

FSC OPERATIONAL CODES OF PRACTICE

No. P9: CHILD WELFARE POLICY

Essential for: All UMs
All FSC employees

Discretionary:

Welfare and Protection of Children or Vulnerable Adults

It is the policy of FSC to safeguard the welfare of all Children and Vulnerable Adults by protecting them from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. 'Children' includes all individuals aged under 18 attending FSC led courses or staying or working on FSC premises. 'Vulnerable adults' relates specifically to those over the age of 18 who are notified to us as being vulnerable or who through their behaviour suggest that they cannot make rational adult judgements or decisions.

Physical Abuse: occurs where children or vulnerable adults' bodies are hurt by ill treatment. This includes failure to protect them and inadequate care or neglect of their basic needs. Hitting, shaking, burning and kicking are all obvious forms of physical abuse, but this kind of abuse can include giving a child inappropriate drugs or alcohol.

Sexual Abuse: occurs when children or vulnerable adults are used to meet the sexual needs of an adult or other child. This can include exposure to pornographic material as well as physical sexual contact.

Emotional Abuse: occurs when a child is constantly threatened, verbally attacked or taunted. Sarcasm, threats and degrading punishments are all forms of emotional abuse.

FSC's policy is underpinned by procedures in 7 key areas:

1. Confidentiality
2. Appointing Appropriate Staff
3. Managing the Centre's/Unit's Operations Safely
4. Responding Appropriately to Behaviour at the Centre/Unit
5. Responding Appropriately to Concerns outside the Centre/Unit's Operations
6. Following Good Practice to minimise unwarranted allegations
7. Following Procedures if Allegations are made

Confidentiality

Any actions which give rise to concerns under this policy must be dealt with in a sensitive, supportive and confidential manner. Any information about incidents and allegations must only be relayed on a need-to-know basis from the individual(s) concerned through the Head of Centre/Unit to a member of the Operational Management Team at FSC Head Office. Confidentiality is important for the child or vulnerable adult and the accused (since they may well be innocent) but should not be a reason for not following procedures as set out in the following sections.

Appointing Appropriate Staff

All staff appointed to work in our Centres should be interviewed as to their suitability to working in an environment where they will, or may, come in to contact with children or vulnerable adults. This suitability should reflect the likelihood and level of contact with children or vulnerable adults. Associate Tutors who work with children or vulnerable adults should be treated the same as our own staff for the purposes of this policy.

All FSC staff appointments must follow FSC procedures set out in our policy on 'Appointment of individuals with a criminal record' and will require a CRB Disclosure check at the appropriate level as determined in that policy.

Associate Tutors who are unlikely to work with children are not regarded as posing an additional threat over and above that which a member of the public or participant on a course provides.

Managing the Centre's/Unit's Operations Safely

All Centres/Units working with or alongside children or vulnerable adults should aim to ensure that as far as is practicable children or vulnerable adults are not coming into unsupervised contact with unknown or unchecked adults on a regular or planned basis. This should involve being aware of any risks associated with:

- working in public areas and managing them or the children or vulnerable adults appropriately for the age and ability of the group concerned
- areas of the Centre/Unit to which the Public have access and managing them appropriately for the age and ability of the group concerned eg. footpaths through the site, information points on site, shop open to the public, etc.
- adult customers using our Centres/Units at the same time as children or vulnerable adults and managing them appropriately for the age and ability of the group concerned (eg. Leisure Learning courses, professional courses, independent groups, etc.). Segregation by timing, allocation of space and supervision could, where practicable, all be appropriate management solutions with priority given to times when children or vulnerable adults are most at risk (eg. when alone, when not fully clothed, etc.)
- FSC premises and land being used by non-FSC staff or visitors (eg. contractors, general public) and managing them appropriately for the age and ability of the group concerned

Responding Appropriately to Behaviour at the Centre/Unit

In most cases behaviour at our Centres/Units involving children or vulnerable adults will be reasonable and normal. If behaviour strays outside what is reasonable and normal it should be quickly controlled to ensure that the incident does not escalate and unacceptable behaviour is not condoned or reinforced by not taking action to control it.

Accompanying staff or accompanying parents/guardians should be actively involved in this control where the incident involves actions between children or vulnerable adults. The aim of the control is to:

- calm the situation
- remove the threat of harm
- return behaviour to that which is viewed as reasonable and normal.

The control exerted should not involve violence or intimidation and should only involve physical contact (which must be the minimum needed) to prevent someone causing harm to themselves or others.

If the situation is anything other than a minor incident it should be reported to the Head of Centre/Unit and an FSC Incident form completed. The decision as to what constitutes a minor incident should be made by the Head of Centre/Unit in conjunction with FSC Head Office, if necessary. If the incident involves the Head of Centre/Unit it should be reported to FSC Head Office directly. If the incident involves any member of FSC staff then an Incident Form should be completed.

All incidents resulting from this policy which are recorded should be investigated in a supportive and non-threatening manner by the Head of Centre/Unit or FSC Head Office as appropriate, and FSC Head Office should be made aware of the situation at the earliest opportunity. If appropriate, and preferably after consultation with Head Office if practicable, the emergency services or Child Protection Services should be involved.

If the incident involves an allegation by a child or other person then this should be investigated as set out in the section on 'Following Procedures if Allegations are made'.

