



**OVERSEAS
FELLOWSHIP OF
NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS**

Policy on Vulnerable Adults and Children

Approved by The National Executive Council of the Overseas Fellowship of Nigerian Christians (OFNC)[25 October 2015];

To be reviewed annually

1. Policy statement

The Overseas Fellowship of Nigerian Christians (OFNC) believes that everyone has the right to protection from abuse and neglect, to live a life characterised by inclusion and participation wherever they are. Everyone has the right to lead a life where they fulfil their potential to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives. The OFNC strives to ensure all those with whom we work and have contact can live a life free from:

- Sexual, mental, and physical abuse and violence
- Humiliation
- Fear
- Neglect and Exclusion
- Discrimination

2. Introduction

The OFNC promotes the advancement of the Christian faith and the relief of persons in conditions of need, hardship and distress. As its work continues to develop and grow, the OFNC needs to ensure that it takes direct and practical actions that protect vulnerable adults and children potentially at risk of harm as a direct result or consequence of activities organised by the fellowship. This Policy seeks to complement and expand on principles set out in the OFNC's constitution and other relevant documents in relation to vulnerable adults and children, emphasising the need to promote awareness of the issues of abuse and how to ensure that the protection of vulnerable adults and children becomes a tangible part of the fellowship's activities. The policy promotes an understanding of protection needs and acceptable behaviours that reduce the risks of harm and exploitation by those included in its scope. The policy also stresses a responsibility to report and respond to concerns of abuse, and for those experiencing abuse to be supported in every way practicable to remove them from risk or harm.

This policy seeks to illustrate basic standards and actions which everyone under the scope of this policy should adhere, to promote good practice and minimise risks to stakeholders.

3. Scope of policy

This policy applies to all:

- NEC/BEC officers
- OFNC members
- Volunteers
- Interns
- Consultants/partner organisations



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4. Definitions

- a) Vulnerable adults are those aged 18 years or more who either: Identify themselves as unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves from harm or exploitation or due to their gender, old age or frailty, mental health problems, learning or physical disabilities as well as disasters and conflicts, and are unable or unwilling as a result to identify themselves as vulnerable or subject to abuse, but are deemed at risk.
- b) Children – children are defined by the UN Convention of the Rights of a Child as being someone under the age of 18 years

Abuse can come in many forms which may include:

- i. Physical abuse – hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, injuring, misuse of medication, restraint or inappropriate sanctions
- ii. Sexual abuse -rape, sexual assault or sexual acts to which a vulnerable adult has not consented to or has been coerced into giving consent through psychological abuse.
- iii. Engaging a child sexually regardless of consent.
- iv. Psychological abuse -emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidating, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or support networks.
- v. Financial or material abuse – theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure regarding wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions. Misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions, or benefits.
- vi. Neglect and acts of omission – ignoring medical or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services.
- vii. Withholding of necessities of life: medication, adequate nutrition, clothing, and shelter.
- viii. Discriminatory abuse: ageism, racism, sexism, based on disability or other forms of harassment, slurs, or hate-crime.

5. Acting to Protect and Reporting Abuse

In no circumstance should concerns of abuse and inappropriate behaviour be ignored. The need to ensure the immediate physical and psychological safety of the vulnerable adult or child should always be of paramount importance, and reporting concerns can help to ensure that all appropriate and practical guidance can be sought.

Any OFNC member must report in situations where:

- i. Abuse is seen or suspected.
- ii. An allegation of abuse is made
- iii. The person or child tells him/her of abuse
- iv. The confidentiality of all parties must be observed at all stages, and information must be recorded in writing.



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- v. Reports should be made within 24 hours or as soon as possible to the disability/special needs officer or child protection officer, giving as much detail as is possible whilst preserving confidentiality. Until either officer is contacted, every effort must be made to act in whatever way is possible to protect the individual(s) of concern.

6. Behavioural protocols to minimise risks to (accusations of) abuse:

The following protocols should be interpreted with the best interests of the vulnerable adult or child as the primary consideration. Understanding good practice must be a priority:

It is expected that all members will:

- i. Respect everyone as an individual.
- ii. Provide a good example of acceptable behaviour, in a way that is in line and truthful to the OFNC's vision, mission and core values in and out of work hours.
- iii. Be aware of any "power" relationships that exist.
- iv. Respect everyone's right to personal privacy.
- v. Try to ensure that actions cannot be misunderstood or cause offence and are acceptable within a relationship of trust.
- vi. Show understanding when dealing with sensitive issues including cultural differences and human diversity.
- vii. Be responsive to reports of abuse and investigate appropriately.
- viii. Plan where possible to have at least 2 responsible adults present during activities, including car journeys, or the home of the vulnerable adult/child.
- ix. Be accountable to the vulnerable adult/child, their carers/parents (if any) and the OFNC.

