



YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

Adopted: March, 2017

Rotary has a long history of providing service to youth. Each year, more than 300,000 young people participate in Rotary programs like Interact, Rotary Youth Exchange, and Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA). Many club and district mentoring programs, immunization efforts, job training programs, literacy projects, and other initiatives also help young people or other vulnerable populations.

Unfortunately, no organization or program is invulnerable to abuse or crises. They can and do occur in even the most seemingly positive settings. Predators often seek teaching, coaching, or other positions that give them access to children and teenagers. Others who are committed to working with youth sometimes find it hard to believe that some adults will abuse the trust placed in them, so they may not notice the signs. Rotary takes youth protection very seriously, and it relies on Rotarians to foster safe environments that prevent abuse and to respond appropriately when it occurs.

Statement of Conduct for Working With Youth

The statement of conduct provides the basic principle for Rotarians to follow when working with young people in any capacity:

Rotary International 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 emotional abuse.

Adopted by the RI Board of Directors, November 2006

This principle must be followed throughout Rotary, from our districts, clubs, Rotarians and other volunteers at all levels, to our materials, programming, and communications with parents and guardians.

Rotary reinforces the Statement of Conduct for Working With Youth with additional policies that set the safety of youth as our first priority. They require districts and clubs to adhere to local youth protection laws and procedures and to

set expectations for responding to any concerns or allegations that arise. These policies apply to any Rotary activity or program that involves youth.

Rotary Youth Exchange policies address the additional risks that that program carries. The district certification process provides extra safeguards and promotes consistency among district partners. In order to participate in Rotary Youth Exchange, districts must demonstrate compliance with all of the certification requirements listed in the Rotary Code of Policies sections on Youth Protection and Youth Exchange. For more information about certification requirements, write to youthexchange@rotary.org.

Adopting sensible procedures and following guidelines protects both program participants and volunteers and enables programs to accomplish their missions and objectives. Controls at the district level, through a district youth protection policy, and similar controls at the club level demonstrate Rotary's commitment to youth, prevent incidents of abuse or mitigate their effects, protect the long-term viability of youth programs, and strengthen the trust of participants and their families.

Recognizing and Addressing Abuse and Harassment

Instances of abuse and harassment of young people can go unaddressed because adults fail to recognize them or because they're reluctant to view their friends, acquaintances, fellow volunteers, or professionals who work with young people as potential perpetrators. Youth protection depends on awareness of the possibility of abuse and harassment and vigilance in guarding against it. All Rotarians and other volunteers who work with young people should fully understand what constitutes abuse and harassment.

DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE AND HARASSMENT

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.

THIS GUIDE USES A FEW TERMS IN SPECIALIZED WAYS:

VOLUNTEER — Any adult involved with Rotary youth activities who interacts directly with youth, whether supervised or unsupervised

For Youth Exchange, volunteers include, among others, club and district Youth Exchange officers and committee members; Rotarian counselors; Rotarians and non-Rotarians and their spouses and partners who work with students during activities or outings or who transport students to events; and host parents and other adult residents of the host home, including host siblings and other family members.

YOUTH PROGRAM PARTICIPANT — Anyone who participates in a Rotary youth program, whether child or adult

- 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

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 non-touching offenses, such as voyeuristic behavior, indecent exposure, or showing a young person sexual or pornographic material.

Abusive or violent behavior by youth is a serious matter that should not be ignored. Program participants and other young people (host siblings and RYLA counselors, for example) must be held responsible for their behavior.

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
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SIGNS OF ABUSE OR HARASSMENT

Rotarians, other volunteers, and parents of Rotary youth program participants should watch for physical and behavioral signs of abuse or harassment. Many of these indicators could also be considered typical adolescent behavior or an understandable reaction to family changes, cultural adjustment, or homesickness. Adults who are actively involved in the participant's daily life will be better able to observe the behavioral and physical changes that can be signs of abuse and determine whether they are.

The behaviors that are commonly exhibited by young victims can be associated with youth discipline problems and may result in their removal from one of Rotary's programs. A young person who is seen as "difficult" may have been abused, either by an adult or by a peer. If you suspect abuse, spend time with the person to find out why their behavior has changed. In some cases, it is suggested to arrange for the young person to meet with a mental health professional who specializes in adolescents.

Physical changes: Repeated pattern of injury or an accident for which the explanation does not make sense

Anxiety: Reports of high levels of anxiety; obsessive-compulsive patterns; fear of certain places, people, or activities; reluctance to be alone with a particular person; nightmares or other sleep problems

Changes in eating habits or body image: Distorted body image, including or resulting in eating disorders

Depression: Excessive crying, extreme mood swings, diminished self-esteem, self-mutilation, and suicidal gestures or attempts

Delinquency: Criminal behavior, conflict with authority, running away, academic problems, and drug or alcohol abuse

Withdrawal: Difficulties at school, unwillingness to participate in extracurricular activities, repression, poor peer relationships, or isolation

Aggression: Overly hostile behavior or language directed toward peers, adults, or pets

Age-inappropriate behavior: Sexual promiscuity or graphic knowledge of sex or sexual behavior

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CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSE AND HARASSMENT

Awareness of abuse and harassment patterns can help you recognize potential problems and current or past transgressions.

The typical abuser blends into society:

- Perpetrators cannot be identified by age, economic status, community standing, race, gender, or mental capacity.
- Many abuse incidents are perpetrated by someone known to and trusted by the abused.
- Offenders can be male or female, and physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and harassment can be perpetrated against a person of either sex.
- Offenders can be other young people.

Although abuse can happen to anybody, it is not indiscriminate:

- Victims of sexual abuse are often carefully chosen and skillfully manipulated.
- Offenders may seek positions that provide that proximity to youth. Such proximity is often achieved by excluding other volunteers and gaining singular access to a potential victim.

Abuse is not always immediately apparent:

- Physical signs of abuse can heal before they're noticed, and a young person may not display common behavioral or emotional indicators.
- It is difficult for many people to believe that someone they know well may have abused a child, so they may dismiss allegations without investigating them thoroughly.

The vast majority of allegations of abuse or harassment go unreported:

- Young people tend to minimize and deny abuse, not exaggerate or over-report incidents.
- They might not tell anyone about an assault because they are convinced that they're to blame or they fear the potential consequences.
- Males are less likely to report abuse because of self-blame, social stigma, or fears that they will not be believed or will be seen to have a particular sexual orientation.
- In some cases, youth wait to report abuse until they are adults.
- Few child abusers are identified and prosecuted.