

District 9800
Victoria, Australia

**ISSUES OF ABUSE AND
HARASSMENT**

**PREVENTION,
RECOGNITION AND RESPONSE**

**ROTARY INTERNATIONAL
YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM**

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INTRODUCTION

Harassment and abuse prevention is a serious concern of exchange programmes around the world, including Rotary. A multi faceted approach incorporates proper screening of host families, effective management of abuse situations, and mandatory training and education of Youth Exchange Mentors. Although harassment and sexual abuse cannot be uniformly prevented, it can be lessened through protective measures enacted by Youth Exchange mentors.

DEFINITIONS

Harassment

Harassment is any unwanted physical or verbal conduct that offends or humiliates the student.

Harassment includes sexual harassment, but can take the form of repeated comments or gestures about the student's home country, language, culture, personal appearance or other characteristics.

Sexual Abuse

Both males and females can be abused in the following ways:

Full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex and fondling.

Showing pornographic books and videos

Asking students to take part in making videos or taking pornographic photographs.

PREVENTION

The most critical goal is to prevent abuse from happening in the first place through:

- Education of the student about safety measures prior to any abuse ever occurring.
- Breaking the silence about harassment and sexual abuse. The more that survivors speak out about their experience, the more that abusers will no longer be able to depend on the silence to protect them from exposure, which may discourage some potential abusers from ever starting down that path.

DISCLOSURES

When dealing with disclosures of abuse or harassment, follow the four R's:

_ RECOGNISE

_ RESPOND

_ RECORD

_ REPORT

RECOGNISE

Being alert to common signs of abuse and harassment is an important aspect of risk assessment and child protection

The presence of indicators may suggest child abuse, however the absence of indicators does not always discount the disclosure of maltreatment.

Generally, a single indicator may not provide conclusive evidence of abuse, however the presence of any indicators should be treated very seriously.

Indicators of abuse must be considered within the student's context, i.e:

1. what is known about the student's family, medical, psychological, educational and social history: and-

2. what developmental behaviours and competencies you would expect the student to be demonstrating.

Possible Adolescent Indicators of Child Abuse and Neglect

- Acting out behaviour eg school truancy, early sexual activity, substance use and delinquency
- School performance problems
- Poor interpersonal skills eg lack of respect for others, intolerance of difference and lack of empathy
- May respond aggressively or be withdrawn
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Somatic/physical symptoms
- Quick temper and explosive
- Unable to accept responsibility or blames others
- Disconnected from others, mistrustful, defensive.
- Lacks confidence, but masks this with bravado.
- Low self esteem

RESPONSE TO DISCLOSURES

You may think you are making things worse by reporting the disclosures. Few things are worse than allowing abuse to continue. Many children and adolescents are devastated by the experience of abuse and, in the most serious cases, may be seriously harmed or have their life threatened.

What you should do, if abuse is disclosed to you :

1. Do not promise confidentiality .

Explain that you will have to tell someone about the abuse in order to make it stop.

2. Use active and passive listening skills and protective interrupting .

Most important, you should listen attentively, and let he/she know that it was right that they tell someone about their worries. Try to make sure that the student isn't disclosing where everybody can hear.

3. Stay calm and competent.

Stay calm and make sure that the young person feels safe and knows that he/she is not to blame for what has happened. Answer the student's queries as honestly as you can. Know the correct procedures to follow (see the flow chart).

4. Help the conversation to move along.

Only ask the student questions that establish what was done and who did it.
Reassure the student that they did the right thing in coming to you and talking about the problem

5. Be non judgemental.

Do not be critical of anything that has happened or anyone who may be involved.
However you can respond to the student's feelings and try to help the student identify their fears.

What The Student Does Not Need

- **To be blamed**
- **To have their own family or situation criticised or blamed**
- **To have adults get angry or excited**
- **To have adults moralising about right or wrong**
- **To be interrogated**
- **To be told to "forget it" or "get over it"**
- **To not have their disclosure acknowledged...this is an enormous step for a student to take.**
- **To be shown excessive pity or sympathy**

RECORD

Keep a written record of the conversation with the student as soon after the disclosure as you can, including the date and time of the conversation.

This is important. Use the student's words, and record only what has been told to you without making any judgements.

REPORT

Report the disclosure to the appropriate person on the flow chart from the Rotary organisation, and they will select the appropriate people to be informed, as well as the appropriate action to follow in order to keep the student safe.

NB: Seek advice from Rotary personnel before informing anyone else about the disclosure or let any person suspected of abuse know what's happened - you could be putting the student in greater jeopardy by doing so.

FACTORS WHY CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS DO NOT ALWAYS REPORT ABUSE

For children and adolescents there is always hope that the abuse will stop. Disclosure can finally offer relief, however the following reactions can make it extremely difficult for children or adolescents to talk about the abuse they have experienced.

Many students often feel very confused and suffer great shame. They fear the consequences of the disclosure once it has occurred. These consequences may include removal of the offending person from the family, divided loyalty, sibling and family anger, and the possible need to repeat the disclosure to a large number of people.

Other reactions may include the following:

Helplessness

- “there is nothing I can do to make this stop”
- “no one will believe me”
- “they made me promise that I wouldn’t talk about it”

Fear

- “he said they wouldn’t believe me”
- “what will happen to my family (host family) if I tell - she said that they would send me away”
- “I can’t trust anyone”

Guilt

- “this must be my fault”
- “if I...then he wouldn’t have...”
- “I am bad/stupid/naughty....that’s why this has happened”

Shame

- “this makes me feel so dirty”
- “this must only happen in this family”
- “they’ll think I’m bad/naughty/easy”

FACTORS WHICH PREVENT ADULTS FROM REPORTING DISCLOSURES OR CONCERNS

- Fear of litigation or liability for reporting: reluctance to testify in court if required
- Difficulty in identifying abuse
- Not believing the indicators of abuse, based on the stereotypes of the student or the informant eg “Oh he/she’s always causing trouble”
- Fear of making an unjustified report
- Belief that reporting is not part of your responsibility
- Fear that reporting will antagonise others....the Rotary club, the family, colleagues, friends.
- Belief that reported families are stigmatised
- Belief that reporting to authorities will not lead to a helpful intervention for the student.
- Objection to the time and possible paperwork involved
- Getting involved

WAYS IN WHICH ABUSE IS MINIMISED AND DISCOUNTED BY ADULTS

Rationalisation of Personal Experience of Abuse

This happened to me and I survived...best to leave it alone

Definition of Abuse

Okay this is not a good situation, but maybe it's not abuse

Distress Leading to Denial

God that poor student ... this is too horrible to think about.

Club Focus

Hey, the student is under so much stress, they are doing the best they can.

Culture

That's the way that family operates...why should I intervene?

Attitudes to Children and Adolescents

He/she is just naughty who doesn't know when to stop.

She is a very tarty girl

Minimising the Effects of Abuse

Kids all over the world deal with this – he/she won't even remember this.

Racism Stereotypes

All of that lot do that to their kids

Class Stereotypes

That's what happens to those types

Lack of Experience or Information or Support

Well what am I supposed to do about it?

Maintaining Distance

That is a horrible story, but it isn't really any of my business

Workload Stress

What else do I take on? If I report this it'll open up Pandora's box.

System vs Individual Needs

This student is already the focus of so many people's energy and resources – now he/she is creating more problems

Defeatism

The damage is already done and reporting it will never achieve anything useful anyway, it'll just make it worse.

POST DISCLOSURE

After a disclosure of harassment or abuse, the student may or may not remain on exchange, but if they do, they will most likely still continue their relationship with the club (depending on the circumstances).

There will be a need for a centralised and managed team approach to supporting the student and their host family.

