

WESSEX Allegation Reporting Guidelines

Introduction

Rotarians, their families, and non-Rotarian volunteers 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 and WESSEX are committed to protecting the safety and well being of students in Youth Services programs and will not tolerate their abuse or harassment. All allegations of abuse or harassment will be taken seriously and must be handled within the following guidelines. **The safety and well-being of students should always be the first priority.**

Definitions

Emotional or verbal abuse: Incidents in which an adult uses fear, humiliation, or verbal assaults to control the behavior of a young person in his or her care. Examples include rejecting the young person, preventing him or her from developing normal social relationships, and making derogatory statements about the youth's race, religion, or personal appearance.

Physical abuse: Mistreatment of a young person by use of physical contact intended to cause pain, injury, or other physical suffering or harm.

Neglect: Failure to provide (for no apparent financial reason) adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care necessary for a youth's well-being.

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:

- Non-touching offenses
- Indecent exposure
- 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:

- Sexual advances
- 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
- Verbal abuse of a sexual nature
- Displaying sexually suggestive objects, pictures or drawings
- Sexual leering or whistling, any inappropriate physical contact such as brushing or touching, obscene language or gestures and suggestive or insulting comments

Is it Abuse or is it Harassment?

Whether the alleged conduct amounts to sexual abuse or sexual 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 District Officers and to local law enforcement authorities as 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 sexual 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 their fault and that they were 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. This record shall be provided to the District Abuse Prevention Coordinator and local law enforcement authorities as required by law.

2. Protect the Student

Ensure the safety and well-being of the student. Immediately remove the student from the situation and from 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 Appropriate Law Enforcement Authorities

Immediately report all allegations of sexual abuse or harassment to the responsible District Officer for investigation. These individuals will provide guidance on reporting to appropriate law enforcement authorities. All allegations must be reported to RI and in the case of Inbound Youth Exchange students to the U.S. Department of State within 72 hours; the person responsible for doing so is the District Youth Exchange Chair or the District Governor.

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. Rotary maintains the privacy (as distinct from confidentiality) of any accused person.

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 responsible District Officer will investigate, 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 to the responsible District Officer, he or she will follow up to make sure steps are being taken to address the situation, including an independent and thorough investigation into any claims of sexual abuse or harassment. Any adult against whom an allegation of sexual abuse or harassment is made shall be removed from all contact with youth until the matter is resolved.

Post Report Procedures

For Use by Rotarian Counselors and District Abuse Prevention Coordinator

The student's Rotarian counselor and the District Abuse Prevention Coordinator are responsible for ensuring that the following steps are taken immediately following an abuse allegation is reported.

1. The adult to whom the student reports the abuse should follow the *WESSEX 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 as directed by the District Abuse Prevention Coordinator (if not already done). If law enforcement agencies will not investigate, the club or District Abuse Prevention Coordinator will 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.
6. Ask social services or law enforcement to recommend someone who is not a Rotarian or in any way involved with Rotary.
7. 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.
8. Remove alleged abuser or harasser from all contact with the specific student and other youth while investigations are conducted.
9. Cooperate with the police or legal investigation.
10. The District Abuse Prevention Coordinator, the District Youth Exchange Chair or the District Governor must inform Rotary International and the U.S. Department of State (in the case of Inbound Youth Exchange students) 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, Youth Exchange students may or may not want to remain on their exchange. If they do, they may or may not want to continue their relationship with their hosting Rotary club depending on the circumstances. In some cases, a 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 them. 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.

Adopted by the RI Board of Directors, November 2002