



Voice For Life Youth Child and Youth Protection Policy

Introduction

Being a Voice For Life Youth group requires a personal responsibility and collective accountability to actively care for and protect any children and young people. This policy sets out our expectations, requirements and procedures for the safety of our children and young people. Of paramount concern in this document is the welfare and safety of children and young people who come into our care.

Policy Summary

This policy outlines our commitment to child protection. It includes our procedures when child abuse is reported to us or is suspected by us. All leaders/helpers/visitors/parents and caregivers are expected to be familiar with this policy and to abide by it.

Purpose Statement

We have an obligation to ensure the wellbeing of children in our care and are committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and to the protection of all children. The safety and wellbeing of the child is our top priority when suspecting abuse.

We support the roles of the New Zealand Police and Oranga Tamariki in the investigation of suspected abuse and will report suspected/alleged abuse to these agencies.

We support families/whanau to protect their children.

We strive to provide a safe environment, free from physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse.

Policy beliefs:

- The interest and protection of the child is our priority in all actions.
- We recognise the rights of the family/whanau to participate in the decision-making about their children.
- We have a commitment to ensure that as an organisation we are able to identify the signs and symptoms of potential abuse and neglect and are able to take appropriate action in response.
- We are committed to supporting all participants to work in agreement with this policy, to work with regional group leaders to ensure child protection policies are consistent and high quality.
- We will always comply with responsibilities of a child protection legislation.
- We are committed to discuss any concerns about an individual child with regional group leaders or other appropriate people (in the case where the abusive behaviour involves the regional group leader).

Voice For Life Incorporated Society

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PO Box 12-286, Thorndon, Wellington

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Definition of Child & Young Persons

A child is someone under the age of 14 years and a young person is aged 14 years and over, but under 17 years who is not or has never been married or in a civil union. (section 2, CYP&F Act)

Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse is the harming, whether physically or sexually, ill-treatment or neglect of any child or young person. Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic needs, and can cause long-term serious harm to the child's health or development. (section 2, CYP&F Act)

Relationship Between Regional Group Leaders or Helpers and Children or Young People

1. **Confidentiality.** Communications between regional group leaders or helpers and parents of children or young people shall be treated as privileged information, unless there is a clear and imminent danger to others.
2. **Discrimination.** Regional group leaders or helpers should recognise the dignity of children and young people and avoid any discrimination.
3. **Abuse of Power.** Regional group leaders or helpers shall not abuse their position by taking advantage of children or young people for purposes of personal, professional, political, financial or sexual gain.
4. **Sexual Harassment.** Children and young people shall be free from the possibility of sexual exploitation or sexual harassment.
5. **Responsibility.** Regional group leaders or helpers should treat children and young people with respect, courtesy, fairness and honesty. Regional group leaders or helpers should take appropriate action against any conduct by other adults that is contrary to this policy.

Selection of Regional Group Leaders and Helpers

All regional group leaders with Voice For Life Youth groups shall undergo a screening process as outlined below:

1. Application form.
2. Police vetting. (Workers can not start until this is cleared)
3. Referee checks by a church leader.
4. Interview by Voice For Life National staff.
5. Receiving a signed declaration from the regional group leader which states that they will adhere to policies and expectations required of a regional group leader.
6. Approval by Voice For Life National staff.

All helpers with Voice For Life Youth groups shall undergo a screening process as outlined below:

1. Application form.
2. Police vetting. (Workers can not start until this is cleared)
3. Referee checks by a church leader.
4. Interview by the regional group leader.
5. Receiving a signed declaration from the helper which states that they will adhere to policies and expectations required of a regional group leader.
6. Approval by the regional group leader.

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Practical Guidelines

1. Regional group leaders and helpers must work for the physical, social, educational, moral and spiritual well-being of the children and young people in their care. This means they will not do anything at any time to damage their trust or the trust of their care-givers.
2. Regional group leaders and helpers shall ensure that care-givers will be adequately informed about the programme their children are involved with, and about any transport arrangements.
3. Regional group leaders and helpers will avoid any and all behaviour that might lead to, or be interpreted as, sexual exploitation or abuse. This means they will not take any children or young people alone to a solitary place and if it is necessary to talk with them alone, it will be within sight and sound of other people. Regional group leaders and helpers will not initiate any form of unwanted affection or touching, nor make suggestive comments or act in ways that are potentially sexual.
4. Regional group leaders and helpers will work with children or young people to set guidelines for acceptable behaviour within their group. They will expect children or young people to act on the basis of these guidelines.
5. Regional group leaders and helpers must be aware that by law:
 - a. Children under 14 years of age cannot be left without reasonable provision for supervision and care.
 - b. Depending on the child's age and maturity, leaving a child under 17 can be considered neglect or abuse.

