



## **Crisis Management and Communication Plan For Child Sexual Abuse Allegation Sample Policy and Guideline**

### **SECTION I: PREVENTION AND EMPLOYEE TRAINING**

(Our organization) has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures to protect children in our care from abuse in any form. These range from extensive pre-hire background checks, staff and volunteer supervision and training, and program policies and procedures that structure program delivery to assure child safety and compliance with all funding source and licensing agencies regulations as well as all local, state and federal law. This plan is designed to assure that the Organization's response to an allegation of abuse prioritizes protection of the child(ren) involved by providing clear guidance for the Board of Directors and staff members.

### **SECTION II: CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

(Our organization) has a risk management plan in place that is shared with staff and board members so that if a crisis occurs, the Organization can move promptly and effectively.

*Following is a checklist of mandatory and recommended actions to take during a sexual abuse allegation.*

- Immediately contact the Executive Director.
- The Executive Director will immediately contact the Organization's legal counsel.
- The Executive Director will immediately inform law enforcement and/or Child Protective Services and solicit guidance with respect to handling the interview of the child and contact with the alleged abuser to prevent interference with vital investigative matters.
- Suspend the alleged abuser from work and notify the alleged abuser that (s)he is not to have any contact with any children or parents/guardians enrolled in Organization programs, or with any Organization employee, until further notice, pending the outcome of the investigation.
- The Executive Director will inform the Chair of the Board and solicit guidance.

- The Executive Director will inform the full board as soon as possible and in an executive session setting.
- The Executive Director will prepare appropriate media statements in consultation with the Organization's legal counsel including, and if deemed necessary and appropriate, whether the investigation results in the termination or continued employment of the alleged abuser.
- The Executive Director will make impacted staff aware of the crisis and advise them of communication plans and the importance of referring all media to the designated spokesperson (most often the Executive Director). The confidentiality of all parties of a sexual abuse allegation, including the alleged abuser, must be upheld at all times. Staff should be prepared to respond appropriately and compassionately to parents and others who may inquire about the crisis, while maintaining the confidentiality of all parties and of the allegation(s).
- The Executive Director will review the case file carefully, with consultation from legal counsel, and document each action taken since the allegation was first reported to the Organization.
- The Executive Director will inform the Organization's insurance carrier and solicit their guidance.
- Support will be offered to staff members who worked directly with the alleged abuser. This support may be provided via an internal source, an outside consultant, and/or Organization staff.
- Support and counseling referrals will be offered to the child's family, in consultation with legal counsel, law enforcement, and Child Protective Services.

### **SECTION III: DEALING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA**

Crisis Communications Management is a critical piece of (Our organization)'s risk management plan. Allegations directed against employees or volunteers within the Organization severely impact the Organization's integrity and credibility. Effective crisis communications includes not only being honest and forthright, but also conveying sensitivity and good judgment in terms of the Organization's constituents, including the victim's family, and courage in analyzing and correcting practices that may assist in preventing similar situations in the future.

*Following are some guidelines for dealing with the media, determining who should deliver the Organization's message to the media, and what that message should be.*

#### **Dealing with the Media**

1. The Executive Director will gather the facts surrounding the allegation and will develop a media statement as soon as possible.
2. All calls from the media will be forwarded to the Executive Director, or to the designated spokesperson if not the Executive Director.
3. In the event that the spokesperson does not have all of the facts and/or a media statement developed, the spokesperson will inform reporters that (s)he will contact them as soon as all of the information and/or a statement is available. It is imperative that the spokesperson take all media calls regardless of whether or not facts and a statement are available. Avoiding the media until such time as facts and statements are available will be detrimental to the Organization's reputation.
4. All Organization employees must "contain" the story at all times and refrain from discussing the situation with the media, coworkers, colleagues, customers, and the general public.
5. The spokesperson must inquire about reporters' deadlines and be respectful of them. In the event that the information being requested by the reporters is not available by their established deadlines, the spokesperson must make contact with the reporters to assure them that (s)he is not avoiding them.
6. The spokesperson must, during all conversations with reporters, be mindful that nothing is "off the record" and assume that whatever is said to the media will be reported/published.
7. The spokesperson must avoid using the words "no comment" unless advised to do so by legal counsel.
8. The Organization's legal counsel should not act as the Organization's spokesperson.

### **Developing the Media Message or Statement**

1. Be brief and truthful.
2. Express sympathy for the victims.
3. State (Our organization)'s commitment to child safety.
4. State (Our organization)'s excellent child safety record and employee/volunteer screening process.
5. Assert, however, that even one abuse case is one too many.
6. Explain that the Organization is fully cooperating with the authorities.

### **Circulating the Media Message or Statement**

1. The message or statement should only be made available to inquiring news media (not all). It can be read, faxed or e-mailed to the inquiring reporter.
2. The statement should be transmitted by the designated spokesperson.
3. A television or radio station may request that the statement be read on air by the Organization's spokesperson. This is entirely appropriate; however it is to be made clear (on air) that the Organization is not participating in an interview, but merely reading the statement.
4. The Organization should refrain from participating in on-air interviews.

## **Sample Statements**

### *Allegation against Current Organization Staff / Volunteer*

"We are shocked and deeply saddened by the news that one of our [staff members, board members, volunteers] has been identified in connection with an allegation of sexual abuse. We express our sympathy to all of those affected. The accused individual has been removed from our [staff, board, volunteer pool, etc.] pending the outcome of the investigation. We are cooperating fully with the authorities investigating this situation. The safety of those we serve, including children, is our number one priority. Every staff member or volunteer is thoroughly screened through a series of professional checks and interviews prior to his or her employment or volunteer service. (Our organization) has zero tolerance for abuse and will continue to refine our practices to ensure the safety of everyone we serve."

### *Allegation against Former Organization Staff / Volunteer*

"We are aware of the recent allegations against a former [staff, volunteer, board member, etc.]. The person involved in these allegations is not currently [employed by the Organization, volunteer for the Organization, etc.]. The safety of those we serve, including children, is our number one priority. Every staff member or volunteer is thoroughly screened through a series of professional checks and interviews prior to his or her employment or volunteer service. (Our organization) has zero tolerance for abuse and will continue to refine our practices to ensure the safety of everyone we serve."

### *Organization Being Sued*

"This matter is currently in legal proceedings and we are not able to comment except to say that we are cooperating fully with the appropriate authorities. We would like to

express that the safety of those we serve, including children, is our number one priority.”