

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT 5520'S

ABUSE AND HARASSMENT ALLEGATION REPORTING GUIDELINES

The section in **blue** follows Rotary's certification requirements for Rotary Youth Exchange.

District 5520 is committed to protecting the safety and well-being of all youth program participants and will not tolerate abuse or harassment. All allegations will be taken seriously and must be handled within the following guidelines.

The safety and well-being of program participants must always be top priority.

DEFINITIONS

Emotional or verbal abuse — The use of fear, humiliation, or verbal assaults to control the behavior of another. Examples include rejecting the person, preventing him or her from developing normal social relationships, and making derogatory statements about his or her race, religion, ability, intellect, tastes, or personal appearance.

Physical abuse — Physical contact intended to cause pain, injury, or other physical suffering or harm.

Neglect — Failure to provide the food, shelter, or medical care that is necessary to well-being.

Sexual abuse — Engaging in or arranging implicit or explicit sexual acts, whether they are performed alone or with another person of any age or gender, through force or coercion or with anyone who is unable to give consent. Any sexual activity between a legal adult and a minor is considered sexual abuse. Sexual abuse can also include nontouching offenses, such as voyeuristic behavior, indecent exposure, or showing a young person sexual or pornographic material.

Sexual harassment — Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted or directed at someone unwilling or unable to provide consent. In some cases, sexual harassment precedes sexual abuse and is used by sexual predators to desensitize or groom their victims.

Examples of sexual harassment include:

- Sexual epithets or jokes, written or spoken references to sexual conduct, gossip about one's sex life, and comments about a person's sexual activity, deficiencies, or prowess
- Verbal abuse of a sexual nature
- Display of sexually suggestive objects or images
- Sexual leering or whistling
- Inappropriate physical contact, such as brushing against a person
- Obscene language or gestures, and suggestive or insulting comments

RECEIVING AN ALLEGATION REPORT

Any adult to whom a program participant reports abuse or harassment must:

Listen attentively and stay calm. Acknowledge that it takes courage to report abuse or harassment. Be encouraging, but remain neutral; do not express shock, horror, or disbelief.

Assure privacy but not confidentiality. Explain that you will have to tell someone about the abuse or harassment to make it stop and ensure that it doesn't happen to others.

Get the facts, but don't interrogate. Ask questions that establish facts: who, what, when, where, and how. Reassure the young person that he or she did the right thing in telling you. Avoid asking "why" questions, which may be interpreted as questioning the young person's motives. Remember that your responsibility is to report this information to the proper authorities.

Be nonjudgmental and reassure. Avoid criticizing anything that has happened or anyone who may be involved. It's especially important not to blame or criticize the young person. Emphasize that it was not his or her fault and that it was brave and mature to come to you.

Document the allegation. Record the conversation, including the date and time, as soon after the report as you can. Try to record the young person's exact words.

ALLEGATION RESPONSE

The following steps must be taken immediately after alleged abuse or harassment is reported. Some of them may be performed by any program volunteer, while others should be performed by a district officer, as specified.

1. Protect the young person.

Ensure the safety and well-being of the young person by removing him or her from the situation immediately and preventing all contact with the alleged abuser or harasser. Reassure the young person that this is for his or her safety and is not a punishment.

Take immediate action to ensure the young person's health and well-being, and get him or her medical or psychological care, if necessary.

2. Report the allegations to appropriate authorities.

Immediately report all cases of abuse or harassment to the designated law enforcement authority, see below for appropriate agencies for Texas and New Mexico, for investigation and then to club and district leaders for follow-through. Interrogations related to allegations of abuse or harassment must be left entirely to law enforcement agencies.

In most situations, the first Rotary contact is the District Youth Protection Officer who is responsible for seeking advice from and interacting with appropriate agencies. If the allegation involves the conduct of this Rotarian, the District Governor or Assistant Youth Protection Officer should be the first Rotary contact.

District 5520 and its Clubs will cooperate with police or legal investigations.

District 5520 has researched local, state, and national laws related to youth protection, including reporting allegations, and notes the legal requirements of Chapter 32A, Article 4 of the New Mexico Statutes Annotated which all volunteers shall be made aware of.

3. Remove the accused person from contact with youth.

District 5520 will remove the alleged offender from all contact with Rotary youth program participants until the matter is resolved.

Follow established criteria and procedures for removing a Rotary Youth Exchange student from a host family if they report a problem with, or make an allegation against, a host family member. If appropriate, move the student to the temporary housing that was screened in advance.

4. Avoid gossip and blame.

Don't tell anyone about the allegation other than those who are required to know. Be careful to protect the rights of both the victim and the accused during the investigation.

District 5520 shall maintain the privacy (as distinct from confidentiality) of any accused person by enforcing the following procedures:

- a) All involved Rotary Clubs, Rotarians and reporting volunteers shall not discuss any matters related to youth protection allegations at meetings where non-involved people are present.
- b) Only the minimum number of people necessary shall be given any information about the allegation and solutions, such as the reporting adult, youth protection officer, required Rotary leadership for implementation of safety measures and solutions, law enforcement, and natural parent or guardian.
- c) If individuals outside the necessary circle inquire about the allegation then they will be informed that it cannot be discussed.
- d) If there is a need for any action which informs a club Rotarian that they will have restrictions on their involvement and contact with youth, only the club president who needs to issue the mandate regarding restricted activity shall be included in the conversation. There will be no vote of the board regarding such action.
- e) No youth protection investigation pursuant to this guideline shall include club meetings of non-involved parties.

5. Follow through.

A district officer must inform RI of the allegation within 72 hours and provide ongoing status reports.

District 5520 will ensure that the program participant's parents or legal guardians have been notified and offer the young person an independent, non-Rotarian counselor to represent his or her interests.

If law enforcement agencies will not investigate, or if the investigation is inconclusive, the district governor will appoint a district review committee to coordinate an independent review to ensure that district youth protection policies were followed, confirm that youth safety was the highest priority, and determine any necessary modifications to district procedures. This review is not responsible for determining the validity of any allegations; that can only be done by youth protection agency personnel or trained law enforcement professionals.

If law enforcement has found the allegations to be noncriminal, the district governor is responsible for contacting the alleged offender. The district governor may delegate this task to a district youth protection officer or district review committee.

District 5520 will document all accusations of inappropriate behavior and the actions taken to resolve the situation, so that patterns of inappropriate behavior are identified and addressed.

Designated Youth Protections Authorities for Texas and New Mexico

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

<https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Investigations/default.asp>

1-800-252-5400

New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department

<https://cyfd.org/>

1-855-333-7233

or the State Police in your area.