

# Rotaract and Youth Protection

## Frequently Asked Questions

July 2009



Abuse and harassment prevention is critical to any program that works with young people. Through service projects and other community activities Rotaractors often work with youth. In these interactions, youth protection principles apply. While assisting with Rotary or non-Rotary youth programs or events, Rotaractors should discuss youth protection with Rotarians from their sponsoring club to consider necessary steps to ensure the safety of youth and protect the volunteers.

Rotary International has a zero-tolerance policy toward abuse and harassment, and is guided by the following *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. (*RCP 2.110.1*)

All Rotaractors, Rotarians, clubs, and districts should ensure that their programs are consistent with both this statement and all RI youth protection policies.

### **What abuse and harassment prevention guidelines have been established?**

While these policies are primarily intended for Rotary clubs, youth protection is the responsibility of all adults working with youth, including Rotaractors. Work with your sponsoring Rotary club to determine how these policies apply to Rotaractors when working with minors. The RI Board of Directors has established the following policy concerning allegations of abuse or harassment:

#### 2.110.3. Sexual Abuse and Harassment Prevention

All Rotarians, clubs and districts should follow the statement of conduct for working with youth and RI guidelines for abuse and harassment prevention established by the general secretary. The guidelines include the following requirements

1. RI has a zero-tolerance policy against abuse and harassment.
2. An independent and thorough investigation must be made into any claims of sexual abuse or harassment.
3. Any adult involved in a Rotary youth program against whom an allegation of sexual abuse or harassment is made must be removed from all contact with youth until the matter is resolved.
4. Any allegation of abuse must be immediately reported to the appropriate law enforcement agency, in accordance with RI's zero-tolerance policy.
5. A club must terminate the membership of any Rotarian who admits to, is convicted of or is otherwise found to have engaged in sexual abuse or harassment. A non-Rotarian who admits to, is convicted of, or is otherwise found to have engaged in sexual abuse or harassment must be prohibited from

working with youth in a Rotary context. A club may not grant membership to a person who is known to have engaged in sexual abuse or harassment. (Upon obtaining information that a club has knowingly failed to terminate the membership of such a Rotarian, the RI Board will take steps to have the Rotarian's membership terminated, including action to terminate the club's charter for failure to comply).

6. If an investigation into a claim of sexual abuse or harassment is inconclusive, then, for the safety of youth participants and the protection of the accused, additional safeguards must be put in place to assure the protection of any youth with whom the individual may have future contact. If there are subsequent claims of sexual abuse or harassment, the adult shall be permanently prohibited from working with youth in a Rotary context. Regardless of criminal or civil guilt, the continued presence of the adult could be detrimental to the reputation of the organization and could be harmful to youth. It can also benefit the adult in preventing additional accusations from other youth. A person who is accused but later cleared of charges, may apply to be reinstated to participate in youth programs. Reinstatement is not a right, and no guarantee is made that he or she will be reinstated to his or her former position.

#### 2.110.4. Travel by Youth

Recognizing that Rotary clubs and districts are encouraged to undertake activities that develop the New Generations, club and district programs or activities that involve minors undertaking travel outside their local community must develop, maintain, and comply with youth protection policies and written procedures.

Clubs and districts:

1. shall obtain written permission from the parents or guardians of all youth participants for travel outside the local community in advance;
2. shall provide parents or legal guardians with specific details about the program, location of event, travel itineraries, sleeping accommodations, and contact information for program organizers before departure;
3. should, when traveling 150 miles away from home residence or out of home country, require the parents or legal guardians of each minor to provide travel insurance for the minor, which includes such coverages as medical (when traveling outside home country), emergency medical evacuation, repatriation of remains, and legal liability, in amounts satisfactory to the club or district organizing the activity or event, with coverage from the time of the minor's departure from home until the return home.

Club and district policies and procedures should include:

1. volunteer application and screening procedures;
2. outlines of volunteer job descriptions and responsibilities;
3. supervision standards for ratio of adults to minors
4. crisis management plan including:
  - a. handling medical and other emergencies and providing for adult support;
  - b. procedures for communicating with parents and legal guardians;
5. written guidelines for reporting and follow-through on allegations or incidents consistent with RI policy.

### **Should Rotarians, Rotaractors and other adults working with Rotary's youth programs undergo background checks?**

Although Rotary International does not require Rotarians, Rotaractors, or non-Rotarians involved in youth programs other than Youth Exchange undergo a background check, including law enforcement public record check and a reference check, this practice is strongly recommended. Additionally, if your Rotaract club is

affiliated with a university, school regulations may require screening of adults before permitting the Rotaract club to work with minors. RI advises that background check, including law enforcement public record check and a reference check should be conducted for all Rotaractors who have unsupervised contact with any youth. This may include, but is not limited to, club and district officers and committee members, counselors, advisors, and various Rotarians and non-Rotarians who host, chaperone, or drive students for activities or conduct sessions and outings. In general, background checks need not be conducted for adults who will have only casual or occasional group interactions with youth.

Districts are encouraged to consult a local legal professional to ensure that screening procedures adhere to local law and practice. Districts may also wish to communicate with local youth-serving organizations to learn about the resources available in the community for screening volunteers.

## **What other resources are available for learning more about Youth Protection?**

Work with your sponsoring club to determine if your district has a youth protection officer, this individual may be able to provide abuse and harassment prevention training to Rotaractors, Rotarians, and non-Rotarian volunteers. If your Rotaract club event is affiliated with a university, the school should be able to provide information on any necessary screening procedures and other rules regarding youth protection, which you may choose to adapt for your specific needs. Other community organizations engaged in youth development in your area may also be willing to share information on the steps they take to ensure of their program participants.

The *Abuse and Harassment Prevention Training Manual Leader's Guide (775)* is available from the download library at [http://www.rotary.org/RIdocuments/en\\_pdf/775en.pdf](http://www.rotary.org/RIdocuments/en_pdf/775en.pdf). This manual provides information on abuse and harassment awareness and prevention, recognizing and reporting problems, and developing a support system for youth. It also includes a training manual for local use.

Significant portions your district's Youth Exchange policies can be extended to apply when Rotaractors work with minors. Speak with your district Youth Exchange committee chair about your district's Youth Exchange abuse and harassment prevention policy to determine how these policies may be implemented.

## **I need additional assistance. Who may I contact?**

Youth Programs staff is available to answer questions regarding youth protection.

If you are made aware of an abuse or harassment allegation please inform the appropriate RI Programs staff member within 72 hours.

<p>Youth Programs Dept. RI Programs Division</p> <p>Rotary International One Rotary Center 1560 Sherman Avenue Evanston, Illinois 60201-3698, USA</p> <p>Fax: 1.847.556.2182</p>	<p>Haris Sofradzija <b>Youth Activities Program Coordinator</b> <a href="mailto:Rotaract@rotary.org">Rotaract@rotary.org</a> - 1.847.866.3315</p> <p>Annahita Ghaboussi <b>Youth Activities Program Coordinator</b> <a href="mailto:Rotaract@rotary.org">Rotaract@rotary.org</a> - 1.847.866.3296</p> <p>Kate Hoepfel <b>Senior Youth Activities Program Coordinator</b> <a href="mailto:Rotaract@rotary.org">Rotaract@rotary.org</a> - 1.847.866.3436</p>
--	--