Responding Appropriately to Concerns Outside the Centre's/Unit's Operations

It is possible that a child or vulnerable adult will approach a member of our staff to confide in them over an incident or incidents related to their home or school life. This is more likely to happen during a residential course where there is more time for trust to build up. If it occurs on a day course then the situation is likely to be either pre-meditated or very serious. If an approach is made to FSC staff, then:

- In all cases the child or vulnerable adult should be listened to carefully and non-judgementally and a note made of the details of the conversation.
- The child or vulnerable adult must be made aware that you will have to pass this information on within the FSC or to the Child Protection Services or the Police
- The Head of Centre/Unit should be informed and the School (normally the accompanying staff) or Child Protection Services (for anyone unaccompanied) should be informed of the situation by the Head of Centre/Unit.

The FSC is not in a position to judge on the rights or wrongs of these cases. If a child is afraid to leave the Centre/Unit with the accompanying staff or their parents/guardian then the child or vulnerable adult can be refused permission to be released from the Centre whilst awaiting the arrival of the Child Protection Services or Police to manage the situation.

Following Good Practice to minimise unwarranted allegations

All allegations of inappropriate behaviour between and with children or vulnerable adults should be taken seriously. Staff should also be aware that their position and/or behaviour may make them vulnerable to inappropriate or false accusations. The aim of the good practice set out below is to minimise the chance of a false accusation occurring and to provide procedures which make investigation of any accusations fair to all parties. The good practice also touches on other areas of Child Welfare:

- Do** treat everyone with respect
 - Do** provide an example you wish others to follow
 - Do** plan activities and routines (eg. duty lock up) involving children or vulnerable adults so that more than one other person is present, or at least is within sight or hearing of the activity or routine
 - Do** respect a child or vulnerable adult's right to personal privacy
 - Do** be aware that a child or vulnerable adult that has been abused may actively seek to compensate for this by using over-friendly or hostile behaviour
 - Do** provide access for children or vulnerable adults to talk to others about any concerns they may have (eg. Trained Counselling Staff or Childline)
 - Do** encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable and caring enough to point out attitudes or behaviour they do not like
 - Do** avoid unnecessary physical contact with children or vulnerable adults (eg. demonstrate how to fit a piece of safety equipment on yourself rather than on the child)
 - Do** avoid situations that compromise your relationship with young people and are unacceptable within a relationship of trust (eg. a relationship between an FSC member of staff and a child over the age of consent)
 - Do** remember that someone else might misinterpret your actions, no matter how well-intentioned
 - Do** recognise that caution is required even in sensitive moments of counselling, such as when dealing with bullying, bereavement or abuse.
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- Do NOT** permit abusive youth peer activities (eg. initiation ceremonies, ridiculing, bullying)
 - Do NOT** play physical contact games with children or vulnerable adults
 - Do NOT** have any inappropriate physical or verbal contact with others
 - Do NOT** jump to conclusions about others without checking facts
 - Do NOT** allow yourself to be drawn into inappropriate attention seeking behaviour such as tantrums or crushes
 - Do NOT** exaggerate or trivialise child-abuse issues
 - Do NOT** show favouritism to any individual
 - Do NOT** make suggestive remarks or gestures, even in fun
 - Do NOT** let suspicion, disclosure or allegation of abuse, go unrecorded or unreported
 - Do NOT** rely on just your good name to protect you
 - Do NOT** believe "it could never happen to me"

Following Procedures if Allegations are made

Allegations could be made by a child, vulnerable adult or other individual. Allegations can be as serious as an incident since an accusation has been made which must be investigated and which could have significant implications for those concerned. Allegations fall into two categories and need to be dealt with accordingly.

Minor Allegations

These may involve individual incidents which reflect unprofessional or inappropriate behaviour but do not involve an attempt to cause harm or where no actual physical harm has occurred.

In the case of minor allegations the incident should be investigated in a supportive and non-judgemental manner by the Head of Centre/Unit and an Incident Report completed. FSC Head Office should be informed of the incident and sent a copy of the Incident Report at the earliest practicable opportunity. If the allegation is about the Head of Centre/Unit then FSC Head Office should be informed at the earliest opportunity and will conduct the investigation into the incident.

If the allegation is found to be true then as a minor incident it is likely that a formal warning about the inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour will be issued. This should be made in conjunction with the provision of any training or counselling that is identified as appropriate.

Serious Allegations

These may involve repeat minor incidents or single incidents where an attempt to cause harm or actual physical harm is alleged or suspected. A serious allegation may be made directly at the Centre/Unit or may come to light as a result of enquiries made by the Police or the Child Protection Services. If the allegation is made directly at the Centre/Unit then FSC Head Office should be contacted at once in order to determine who should be involved in the initial investigation.

If a serious allegation is made the accused individual(s) should be suspended on full pay whilst an initial investigation is undertaken.

The suspended individual(s) should have access to reasonable support, free of charge, which could either be from their union or a member of FSC Head Office (or FSC's nominee) who is not involved in the investigation.

If the evidence in the initial allegation is sufficient to suggest that criminal proceedings might result, then the incident should be treated as a major incident in FSC terms and the procedures in that OCoP should be followed. In addition the individual(s) accused will remain suspended from normal duties. The nature of the accusations and the evidence provided will help to determine whether the suspension is with or without pay.