Support of Regional Group Leaders and Helpers

1. Training and Updating. All regional group leaders will be advised of any policy or law changes. One meeting a year with Voice For Life National will give time to going through this policy and providing additional training where it is needed, or wanted.
2. Policy revision. This policy will be revised annually and updated as required.

Child Abuse Reporting Procedure

The safety of the child will be the primary consideration and all allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly to determine whether the allegation is founded or unfounded.

Confidentiality is to be maintained throughout.

This procedure includes the responsibilities of the informant (the one to whom the allegation of abuse is first made), the procedures to be followed if a helper is suspected of abuse, if a parent is suspected of abusing their own child, and where the suspected abuse is by someone outside of the family. Allegations or suspicions are to be reported to the regional group leader, who will also inform Voice For Life National.

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In the instance where an allegation is made against a regional group leader, this is to be reported to Voice For Life National.

The responsibilities of the informant

All allegations of abuse will be taken seriously. The following procedure should be followed if a child or young person discloses any abuse to you.

1. Listen to the child or young person. Allow him/her to tell you only as much as they want. Do not put words into his/her mouth. Under no circumstances should he/she be questioned beyond that which he/she voluntarily discloses. Your job is not to solve the problem or find out whether it is true.
2. Write down what the child or young person says. This should be factual and include the time and date of the disclosure, who was present, and where the conversation took place.
3. Make sure that the child or young person understands that you accept what they say and that they will get help, but do not make any promises that you will not be able to keep i.e. you will be safe now.
4. Do not panic or overreact. When children disclose it is a critical moment for them. They will be watching your reaction as to how you cope with the disclosure. Depending on your reaction they will decide how far their disclosure should go.
5. Do not criticise the child or young person for not disclosing sooner or for allowing the alleged abuse to take place.
6. Do not confront the alleged abuser yourself.
7. Report the alleged abuse to the regional group leader, or Voice For Life National as soon as possible and do not discuss the matter with anyone else.
8. Check on the immediate safety of the child or young person.

Procedure when there is an allegation that a regional group leader or helper has abused a child or young person.

1. The allegation is reported to Voice For Life National as soon as possible, within 24 hours.
2. The regional group leader or helper suspected of abuse may be suspended while an investigation is being done.
3. Voice For Life National will consult with the appropriate outside support agencies in investigating the allegations e.g. Oranga Tamariki, or the Police.
4. If a regional group leader or helper is found guilty of abuse, they will step down from their position and will no longer be permitted to work with children or young people with Voice For Life Youth.

Procedure when abuse by a parent or caregiver is suspected.

1. The suspicion is reported to the regional group leader within 48 hours.

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2. The regional group leader, together with the informant, reports it to Voice For Life National within 48 hours.
3. If child abuse is suspected, the Voice For Life National will report it to the appropriate outside agency e.g. Oranga Tamariki, or the Police.
4. The parent will be informed by the police or Oranga Tamariki.

Procedure when the suspected abuse has occurred outside the family.

1. The suspicion is reported to the regional group leader within 48 hours.
2. The regional group leader, together with the informant, reports it to Voice For Life National within 48 hours.
3. The parents are informed before any further action is taken.
4. In consultation with the parents, the suspected abuse is reported to the Police or Oranga Tamariki.

Record Keeping

1. The informant will make a factual record of all observations and communications related to the disclosure. It is important to only include what was said, seen, or heard, as this may become a legal document.
2. This record will be made as soon as possible after the disclosure.
3. The record will be concise and will include date and time of the disclosure and the informant's relationship to the child or young person making the disclosure.
4. The informant should sign the record.
5. This record will remain confidential to those involved in the investigation.
6. A factual written record will be kept of the entire process. This will include the date and time that the incident was reported, to whom it was reported, and the name and signature of the person doing the reporting for each step of the process.
7. Support will be offered through pastoral care to the victim of child abuse and their family, the alleged perpetrator and their family, the informant, as well as all involved in any child abuse investigation.

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