

Adoption date: January 2021

Trigger warning: *By nature of the subject of safeguarding, this policy contains language about sexual exploitation and abuse. The reader should be aware that it may be emotionally challenging.*

1.0 Purpose

To set policy that explicitly shows affiliates are committed to the highest ethical standards and oppose all forms of exploitation and abuse. Affiliates must create and maintain a work environment that is safe, productive and respectful for colleagues and must prevent and respond to physical or sexual abuse or exploitation, harassment, or bullying of the people in the communities we serve (especially vulnerable adults and children) and the people with whom we work or partner.

2.0 Policy

2.1. DEFINITIONS

- **Child** is defined as anyone who is not yet 18 years old.
- **Child neglect:** Neglect occurs when a child's basic needs have consistently not been met to the extent that it has a detrimental effect on the child's health and personal development. These basic needs include food, clothing, shelter and supervision.
- **Child sexual abuse:** Child sexual abuse occurs when there has been any sexual exploitation of a child. Child sexual abuse includes any actual, attempted or threatened sexual activity involving children (such as intercourse, fondling, oral sex, indecent exposure, exposing the child to pornography, etc.).
- **Emotional abuse:** Emotional abuse occurs when persistent ill treatment of a person affects their self-esteem. This may include name-calling, rejection, threatening, intimidating or any other acts that can affect the person's physical and emotional growth and self-esteem.
- **Habitat representatives** are defined as staff members, board members and key volunteers.
- **Physical abuse:** Physical abuse occurs when a person purposefully injures or threatens to injure anyone (such as by punching, kicking, burning, etc.). Physical injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures. Physical injuries will not always be visible.
- **Safeguarding** is preventing and responding to physical or sexual abuse or exploitation, harassment, or bullying of the people in the communities we serve (especially vulnerable adults and children) and the people with whom we work or partner.
- **Sexual abuse:** Sexual abuse is any actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal power dynamics or otherwise coercive conditions.
- **Sexual exploitation:** Sexual exploitation is any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including but not limited to profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.
- **Sexual harassment:** Any unwelcome sexual advance, comment, expressed or implied sexual demand, touch, joke, gesture, or any other communication or conduct of a sexual nature (whether verbal, written, or visual).
- **Vulnerable adult:** A person age 60 or older with an impaired functional, physical or mental ability to care for oneself or an adult age 18 or older who has a developmental disability and/or requires assisted care.

2.2. AFFILIATE SAFEGUARDING COMMITMENTS

Habitat for Humanity is opposed to any form of discrimination, exploitation and abuse, including slavery, coerced conscription, prostitution, trafficking of people for any purpose, vulnerable adult or child abuse, and dangerous or exploitative child labor. In the design and implementation of programs and policies, we seek always to work without bias; to do no harm; and to eliminate (rather than contribute to) the harm of discrimination, exploitation and abuse.

All Habitat representatives are expected to adhere to Habitat's Safeguarding Behavior Commitments as set forth below.

All Habitat representatives commit to respecting and safeguarding the rights and dignities of all people, and protecting our staff members, volunteers, partners, research participants, community members (especially vulnerable adults and children), and those we intend to serve from exploitation and abuse. This includes the following general standards of behavior at all times, even when on leave or off duty:

- Habitat representatives will respect, promote and safeguard the rights and dignities of all people (with particular attention to those we intend to serve, vulnerable adults and children) without discrimination or bullying of any kind.
- Habitat representatives will treat all intended and actual individuals we serve with respect, courtesy and dignity.
- Habitat representatives will not engage in any form of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behavior toward those we intend to serve in any circumstances.
- Habitat representatives will not engage in any abuse of authority, position or influence by withholding humanitarian assistance or manipulating selection or targeting processes for those we intend to serve.
- Habitat representatives will help to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and that safeguards the rights of those we intend to serve, research participants, and community members (especially vulnerable adults and children).
- Habitat representatives will never engage in sexual exploitation or abuse.
- Habitat representatives will never engage in sexual activity with a child (anyone who is not yet 18 years old) regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defense.
- Habitat representatives will never exchange money, employment, goods or services (including assistance that is due to those we intend to serve) for sex, sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behavior.
- Habitat representatives will not engage in a sexual relationship with those we intend to serve, since it is based on inherently unequal power dynamics and undermines the credibility and integrity of Habitat for Humanity's charitable mission.

2.2.1. Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse

All Habitat representatives are prohibited from engaging in sexual exploitation or abuse.

2.2.2. Child protection

All Habitat representatives are prohibited from engaging in child abuse, exploitation or neglect. Affiliates must be aware of and comply with state, local and federal statutes related to child pornography, prostitution and child labor prohibitions.

Habitat for Humanity strives to be a child-safe organization to reduce the risk of child abuse in all aspects of our operations. Affiliates must execute Habitat's mission in alignment with Habitat's child protection standards described below.

Affiliates must design their programs and execute the mission in alignment with the following standards:

- Habitat representatives will keep the health and safety of children paramount at all times.
- Habitat representatives will consider child safeguarding in project planning and implementation to determine potential risks to children associated with project activities and operations.
- Habitat representatives will work to ensure that personal dignity and respect for children is maintained through all projects, programs and departments.

