

DISTRICT 7475 ABUSE AND HARASSMENT ALLEGATION REPORTING GUIDELINES

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Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth: District 7475 (the “district”) strives to create and maintain a safe environment for all youth who participate in Rotary activities. To the best of their ability, Rotarians, Rotarians’ spouses and partners, and other volunteers must safeguard the children and young people they come into contact with and protect them from physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

No tolerance for any abuse or harassment: Rotary International and its districts are committed to protecting the safety and security 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, psychological, or verbal abuse — The use of fear, humiliation, or verbal assault to control the behavior of another. Examples include rejecting the person, preventing them from developing normal social relationships, and making derogatory statements about their race, religion, abilities, 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 or emotional care that is necessary to well-being.

Sexual abuse — Engaging in or arranging implicit or explicit sexual acts. This includes pressuring someone to perform a sexual act alone, or sexually engaging directly 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 or youth program participant, or any nonconsensual sexual activity between peers, is considered sexual abuse. Sexual abuse can also include offenses that don’t include touching, such as voyeurism, indecent exposure, stalking, electronic harassment, or showing a young person sexual or pornographic material.

Sexual harassment — Sexual advances, requests for sexual acts, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted or directed at someone who is unwilling or unable to consent. In some cases, sexual harassment precedes sexual abuse and is used by sexual predators to desensitize someone or accustom them to inappropriate behavior. Examples of sexual harassment include:

- Sexual epithets or jokes, written or spoken references to sexual conduct, gossip about someone’s sex life, or comments about a person’s sexual activity, deficiencies, or prowess
- Giving private or secret gifts, including those of a sexual nature
- Verbal abuse of a sexual nature
- Display of sexually suggestive objects or images
- Sexual leering or whistling
- Inappropriate physical contact, such as intentionally brushing against a person
- Obscene language or gestures, suggestive or insulting comments

Grooming — Establishing an emotional connection with someone to lower their inhibitions and gain their trust with the intent to be sexually abusive.

Consent — An informed, knowing, and voluntary permission for something to happen, including sexual activity.

Receiving a Report of Abuse or Harassment

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 supportive, 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 to prevent it from happening to others.
- **Get information, but don't interrogate the participant.** Ask questions that establish facts: who, what, when, where, and how. Reassure the young person that they did the right thing in telling you. Avoid asking why questions, which may be interpreted as questioning the young person's motives, implying they are at fault, or suggesting that you don't believe them. Remember that your responsibility is to report this information to the proper authorities.
- **Be nonjudgmental and reassuring.** Avoid criticizing anything that has happened or anyone who may be involved — even the accused, because it could be someone they care about. It is especially important not to blame or criticize the young person. Emphasize that it was not their fault and that they were brave and mature to come to you.
- **Be patient and understanding.** A person who has experienced trauma might find it difficult to talk about the details of their experience. Encourage them to report as much as they can or as they feel comfortable discussing. Try to minimize any need for them to explain their experience again.
- **Document the allegation.** Take confidential notes that include details such as dates and locations they reference, as soon after the report as you can. Try to use the young person's exact words.

Responding to an Allegation

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

1. Protect the young person.

Ensure the safety and security of the young person by removing them from the situation immediately and preventing all contact with the alleged abuser or harasser. Reassure the young person that this is for their safety and is not a punishment.

Take immediate action to safeguard the young person's health and well-being, and get them medical or psychological care, if necessary. If both the person who reported the problem and the person who is accused are young people, provide support to both of them.

2. Report the allegations to appropriate authorities.

Immediately report all cases of abuse or harassment — first to the District Youth Protection Officer for investigation and then to club and district leaders. The investigation of alleged abuse or harassment must be left entirely to law enforcement agencies. All investigations must be conducted by authorities that are not affiliated with Rotary.

In most situations, the first Rotary contact is the District Youth Protection Officer, who will be the liaison to and seek guidance from the appropriate agencies. If the allegation involves this individual, the District Governor should be the main Rotary contact. The district will cooperate with police and legal investigations.

3. Remove the accused person from contact with youth.

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

Follow Rotary International and ESSEX criteria and procedures for removing a Rotary Youth Exchange student from a host family if the student makes an allegation against a host family member. Move the student to another host family that was screened in advance.

4. Avoid gossip and blame.

Do not tell anyone about the allegation other than those who need to know. Take care to protect the rights of everyone who is involved during the investigation.

The district maintains the privacy (as distinct from confidentiality) of any person who has been accused by enforcing the following procedures:

1. Information regarding the allegation is limited to the District Governor and district officers involved in the district's Youth Protection and Risk Management programs, Rotary International personnel, law enforcement and other government agencies as required.

5. Follow up and implement safeguards.

The District Governor and all Rotary and Rotaract member and nonmember volunteers who know about an allegation must make sure that RI is informed of it within 72 hours. A district officer will provide ongoing status reports to RI.

The district will also make sure that the parents or legal guardians of the participants (whether they are accused or making the accusation) have been notified. The district will refer all involved young persons to an independent, non-Rotary counselor who can provide them professional emotional support

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

When the district is notified of the outcome of any investigation by law enforcement, whether criminal or not, it will contact everyone involved in the incident. The district will document all allegations and accusations, as well as the final outcome and the actions taken to resolve the situation. Patterns of inappropriate behavior must be identified and addressed.