

Safeguarding Policy for Society of St. Vincent de Paul Rockford Council and Conferences

Scope This policy applies to all Vincentians of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Rockford Council, subjugated Conferences, volunteers and employees. This policy is determined to cover all events and activities of the Society including but not limited to home visits, special works, employment, meetings and other service and /or fellowship gatherings of Vincentians including those with the public.

Policy The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is committed to protecting the rights of all people, and to ensuring that vulnerable persons of all ages are protected from physical and mental violence, injury, abuse, and exploitation, including sexual abuse. Improper interference with the ability of Vincentians to perform their expected duties is not tolerated.

Safeguarding is the act of protecting from harm people who are vulnerable. It involves reducing and preventing risks of harm and working to ensure that vulnerable individuals and communities are safe and empowered. Safeguarding involves recognizing the human rights of all persons and working to ensure that those rights are not violated.

In the context of the St Vincent de Paul Society, safeguarding involves working to ensure that in seeking to assist people in need, we are committed to do no harm to their health and wellbeing or put them at risk of abuse or neglect. This policy seeks to address safeguarding as it applies to children and young people. It also applies to other vulnerable people, acknowledging that people could be vulnerable to abuse or neglect by reason of their age, physical or mental disability, or poverty and reliance on support services.

As Vincentians, the nature of our work means that there is often a power imbalance when we encounter a person in need; a person's circumstances, whereby they are seeking help, and our position as a provider of financial, material, or personal support, creates a risk and renders vulnerable the person seeking help. In committing to safeguarding, we are not just seeking to ensure that abuse is prevented, reported, and acted upon; we are also seeking to create safe and respectful environments.

Promoting good practice

All Vincentians must work in an open environment and remain visible when working with children and vulnerable adults, e.g. avoid private or unobserved situations, whenever practical and possible, and ensure that another adult is present at all times when working in close proximity of children and vulnerable adults. Even if dangerous or inappropriate people enter our ranks, they are not in a position to do harm because we have supervision, checking and reporting processes in place.

The following are common sense examples of how to create an open and safe environment.

- Our Rule's "two adult rule" serves to keep vulnerable persons safe, and to protect against false/malicious allegations being made against Vincentians and others providing services.
- Encouraging open communication with no secrets.
- Treating all children and vulnerable adults equally, and with respect and dignity.
- Always putting welfare first, before winning or achieving goals.
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empowers children and vulnerable adults to share in the decision-making process.
- Making activities fun, enjoyable and promoting fairness.
- Being an excellent role model - this includes following all local laws, not smoking, taking drugs and drinking alcohol inappropriately in the company of children and vulnerable adults.
- Giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Recognizing the developmental needs and capacity of children and vulnerable adults, avoiding excessive training or competition and not pushing them against their will.
- Maintaining a safe and appropriate physical distance. **It is never, under any circumstances, appropriate for Vincentians to have an intimate relationship with a child or a vulnerable adult.**

- Never entering a child or vulnerable adult's private room or invite them into a room unless accompanied by another adult.
- Never publish any story or image that might put a vulnerable person or their family at risk. Photos and videos must never be demeaning or disrespectful of the dignity of the persons portrayed. Obtain written consent before publishing.
- Securing advance written parental consent to act in place of the parent, if the need arises to administer emergency first aid and/or other medical treatment.
- Concerns or allegations of abusive or exploitative behavior is always taken seriously, investigated and acted on as appropriate.

Practices to be avoided

The following should be **avoided** except in emergencies. If cases arise where these situations are unavoidable it should be with the full knowledge and consent of local partners, or the child's parents or next of kin. For example:

- Avoid being alone when dealing with a child or vulnerable adult who sustains an injury and needs to go to hospital.
- Avoid spending time alone with children or vulnerable adults away from others.
- Avoid being alone while picking up or dropping off a child or vulnerable adult to an event or activity.
- Do not enter a home without being welcomed in by an adult.