- Habitat representatives will apply measures to reduce the risk of child abuse, exploitation or neglect, including but not limited to:
 - Limiting unsupervised interactions with children.
 - Prohibiting exposure to pornography.
 - Complying with appropriate data responsibility standards and with applicable laws, regulations or customs regarding the photographing, filming or other image-generating activities of children, and audio recordings.

Habitat representatives will ensure compliance with local child welfare and protection legislation and with U.S. law where applicable.

2.2.3. Prohibition of prostitution and trafficking

Habitat for Humanity expressly prohibits sex trafficking and the procurement of commercial sex acts by any Habitat representative. Habitat for Humanity expressly prohibits human trafficking by any Habitat representative.

2.2.4. Internet use policy

Affiliates must adopt a board-approved internet use policy that prohibits all Habitat representatives from accessing, possessing or circulating pornographic content using affiliate computers, affiliate-supported electronic devices, affiliate email accounts, affiliate-related electronic distribution lists, or an internet connection paid for by the affiliate. This includes sharing of emails or group texts (including jokes) containing explicit images. The policy will live in the employee handbook and appropriate volunteer documents. Habitat representatives are expected to model this behavior away from the workplace.

2.3. REPORTING AND HANDLING COMPLAINTS

2.3.1. Expectations of reporting

Habitat for Humanity expects all Habitat representatives (especially managers) to report all suspected safeguarding misconduct immediately and expects affiliates to take swift action upon receiving a complaint.

Affiliates must adopt clear guidelines stating the responsibility to report potential safeguarding misconduct and the disciplinary consequences of noncompliance. The guidelines must include a reporting process and immediate notification to Habitat for Humanity International via the [Habitat Ethics and Accountability Line](#) (formerly known as MySafeWorkplace®) or by calling (800) 461-9330 for incidents in the following categories: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual exploitation and neglect.

2.3.2. Expectations of handling complaints

Affiliates must have an investigation process inclusive of a commitment to protecting confidentiality, clear documentation requirements, communication with the survivor/victim, and corrective actions.

Affiliates must offer whistleblower protection in compliance with a board-approved whistleblower policy.

2.3.3. Outside reporting

Affiliates must comply with all relevant requirements related to mandatory reporting of alleged or confirmed safeguarding misconduct to local authorities according to local jurisdiction. Additionally, there may be circumstances due to contractual, legal or donor obligations where it is required or appropriate for affiliates to report alleged or confirmed safeguarding misconduct to external parties such as donors, regulators or other governing bodies. Finally, affiliates' approach for voluntary sharing of information related to safeguarding misconduct allegations and investigations should be guided by the parallel philosophies of transparency (to donors, regulators and the public) and confidentiality (for the protection of survivors). Wherever possible, information will be presented in a way that protects the survivor's anonymity for confidentiality and safety reasons (except where relevant law might require disclosure).

2.4. PROTOCOLS FOR ALLEGED VICTIM ASSISTANCE

Affiliates are encouraged to provide support to alleged victims of safeguarding misconduct. Upon receipt of an allegation, the affiliate should consider providing any or all of the following forms of assistance that are appropriate and based on the informed consent of the alleged victim: immediate material care (e.g., direct or funding support for medical care, food or emergency shelter); psychosocial support (e.g., referrals or funding support to local entity); or legal and advocacy support (e.g., support to obtain alleged victim advocacy services or legal counseling in order to make an informed decision about whether to pursue legal recourse). It is recommended that affiliates proactively familiarize themselves with services for alleged victims in their communities.

2.5. OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SAFEGUARDING

2.5.1.

Affiliates must designate a safeguarding officer responsible for enacting the affiliate's policy and sharing awareness on the issue of safeguarding. In addition, affiliates should consider safeguarding principles during strategic and project planning, along with monitoring and evaluation activities.

2.5.2.

Affiliates must ensure their board of directors receives regular updates on safeguarding allegations and investigations to facilitate effective process oversight.

2.5.3.

Affiliates must provide regular safeguarding training for their board members, staff members and volunteers in leadership positions. Affiliates should consider making such training available to certain other volunteers as may be appropriate.

2.5.4. Recruitment

Safeguarding protocols must be considered during recruitment, including consideration of criminal background checks, sexual offender registration checks (as per Policy 19) and reference checks. It is also encouraged that the level of safeguarding responsibility (e.g., positions involving direct contact with those we intend to serve, children or child-related projects) be clarified and reinforced in the job description and interview process.

Affiliates must conduct reference checks on any prospective Habitat employees, board members, or key volunteers who are known to have had previous experience at another Habitat organization by checking with that organization. Affiliate leaders receiving such reference requests will be expected to share any pertinent information of a serious nature relating to safeguarding matters, and if in doubt, should consult with their local legal counsel.

3.0 Rationale

Habitat for Humanity recognizes that everyone has a right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse. This policy sends a clear message that exploitation and abuse are not tolerated across the entire Habitat network.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES:

- [Safeguarding for U.S. Affiliates](#)
- [Guidance Memorandum on Sex Offender and Criminal Background Checks](#)