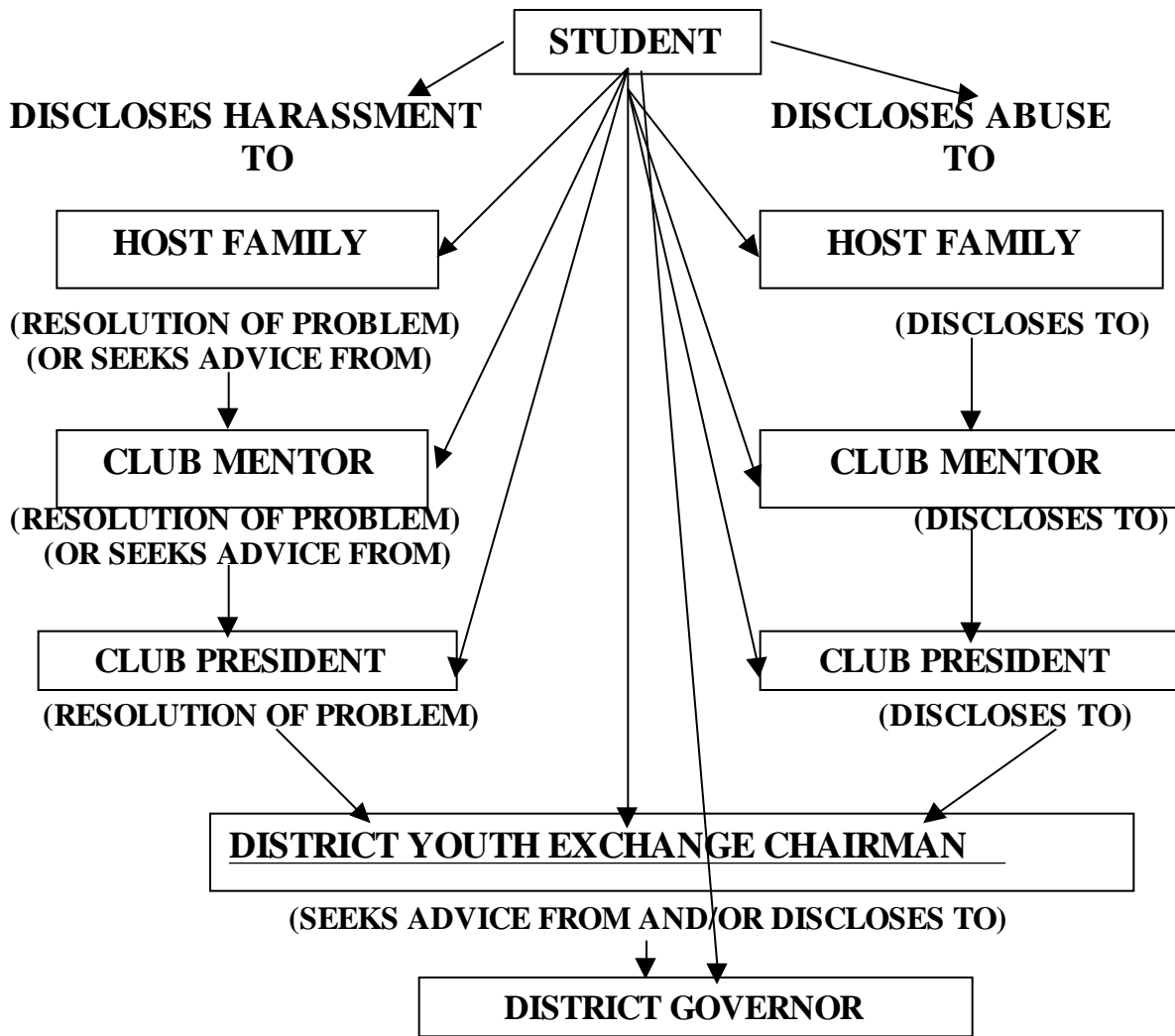
The student may become withdrawn and appear to be avoiding members of the host family or club.

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.

There may also be short and long term ramifications of abuse, and club members and host families may experience emotional reactions as a result of the process. As such they also have a responsibility to themselves to self-care, and therefore there may be a need for debriefing and ongoing support.

STUDENT PROTECTION NOTIFICATION STEPS



The District Governor will select appropriate actions from the following :

- * **Ensure the safety of the student**
- * **Report to Police**
- * **Refer student to appropriate support (District psychologist, other appropriate agency and club mentor)**
- * **Contact the District Governor of the sponsoring district.**
- * **Contact the student's parents**

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District Governor undertakes ongoing support