

Ark Aid Street Mission, Inc.
Abuse Prevention & Response Policy Digest

The management of The Ark Aid Street Mission, Inc. is committed to the prevention of abuse in any form towards clients, volunteers and staff and is ultimately responsible for worker health and safety. We will take whatever steps are reasonable to protect anyone in the Ark premises or engaged in Ark activities from all sources.

The purpose of this policy is to prevent abuse or harm to any person involved in the Ark and to prevent false or wrongful allegations of abuse. This policy is based on both the current legal standard of care and from the Christian conviction, exemplified in the Statement of Faith that all persons are precious in God's sight, that we must care for each other and that vulnerable people deserve extra care. The Ark Aid Street Mission is committed to providing a safe environment for all persons and has zero tolerance for abuse, harassment or neglect by employees, volunteers or clients.

Abuse is most likely to occur to vulnerable people. This includes minors, but also includes adults with diminished physical, mental or emotional capacities, seniors living with special needs and other adults receiving counseling and support services. A vulnerable person is one because of age, a disability or their circumstances, whether temporary or permanent who is (a) in a position of dependence on others or (b) otherwise at greater risk than the general population of being harmed by persons in a position of authority or trust relative to them. Given this definition, it is assumed that everyone who accesses any Ark service should be considered vulnerable. There may also be volunteers who should also be considered vulnerable. Therefore, this policy and the protections it affords must be applied to virtually every person involved at the Ark.

Abuse can occur in any of the following forms:

1. Physical: any use of physical force or action that results, or could result in injury to a youth/child/vulnerable adult. It is more than reasonable discipline.
2. Sexual: using a child, youth or vulnerable adult for sexual stimulation or gratification. This includes behaviour that involves touching such as fondling, sexual activity as commonly understood and rape. It also includes behaviour that has non-touching aspects such as verbal comments, showing of pornographic material, exhibitionism or allowing children to witness sexual activity.
3. Emotional: a pattern of hurting a child/youth/vulnerable adult's feeling to the point of damaging their self-respect. It includes verbal attacks on the person, insults, humiliation or rejection. A person who is emotionally harmed may demonstrate severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, aggression or self-destructive behaviour.
4. Child Neglect: failure to provide and exercise reasonable care, such as leaving a child unattended, improperly supervising activities or ignoring a child's physical, developmental or social needs.
5. Harassment: conduct or interaction with another person that makes them feel attacked, demeaned, intimidated or manipulated, particularly with someone who is stronger than they are or who is relating to them from a position of authority or power in a situation that leaves them helpless to resist.
6. Improper touching: touching which creates feelings of violation, confusion or isolation. It may include kissing a child, coaxing a child to give a kiss, extending hugging to tickling, touching a child in a area that would be covered by a swim suit, carrying children over the age of 3, or having them sit on an adult's lap. The Criminal Code defines sexual assault as touching in a sexual way on purpose, either directly or indirectly, without consent. Adults should not be hugged or otherwise touched in any more than an incidental way unless they initiate it.
7. Discipline/assault: excessive discipline to cause bodily harm or the attempt to threaten to apply force, such as striking another person or spanking a child.

All volunteers must complete a volunteer application and an initial interview with the Executive Director or his designate. New volunteers without a police check will always be assigned to work in a group and/or a public area. All those accepted must sign a covenant confirming that they have read, understood and are willing to comply with these policies and procedures. Applications and covenants of those who are accepted and volunteer will be kept indefinitely.

Operational Procedures

Volunteers and staff who have any chance of being alone with clients or otherwise be in a position of trust or authority will sign a covenant that they have read, understood and will comply with all policies and procedures to minimize risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse. This will include a Boundary Form that lists activities that will result in immediate termination and those which will result in a caution or warning.

Supervision is the key ingredient in maintaining a safe place. Given the nature of the Ark building and the activities that are provided, there is little private or isolated space. Most activities are done in groups.

Unscreened volunteers will always be in a public or group setting and never alone with a client.

Screened volunteers may be alone with a client as long as someone else knows about the situation, it takes place during the usual Ark working day and another person is in proximity to periodically discretely monitor the situation at least 4 times per hour.

Volunteers under the age of 18 can only assist when there is adequate supervision by screened adults or when all activities will be in a group or public place. No youth under the age of 14 may volunteer without the presence of a parent or guardian. Youth under the age of 18 must be accompanied by adults with a ratio at least of one adult for 3 minors. Youth will always be kept in a group and never be alone with a client or another volunteer. This policy applies to transporting minors whether in private vehicles or the Ark's van.

Corporal punishment is prohibited. Touching another person is strongly discouraged. A hug should only be given if the client initiates it and kept as brief as possible. A client should be touched only to prevent harm to themselves or others. Medical intervention will only be carried out by those with first-aid training and only as necessary until an ambulance arrives.

Children will only be at the Ark with a parent or guardian. Volunteers or staff may offer to assist with the child while the responsible adult accesses the Ark services but will always be in sight of others. Children or infants will never be taken into the washroom by volunteers or staff. A child may be taken to the washroom by a volunteer or staff who will wait outside and immediately return the child to the parent/guardian.

Staff and volunteers will only interact with clients at the Ark or during Ark sponsored and monitored activities. Accompanying a client to an off-site activity, such as to church may be permitted if done by a screened person (i.e. current police check) and with permission from and foreknowledge of the Executive Director. Relationships outside of those parameters is not permitted and will be considered a boundary issue with immediate dismissal if violated. Relationships between staff and volunteers outside of Ark activities is discouraged. If the Executive Director becomes aware of such a relationship, he will consider it a boundary issue that merits a discussion and possible warning.

Individual photography of children is prohibited. Publishing of photographs of any children will require the written consent of a parent or guardian.

Internet use by clients will always be supervised by an approved volunteer or staff. Software to inhibit access of inappropriate material, eg. Adult sites will be installed and maintained.

Incidents of injury or suspected abuse will be reported to the Executive Director or the Assistant Director who will report the incident to the Executive Director as soon as possible. The incident report form will be completed. Any incident report indicating criminal activity will be immediately reported to the police. The Executive Director will immediately inform the Board of the incident report and will also inform the insurance provider according to current requirements.