensuring that the following steps are taken immediately following an abuse allegation being reported.

1. The adult to whom the student reports the abuse should follow the *Allegation Reporting Guidelines*.
2. Confirm that the student has been removed from the situation immediately and all contact with alleged abuser or harasser.
3. Contact appropriate law enforcement agency immediately (if not already done). If law enforcement agencies will not investigate, the club or district Youth Protection Officer should coordinate an independent investigation into the allegations.
4. Ensure the student receives immediate support services.
5. Offer the student an independent, non-Rotarian counselor to represent the interests of the student. Ask Social Services or law enforcement to recommend someone who is not a Rotarian or in any way involved with the Youth program.
6. Contact the student's parents or legal guardian. If away from home, provide the student with the option of either staying in country or returning home.
7. Remove alleged abuser or harasser from all contact with the specific student and other youth while investigations are conducted.
8. Cooperate with the police or legal investigation.

9. The student's Rotarian Counselor or Youth Program Chair should inform the Youth Protection Officer and district governor of the allegation. Either the District Governor or the district Youth Exchange Chair or the Youth Protection Officer must inform Rotary International of the allegation within 72 hours, and provide follow-up reports of steps taken, the outcome of all investigations, and resulting actions.

Post Allegation Report Guidelines

Responding to the Needs of the Student

There will need to be a cohesive and managed team approach to supporting the student after an allegation report. The student is likely to feel embarrassed, confused, and may become withdrawn and appear to be avoiding members of the host family or club. After a report of harassment or abuse, students may or may not want to remain in their program. If they do, they may or may not want to continue their relationship with their Rotary club depending on the circumstances. In some cases, an exchange student may wish to remain in country, but change to a different host club.

It may be difficult for club members and host families to understand how the student is feeling, but it would be helpful for the student to know that the club remains a support for him or her. Club members and host families may experience ambiguity toward their roles and may feel unclear regarding their boundaries. However they need to do whatever is necessary to reassure the student of their support at all times.

Appropriate Response for Addressing Issues within the Rotary Club for Allegations Made Against Rotarians or Non-Rotarians

When addressing an allegation of abuse or harassment, the most important concern is the safety of the students. Club members should not speculate, make editorial comments, or offer personal opinions that could potentially hinder any police or criminal investigations. Club members should be cautioned about speculating or commenting on the matter during the investigations. Comments made about alleged victims in support of alleged abusers do not support our statement of conduct or Rotary ideals. Comments made against an alleged abuser could lead to a slander or libel claim filed against Rotarians or clubs by the alleged abuser.

Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth

Rotary International is committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for all participants in Rotary activities. It is the duty of all Rotarians, Rotarians' spouses, partners, and other volunteers to safeguard to the best of their ability the welfare of and to prevent the physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of children and young people with whom they come into contact.

(January 2006)

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