

Safeguarding Policy

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 Palouse Habitat for Humanity (PHFH) is committed to the highest ethical standards and oppose all forms of exploitation and abuse. PHFH will 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

PHFH 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. PHFH will comply with state, local and federal statutes related to child pornography, prostitution and child labor prohibitions.

PHFH 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.

PHFH will adhere to 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

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

2.2.4. Internet use policy

PHFH will 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. Currently the employee handbook and volunteer handbook describe appropriate use of electronic tools provided for Habitat use. Habitat representatives are expected to model this behavior away from the workplace.

2.3. Reporting and handling complaints

2.3.1. Expectations of reporting

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

The Employee Handbook outlines the reporting process. Habitat representatives have responsibility to report potential safeguarding misconduct and the disciplinary consequences of noncompliance

2.3.2. Expectations of handling complaints

PHFH will investigate complaints, while maintaining a commitment to protecting confidentiality, clear documentation requirements, communication with the survivor/victim, and corrective actions. PHFH has adopted a whistle-blower policy.

2.3.3. Outside reporting

PHFH will comply with all relevant requirements related to mandatory reporting of alleged or confirmed safeguarding misconduct to local authorities according to local jurisdiction. Where required due to contractual, legal or donor obligations, PHFH will report alleged or confirmed safeguarding misconduct to external parties such as donors, regulators or other governing bodies. PHFH will consider voluntary sharing of information related to safeguarding misconduct allegations and investigations 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

PHFH will provide support to alleged victims of safeguarding misconduct. Upon receipt of an allegation, PHFH provide 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. PHFH will 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. PHFH will ensure our board of directors receives regular updates on safeguarding allegations and investigations to facilitate effective process oversight.

2.5.3. PHFH will provide regular safeguarding training for their board members, staff members and volunteers in leadership positions. PHFH may make 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.

PHFH will 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. PHFH 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

PHFH 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](#)

Adopted: May 2022