No OFNC member should:

- i. Permit abusive behaviour, e.g. bullying, ridiculing or taunting.
- ii. Have inappropriate physical or verbal contact with others.
- iii. Jump to conclusions or make assumptions about others without checking facts.
- iv. Encourage inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour such as infatuations or 'crushes' from, including sleeping in the same bed as, a vulnerable adult/child
- v. or doing things of a personal nature that a vulnerable adult/child could do for him or herself e.g. grooming, dressing or bathing.
- vi. Show favouritism to anyone or spend excessive amounts of time on one vulnerable adult/child.
- vii. Make suggestive remarks or actions, even in jest.
- viii. Engage in or allow sexually provocative games to take place.
- ix. Deliberately place yourself or others in a compromising situation.
- x. Believe it could never happen to him/her.

7. Minimising risk situations

Everyone should keep in mind that actions, no matter how well intended, can be subject to misinterpretation by a third party. The OFNC recognises that some family and cultural



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situations do not pose a real risk to abuse but can be misinterpreted by a third party. The OFNC has an obligation to treat any accusation with full seriousness and investigate the matter fully when reported; Typically:

- i. Whenever meeting vulnerable adults and/or children, where possible a member should be accompanied by a responsible adult. The OFNC encourages its members to choose open, public locations for meetings
- ii. Any member meeting a vulnerable person on behalf of the OFNC should inform the disability/special needs officer or the child protection officer of any situation which in his or her opinion may be subject to misinterpretation.
- iii. Avoid inappropriate use of the internet or email, such as visiting “adult” websites. Sexual behaviour
- iv. No OFNC member should engage in or allow sexually provocative games with vulnerable adults/children to take place.
- v. No OFNC member should touch a vulnerable adult/child in an inappropriate or culturally insensitive way.
- vi. No OFNC member should engage in transactional sex or prostitution in any form.
- vii. It is recommended to wait for appropriate physical contact, such as holding hands, to be initiated by the vulnerable adult/child.

8. Psychosocial behaviour

- i. Members should be aware of the power relationship between an adult and vulnerable person, and avoid taking any advantage this may provide.
- ii. Members are encouraged to use language that mentally and emotionally empowers vulnerable adults and children. Members should not embarrass, humiliate or degrade vulnerable people.
- iii. Members should show neutrality and impartiality according to race, culture, age, gender, disability, religion, beliefs, sexuality or political persuasion.

9. Requirements of the Policy

OFNC will meet its commitment to safeguard vulnerable adults and children by promoting and taking action on awareness-raising, prevention, reporting, responding, and monitoring. To ensure that the policy is fully implemented, OFNC will at branch and national level:

- i. Refer to Guidelines on implementation Systems and procedures.
- ii. Provide guidance to all who work with OFNC on how to provide immediate responses to risks and abuse
- iii. Disseminate clear procedures on how to report abuse, appropriate to the local context
- iv. Operate procedures on recruitment and selection and the specific actions required as a result of this policy
- v. Appoint, train and support members to implement the policy
- vi. Integrate this policy with other policies including disability, Code of Conduct, Whistle-blowing, Disciplinary and Grievance, Emergency Manual.
- vii. Ensure that all members understand the guidelines relating to confidentiality and security of storing confidential information.



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- viii. Provide training that describes appropriate behaviour with vulnerable adults and children and develops understanding of the risks and threats to protection.
- ix. Develop and maintain an action plan, including through induction.
- x. Ensure members understand how to respond to allegations.
- xi. Ensure that all representation of vulnerable adults and children conform to best practice on use of photographs and working with the media and communications materials.
- xii. Ensure that measures are taken so that beneficiaries are made aware of their ability to report their complaints and concerns.

This policy and its procedures can be subject to internal or external audit at any time.

10. Consequences of breach of protection policy

If there is an allegation of a violation of the policies, guidelines, principles or practice of the protection policy from a verifiable source, the individual concerned may be suspended from all activity/association with OFNC pending the outcome of an independent investigation. The investigation must comply with reporting procedures. Failure to report and breaches of confidentiality in the process will be subject to investigation and disciplinary procedures

If it has found that an act had been committed in relation to vulnerable adults/children whether within or outside the context of the organisation's work, which are either criminal, grossly infringe the vulnerable adult's/child's rights, or contravene the principles and standards of this policy, The OFNC will take immediate disciplinary action and any other action which may be appropriate to the circumstances. This may include the termination of any relationship with a partner organisation or the suspension of a member.

The OFNC may involve the authorities such as the police at any stage of the investigation if appropriate to ensure the protection of vulnerable adults/children and pursue a criminal prosecution where this is applicable.

11. Roles and Responsibilities

All members must become acquainted with the requirements of the policy and act in accordance with these.



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Revision No.	Date	Changes	Notes	Date of next review
001	9 th Jan 2016	No changes	Discussed at NEC meeting	24 October 2016