

Rotary International Youth Exchange Sexual Abuse and Harassment Allegation Reporting Guidelines

Introduction

The most powerful force in the promotion of international understanding and peace is exposure to different cultures. Youth Exchange provides thousands of young people with the opportunity to meet people from other lands and to experience their cultures.

A Youth Exchange student will spend a year, or perhaps just an extended period of time, living with a host family in a country other than their own. 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 is committed to protecting the safety and well being of Youth Exchange students 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

Sexual abuse: Sexual abuse refers to engaging in sexual acts with a student or forcing or encouraging a student to engage in 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 offences
- indecent exposure
- exposing a child to sexual or pornographic material.

Sexual harassment: Sexual harassment refers to sexual advances, requests for sexual favours 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 comment about an individual's sexual activity, deficiencies, or prowess;
- verbal abuse of a sexual nature;
- displaying sexually suggestive objects, pictures or drawings; and
- 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 as required by law to the police.

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 she/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 criticise 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.

2. Protect the Student

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

3. Report to Appropriate Law Enforcement Authorities

- a. Immediately report all cases of sexual abuse and harassment to the police.
- b. If the police wish to interview the student or arrange for a forensic medical examination, accompany the student
- c. As soon as possible advise the student's Club counsellor of the accusation unless the counsellor is involved in the accusation; then contact the District Protection Officer or a member of the District Protection Committee.
- d. The student's Club counsellor if advised of an allegation should advise the District Protection Officer or a member of the District Protection Committee.

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.

5. Do not challenge the alleged offender. The adult to whom the student reports the incident 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 Protection Officer or Committee and District Governor are responsible for investigating, with the assistance of the District Youth Exchange chair and the Club counsellor as needed, 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 Rotarian counsellor or District Youth Exchange Chair, follow up to make sure steps are being taken to address the situation.

Post Report Procedures

For Use by Rotarian Counsellors, District Protection Officer or Committee and District Youth Exchange Chairs

The student's Rotarian counsellor and the District Protection Office or Committee are responsible for ensuring that the following steps are taken following an abuse allegation report. Unless otherwise specified, these steps must be taken immediately following the report.

- a. The adult to whom the student reports the abuse should follow the *Allegation Reporting Guidelines*.
- b. Confirm that the student has been removed from the situation immediately and all contact with alleged abuser or harasser.
- c. Contact the police immediately (if not already done).
- d. Ensure the student receives immediate support services.
- e. Offer the student an independent, non-Rotarian counsellor to represent the interests of the student. Ask social services or the police to recommend someone who is not a Rotarian or in any way involved with the Youth Exchange programme.
- f. Contact student's parents. If away from home, provide student with the option of either staying in the country or returning home.
- g. Remove alleged abuser or harasser from all contact with specific student and other youth while investigations are conducted.
- h. Cooperate with police or legal investigation.
- i. The student's Rotarian Counsellor should inform the District Protection Officer or Committee member. The District Protection Officer or committee must then inform the District Youth Exchange chair and District Governor of the allegation. Either the District Governor or the District Protection Officer must inform Rotary International of the allegation. This **must be done within 72 hours**. Provide follow-up reports of steps taken and 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 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 the 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-Rotarian volunteers

When addressing an allegation of abuse or harassment, the most important concern is the safety of children and young people. 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