

Faith and Light international Code of conduct

Faith and Light is founded on the belief that each person with an intellectual disability is fully a person with all the rights of a human being: above all the right to be loved, recognised and respected for himself or herself and in the choices he/she makes; the right also to receive whatever help is necessary in order to grow at every level, spiritual and human. Faith and Light also believes that every person, able-bodied or disabled, is equally loved by God and that Jesus lives in them, even if the person concerned can barely express this. Faith and Light believes that every person, even the most disabled, is called to deepen his or her life in Jesus, to receive all the spiritual richness from his/her Church, sacraments, liturgical tradition, etc. He/she is called to be a source of grace and peace for the whole community, and also for the Churches and for all humanity. (Charter II, 1).

The Faith and Light International Association has set up a code of conduct relating to the wellbeing and protection of the most vulnerable people in its communities, in particular the children and the intellectually disabled, young and adult, who have joined the local communities for their usual meeting times and for more occasional activities such as weekends, holiday camps, pilgrimages...

This code of conduct does not replace any local legislation in force on these topics but it gives guidelines on the behaviour that members of the communities must observe within their community to respect the wellbeing of the most fragile members and protect them from any risk of abuse or maltreatment. Each person is responsible for knowing the legislation in force.

The communities may have many activities other than the regular meetings. They arise according to the needs and creativity of individuals and the inspiration from God. Among these initiatives are holiday camps, retreats and pilgrimages, etc. (Charter III, 2).

1) What is meant by maltreatment?

The World Health Organization defines maltreatment as all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the person's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. (WHO, Geneva, 29-31 March 1999).

2) What is this code of conduct?

In order to help people with intellectual disabilities to find peace of heart, hope and the desire to grow, it is certainly necessary to see them in the light of the Gospel, but also to understand their human needs in their suffering, and to know how to respond. For this, we must gradually acquire human experience and the necessary knowledge. Those who are involved in Faith and Light must become competent in the way they accompany people who suffer or are in difficulties. (Charter II, 3).

In our communities, we should, as invited by our charter:

- Treat children and the most vulnerable people in our community with respect and dignity, taking into account their specific characters, their needs and their choices in accordance with local traditions and culture
- Respect the rights of each person as a complete person, both in their body and soul
- Create and develop a culture of frankness and transparency that allows each person to feel free

to speak openly about their concerns, problems and personal situations and to be listened to seriously

- Avoid any behaviour that may threaten the physical and psychological integrity of any person in the community
- Inform the community coordinator and/or the vice provincial coordinator of any concern with regard to compliance with this code or any situation that contradicts this code
- Make sure that it is the most appropriate people in the community who shower or take to the toilet vulnerable people who cannot do so alone

For each activity lasting more than 24 hours, each community coordinator will send a statement to the provincial or national association. That statement shall indicate that all the participants have been informed of this code of conduct. Each community coordinator must be informed by the provincial or national association of the means to implement when necessary, and specify the name of the reference person to contact in the association.

People with intellectual disability who are unable to read or write, or have limited capacity to do so, will have to be informed about the content of this code in a way appropriate to their level of communication and understanding.

In addition, when planning activities, community coordinators will have to foresee means of vigilance to implement, to ensure the well-being and the protection of the most fragile persons. Every evening, the people in charge of the supervision shall make a replay of the day's activities in relation with the protection of vulnerable persons.

Planning will take into account that legal prohibitions, whether factual or intentional, are punishable and liable to immediate prosecution, not all necessitating the same means of action or mapping. Amongst the legal prohibitions, it will be stipulated that it is absolutely forbidden under all circumstances to:

- hit or use any form of physical, verbal or psychological violence
- have verbal or physical behaviours of a sexual nature or sexually abuse the person
- humiliate the person or belittle them through words or acts
- Harass or intimidate directly or indirectly through social media.

We must be aware of the need to raise awareness amongst leaders and then all members of issues regarding abuse and maltreatment in general. On the other hand, when someone secretly receives a revelation, or finds out, he/she is upset and often disoriented, without knowing what to do. This increases the risk of either staying silent or of alerting everyone - and it is very important to maintain a high degree of discretion to protect the victim and to be able to listen to them in confidentiality. Therefore, there should be a team or at least one contact person with the provincial coordinating team. This person can first listen to the person who has knowledge of the facts and give him/her guidance on the facts and information to detect.

3) Dealing with information about mistreatment or abuse, received from a community member

- a. It is necessary to have favourable preconceptions about the victim and not minimize the verbalisation of the event. It is very important to help him/her express himself/herself freely, making sure not to influence him/her, but trying to gather objective facts and write them down.
- b. The credibility needs to be assessed – based on objective facts noted– from the objective facts (observations or others). It is better to remove the alleged person from the activities so as not to compromise the statement.

- c. Create a written memo stating, in the most objective way possible (places, date and time), the facts and what was heard, and make it available to the authorities who may be required to carry out an investigation.
- d. If the facts are credible, the person who carried out the abuse must be immediately excluded from the movement and forbidden from taking part in any further meetings.
- e. If the abused person is a minor or vulnerable, those informed of this abuse must inform the police and relevant authority, as well as those responsible for the victim (parent, guardian) and the leaders of the provincial association.
- f. You can make a distinction in other situations where the facts are said to be “unclear” and where it is then necessary to carry out an investigation in accordance with the presumption of innocence but also with the desire not to risk any new abuse being committed.

4) Recommended practices for handling information from a community member, concerning mistreatment or abuse

- We must be aware that the person who receives the news in confidentiality will be upset and will need to be listened to in the strictest discretion by someone, with skills in the field, who can help him/her to listen to the victim and know how to proceed.
- This information should never be underestimated.
- It is therefore necessary to handle this initial information in the strictest confidence, and, in accordance with the presumption of innocence, request the strictest confidentiality from the person who raised this situation contravening the law and breaching this code of conduct. However, we must not contribute to the law of silence often present in such circumstances.
- Any notification made by a member of a community must immediately be sent to the provincial coordinator, who will be kept regularly updated with any development in this regard. The information will also be sent to the President of the Board of Directors of Faith and Light International as well as the General Secretary.
- If the fact is proven correct or confirmed, it is necessary to accompany the victim and allow him/her to verbalize his trauma with an official complaint. The victim should not bear the responsibility for the abuse, especially if it is perpetrated by a person of authority. The perpetrator of the abuse should no longer be in contact with the victim and possibly with the community members. Everyone must be treated differently. The community coordinator will ensure that appropriate support is provided to those involved, their companions and their families; this support will be extended to other members of the community affected by this situation.

5) Adaptation to local legislation

All provinces are requested to ensure that this code of conduct be adapted in a way that is consistent with the laws of each of the countries where Faith and Light is present.

The Board of Directors will be kept informed of the dissemination of these national codes of conduct as and when they are produced. A copy (in one of the three official languages of Faith and Light) will be sent to the International Secretariat.

**Document templates to be signed by each community coordinator
for a Faith and Light event**

Statement to return to your provincial coordinator

STATEMENT

I, the undersigned:

Community coordinator:

Province:

Declare that I have read and understood the Code of Conduct of Faith and Light and pledge to respect it and abide by it as well as by the legislation of my country. Declare also that I have informed all the participants of the content of the Code. Declare being informed by the provincial/national Association of the means to implement if necessary.

Drawn up in:

On (date):

Signature: