

Sexual Abuse and Harassment Allegations

Reporting Guidelines for District 5500

Rotary International is committed to protecting the safety and well-being of all youth program participants. We will not tolerate their abuse or harassment. All allegations of abuse or harassment shall be taken seriously and must be handled within the following guidelines. The safety and well-being of young people must always be the first priority.

Definitions

Sexual abuse: Engaging in implicit or explicit sexual acts with a young person or forcing or encouraging a young person to engage in implicit or explicit sexual acts alone or with another person of any age, of the same or opposite sex. This includes non-touching offenses, such as 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. In some cases, sexual harassment precedes sexual abuse and is used by sexual predators to desensitize or groom their victims.

Some examples of sexual harassment include:

- Sexual epithets, jokes, written or spoken references to sexual conduct, talking about one's sex life in the presence of a young person, and comments about an individual's sexual activity, deficiencies, or prowess
- Verbal abuse of a sexual nature
- Display of 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

Who should determine if it is abuse or harassment?

Upon hearing allegations, adults should not determine whether the alleged conduct constitutes sexual abuse or sexual harassment. Instead, after ensuring the safety of the student, the adult should immediately report all allegations to appropriate child protection or law enforcement authorities. In some countries, this reporting is required by law.

Allegation Reporting Guidelines

Any adult to whom a Rotary youth program participant reports an allegation of sexual abuse or harassment must follow these reporting guidelines:

1. *Receive the report.*
 - a. Listen attentively and stay calm. Acknowledge that it takes a lot of courage to report abuse or harassment. 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 in order to make it stop and ensure that it does not happen to others.
 - c. 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 present the story to the proper authorities.
 - d. 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 the situation was not his or her fault and that it was brave and mature to come to you.
 - e. Document the allegation. Make a written record of the conversation, including the date and time, as soon after the report as you can. Try to use the young person's words and record only what he or she told you.
2. *Protect the young person.*

Ensure the safety and well-being of the youth program participant by removing him or her from the situation

immediately and preventing all contact with the alleged abuser or harasser. Reassure the youth this is being done for his or her safety and is not a punishment.

3. *Report the allegations to appropriate authorities — child protection or law enforcement.*

Immediately report all cases of sexual abuse or harassment — first to the appropriate law enforcement authorities for investigation and then to the club and district leadership for follow-through. In District 5500, the appropriate law enforcement office is

Arizona Child Protective Services CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE 1-888-767-2445 or call a law enforcement agency.

If the student is over 18 years of age, mentally or physically disabled and unable to protect them self, you are to call 911 or the Adult Protective Services Hotline, 1-877-767-2385. Other wise they are to call 911 or the local law enforcement agency.

In most situations, the first Rotary contact is the District 5500 Youth Protection Officer, Kermit Miller, who is responsible for seeking the advice of appropriate agencies and interacting with them. If the allegation involves the conduct of this Rotarian, one of the two district youth program chairs or the district governor should be the first Rotary contact.

District 5500 will cooperate with police or legal investigations.

District 5500 has researched local, state, and national laws related to sexual abuse and harassment prevention and notes the following legal requirements of which all adult volunteers participating in the program must be aware: **Child abuse and neglect are against the law in Arizona, and so is failure to report it.**

Call your local law enforcement agency or 911 if the situation is an emergency.

If you suspect a child has been abused or mistreated, you are required to report it to the Arizona Child Protective Services. Child Abuse Hotline 1-888-7672445.

You are required to make a report within 48 hours of the time you suspected the child has been or may be abused or neglected.

4. *Avoid gossip and blame.*

Don't tell anyone about the report other than those required by the guidelines. Be careful to protect the rights of both the victim and the accused during the investigation.

District 5500 will maintain the privacy (as distinct from confidentiality) of any accused person by limiting discussions only to those people who need to know. The audience will be limited to the club counselor, club youth exchange officer, district youth exchange officer, district Youth Protection Officer, the District Governor, and appropriate government or law enforcement agents necessary to protect the alleged victim.

5. *Do not challenge the alleged offender.*

Don't 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 governor is responsible for follow-through and will contact the alleged offender after the young person has been moved to a safe environment. The district governor may designate this task to a district youth protection officer or district review committee.

Follow-through Procedures

Either the district youth programs chair or district youth protection officer will ensure that the following steps are taken immediately after an abuse allegation is reported.

1. Confirm that the youth program participant has been removed from the situation immediately and has no contact with the alleged abuser or harasser.
2. If law enforcement agencies will not investigate, the district youth protection officer or district review committee should coordinate an independent review of the allegations.

3. Ensure that the student receives immediate support services.
4. Offer the young person an independent, non-Rotarian counselor to represent his or her interests. Ask social services or law enforcement to recommend someone who is not a Rotarian or in any way involved with the youth program.
5. Contact the student's parents or legal guardian.



If the student is away from home, the student and his or her parents should decide whether to stay in country or return home. If the student stays in country, written authorization from the student's parents or legal guardian is required. If the student and the student's parents choose for the student to return home, consult with police before making travel arrangements. If an investigation is pending, the police may not approve of the student leaving the country.

6. Remove alleged abuser or harasser from all contact with any other young participants in Rotary programs and activities while investigations are conducted.
7. Cooperate with the police or legal investigation.
8. Inform the district governor of the allegation. Either the district governor, district youth protection officer, or other district youth program chair [will](#) inform RI of the allegation within 72 hours and provide follow-up reports of steps taken and the status of investigations.
9. After the authorities have completed their investigation, the district must follow through to make sure the situation is being addressed. Specifically, District [5500](#) will conduct an independent and thorough review of any allegations of sexual abuse or harassment.

Post Allegation Report Considerations

Responding to the needs of the youth program participant

District [5500](#) will adopt a cohesive and managed team approach to supporting a young person after an allegation report. The youth program participant is likely to feel embarrassed or confused and may become withdrawn.



After a report of harassment or abuse, students may have mixed feelings about remaining on their exchange. If they do choose to stay, they may or may not want to continue their relationship with their hosting Rotary club. In some cases, a student may wish to remain in country but change to a different host club.

Although club members and host families may have trouble understanding how the student is feeling, the student would find it helpful to know that the club continues to be reassuring and supportive. Club members and host families may feel ambivalent about their roles and unclear about their boundaries. However, they need to do whatever is necessary to reassure the student of their support at all times. [District 5500 will support this need.](#)

Addressing issues within the club

When addressing an allegation of abuse or harassment, the most important concern is the safety of youth. Club members should not speculate or offer personal opinions that could potentially hinder any police or criminal investigations. Rotarians must not become involved in investigations. Making comments about alleged victims in support of alleged abusers violates both the Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth and 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. [District 5500 will work to ensure this requirement is met.](#)