

Safeguarding Youth Policy

Policy: Fairbanks Youth Advocates will do everything reasonably possible to ensure that youth are completely safe at all times.

Purpose: We are dedicated to serving the at risk youth of the Interior. Under no condition will FYA participate in compromising their personal, physical, emotional or spiritual safety. This policy is written to educate staff of their requirements as Mandated Reporters and the procedure to address suspected abuse. This policy also addresses appropriate behavior and boundary guidance for both staff and volunteers that are intended to keep everyone safe.

Recruitment and Selection of Employees

Fairbanks Youth Advocates is committed to following best practices of hiring and selection of volunteers and staff to ensure youth are safe in our care. This includes local and federal background checks, selective interviewing, and reference checking.

Background for reporting Child Abuse:

- **Child Abuse Reporting Act:** While everyone should report suspected child abuse, Alaska Penal Code provides that it is a crime for certain professionals and laypersons who have a special working relationship of contact with children not to report suspected child abuse to the proper authorities.
- If you have **reasonable cause to suspect** that a child has suffered harm as a result of abuse or neglect, you must **immediately** (as soon as reasonably possible-no later than 24 hours) report that information to the nearest office of the state's Department of Health & Social Services, Office of Children's Services.
- Alaska Penal Code gives mandated reporters who report suspected cases of child abuse absolute immunity, both civilly and criminally, for making such reports. However, any person who fails to report an instance of child abuse as required by the Child Abuse Reporting Act is guilty of a misdemeanor.
- For more information, see:
 - **<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/publications/reportingchildabuse.htm>**
- STATE LAW defines child abuse or neglect to include the following actions by those responsible for a child's welfare:
 - Physical injury that harms or threatens a child's health or welfare;
 - Failure to care for a child, including neglect of the necessary physical (food, shelter, clothing, and medical attention), emotional, mental and social needs;
 - Sexual abuse, including molestation or incest;

- Sexual exploitation, including permitting or encouraging prostitution;
- Mental injury--An injury to the emotional well-being, or intellectual or psychological capacity of a child, as evidenced by an observable and substantial impairment in the child's ability to function in a developmentally appropriate manner; *or*
- Maltreatment--A child has suffered substantial harm as a result of child abuse or neglect due to an act or omission not necessarily committed by the child's parent, custodian or guardian.

Principles

The following principles are key for all staff including volunteers:

- The safety of all youth is paramount.
- In cases of suspected abuse all staff have a responsibility to take action in the ways set out in this procedure.
- **ALL PAID** staff members are considered Mandated Reporters and are **required by law** to report all suspicions of child abuse.
- If a volunteer has reason to suspect, FYA encourages volunteers to report as well.
- A staff or volunteer may choose to consult with a supervisor prior to reporting. Ultimately, the person who has the suspicion, is responsible to report.
- Investigation is always the responsibility of the Office of Children's Services and the Police. These agencies have to balance the necessity for action to protect the child with the potential adverse effects of an investigation on the family and/or others.
- It is not staff's responsibility to determine whether suspicions are correct, or to investigate those suspicions.
- Record keeping is essential and all documents should be kept to the standards outlined in the recording procedures.
- This procedure also covers disclosures made in electronic communications (e-mail or text messaging).

Procedure

1. Respond to a Disclosure or suspected Abuse of Minor. . if you have reason to suspect:

- Call OCS. The Northern Region (Fairbanks) number is 451-2650.
 - If youth reports of previous abuse and states that it is not actively going on and is not in immediate danger of further abuse OR youth reports that abuse is actively going on or there is a chance that the abuse will occur when the child is released:
 - Staff is instructed to share their observation(s) with their immediate supervisor and Program Director.

- Staff who made the observation completes a written Suspected Child Abuse Report and calls it into OCS.
- Staff who made the observations provides a written Suspected Child Abuse Report report to their FYA supervisor.

Staff Conduct

It is important that we establish guidelines and boundaries to **ensure our safety as well as the safety of the young person**. The following guidelines apply to all employees and volunteers at Fairbanks Youth Advocates whether acting in a paid or unpaid capacity:

Valuing and respecting **ALL** as individuals, and modelling appropriate conduct is expected of all staff, volunteers, and contractors at all times. This excludes bullying type behavior, aggressive behaviour, racism, or sexism.

DO:

Fist bumps are an acceptable form of greeting.

A risk assessment before taking a youth alone in a car, however short the journey.

Get permission from supervisor first.

Call a taxi whenever possible.

Leave doors open, be public.

Perform bed-checks every half hour to assure youth are safe and accounted for.

Wait until bathroom is empty before going in.

Keep your personal information personal: facebook, email, phone numbers.

Laugh with clients.

Be respectful.

DON'T:

Initiate other physical contact.

Give rides outside of service hours.

Take a youth alone without permission.

DON'T:

Shut or lock doors or be out of view.

Text youth with personal devices.

Go into an occupied bathroom.

DON'T:

Make suggestive remarks or comments.

Tease about weight, sexual preferences,

Religion, etc.

Know your personal limits.

Do set boundaries for yourself and youth when necessary.

Report any kind of accusation immediately to supervisor.

Participate in any training which is available to you to support you in your work.

Remember that those who abuse can be of any age, gender, ethnic background or class.

E-Safety

Children and young people can be vulnerable to exploitation or abuse through the medium of Information Technology. It is important that staff and volunteers are alert to potential risks young people may be exposed to, and that steps have been taken to mitigate the risk of this occurring, with specific reference to:

- Content - e.g. exposure to age inappropriate material, inaccurate or misleading information, socially unacceptable material (e.g. inciting violence, hate or intolerance) and illegal material, including images,
- Contact - e.g. grooming using communication technologies leading to inappropriate behavior or abuse; including sexting,
- Commerce - e.g. exposure to inappropriate advertising, online gambling, identity theft and financial scams;
- Culture -e.g. bullying via websites, mobile phones or other communication technologies, or inappropriate downloading of copyright materials (i.e. music, films, images); exposure to inappropriate advertising, online gambling and financial scams;

If there is any indication that a child or young person is experiencing difficulties in this area then this should be taken seriously and acted on. Speak with the supervisor on shift immediately.

Safety/Bed Checks

To assure the safety of all and that all youth & volunteers signed in are accounted for, a safety check will be performed on the hour and half hour. Safety checks are primarily focused on determining that all youth are accounted for and that all youth are breathing. This information is recorded AT the time that the safety check was performed. All safety checks will be completed by staff between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 5:30 a.m.

Procedure:

Staff should never touch youth.

Staff should never uncover youth.

Using a flashlight, staff should shine the light on the mid-section of the young person to determine if the young person is breathing. Lights never shine on faces. If it is unclear if the young person is breathing, the second adult should be asked to assist in making a determination.