Practices never to be sanctioned

The following should **never** be sanctioned. You should never:

- Cause direct physical harm, including purposely hitting, hurting, or physically assaulting a child or vulnerable adult.
- Cause direct emotional harm, including acting in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children or vulnerable adults, or otherwise perpetrates any form of emotional harm.
- Use language that could be abusive, offensive or inappropriate.
- Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay.
- Share a private room with a child or vulnerable adult.
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching.
- Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child.
- Reduce a child or vulnerable adult to tears as a form of control.
- Condone or participate in behavior that is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- Discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favor some to the exclusion of others.
- Fail to act upon and record any allegations made by a child or vulnerable adult.
- Do things of a personal nature for children or vulnerable adults that they can do for themselves.
- Spend any unsupervised time outside specified program hours with a child or vulnerable adult.
- Invite or allow children or vulnerable adult to stay with you at your private residence unsupervised and without advance written permission from parents or guardians.
- Sexually exploit any child, vulnerable adult, or any person.
- Engage in non-consensual sexual contact. **Sexual contact with a minor under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult is never consensual.**

This list is not exclusive. Therefore, Vincentians should avoid activities that may be considered to constitute poor practice.

Formation and Training

People in positions of responsibility whether they be members, volunteers or employees, are responsible for actively promoting the safeguarding policies and procedures. To develop and reinforce good practices, safeguarding awareness and training is required.

The Diocese of Rockford provides a Safe Environment Program that is required for those who wish to volunteer for a parish, school, or ministries (including the Society of St Vincent de Paul) that come in contact with children and vulnerable persons. All Vincentians and parishioners that are Associate Members are required to complete the Safe Environment screening and training which include the following:

- Background Check and Sex Offender Registry Check
- Documents and Polices
 - Sexual Misconduct Norms
 - Mandated Reporter Form
 - Code of Pastoral Conduct
 - Technology and Social Media Guidelines
 - Guidelines for Youth and Those Working with Youth
 - Optional Training: e.g. Mandated Reporter Training
- Virtus Online Training
 - Protecting God's Children Training
 - Vulnerable Adults Training (when available)

Similar screening and training will be provided by the Rockford Council for non-Catholic Associate Members and employees that fall under its governance. These persons will be asked to review the Safeguarding Policy and affirm their understanding of it in writing.

In addition to the Safe Environment Program, Vincentians should attend the Ozanam Orientation & Training and be familiar with The Rule, The Manual and Rockford Council policies.

Recruitment practices should be robust enough to ensure that new members, volunteers, or employees do not pose a known risk to the safety or wellbeing of those we serve.

Reporting and Responding

Concerns or allegations of abusive or exploitative behavior is always taken seriously, investigated and acted on as appropriate. Therefore, it is the duty of all Vincentians to report immediately on any and all concerns of suspected abuse to the Conference and District Presidents who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child or vulnerable adult in question and any other person who may be at risk. In addition, if an unlawful incident has been observed, the local law enforcement, Child Protection Agency, or Department on Aging should be contacted.

The District/Conference President will notify the Council President of a Safeguarding incident. The reporting Vincentian will be encouraged to provide a written statement of the incident and identify other witnesses that were present. If witnesses were present, the District/Conference President will interview and record what they observed. Once all of the information has been gathered the Council President should be contacted. As soon as possible, the Council Board should meet and determine the appropriate action.

Where there is a credible complaint against a member of the Society, volunteer or employee, those persons will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including Society membership suspension or termination of employment or volunteer status.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul understands that these matters can be extremely sensitive. Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Vincentians can raise concerns and make reports without fear of reprisal.

Illinois Adult Protection Services Act

In 2013 the State of Illinois passed the Adult Protective Services Act which protects the elderly and adults with disabilities from abuse and neglect. Any person who suspects the abuse, abandonment, neglect, financial exploitation, or self-neglect of an eligible adult may report this suspicion to the Department on Aging of the State of Illinois.

Communicating the Safeguarding Message

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is committed to protecting vulnerable persons. Through awareness and training of this Safeguarding Policy, Vincentians, volunteers and employees of the Society may recognize abuse and take action to protect vulnerable persons.

It is essential that every Vincentian, volunteer and employee be informed of this Policy and the available training. Reinforcement and vigilance of the Safeguarding Policy is in the best interest of the Society and of those we serve. This Safeguarding Policy should be discussed and emphasized annually: e.g. at conference meeting, via email, posted in the workplace, etc.

Every three year the Safeguarding Policy should be reviewed and updated by the Council.