

## **Valley United Soccer Club**

### **Code of Conduct to Protect Children**

#### **Introduction**

As a reputable child-serving organization, Valley United Soccer Club has developed the following Code of Conduct to Protect Children to guide our employees/ volunteers. While every employee/volunteer is valued and unique, we come together as an organization in the best interests of children and their families. The safety, rights, and well-being of children we serve are at the core of our daily operations. We nurture supportive relationships with children while balancing and encouraging appropriate boundaries.

#### **Why a Code of Conduct to Protect Children?**

At the core of our operations is a deep commitment to ensuring all children are protected and safe. A Code of Conduct to Protect Children is an important component to creating safe environments for children. As a reputable child-serving organization, the safety, rights, and well-being of children served by our programs and services are paramount to the core of our daily operations and our continued public support, and it is imperative that we have transparency and accountability in all of our dealings involving children.

We believe that each employee/volunteer plays a key role in the protection of children regardless of their contact with the public. Employees/volunteers are the ambassadors of the organization, and in all dealings involving children our employees/volunteers must display, and appear to display, behaviour that is consistent with our mission.

Maintaining personal boundaries is integral to developing healthy relationships with children and families. Behaviour that presents risk often begins by breaking boundaries with children and teens. To help employees/volunteers understand what is expected, this Code includes information about the type of behaviour expected, and it provides clear direction to those who either directly observe behaviour of concern, or who learn about behaviour of concern from others.

The intent of the Code of Conduct to Protect Children is to guide our employees/volunteers in developing healthy relationships with the children involved in activities or programs delivered by our organization. By providing employees/volunteers with the guideposts against which they can measure their own behaviour and the behaviour of those around them, employees/volunteers are empowered to identify and address behaviour of concern at an early stage to help better protect children.

## **Treating Children with Dignity and Maintaining Boundaries**

All employees/volunteers are responsible for treating all children with respect and dignity, and for maintaining appropriate boundaries. Employees/volunteers must monitor their own behaviour towards children, and be aware of the behaviour of their colleagues, to ensure that behaviour is appropriate and respectful, and will be perceived as such by others.

If at any time you are in doubt about the appropriateness of your own behaviour or the behaviour of others, you should discuss it with the President of VUSC. Refer to the Reporting Requirements section for further guidance.

### Things to Consider:

Before engaging in any behaviour or activity with a child, and when considering how your behaviour or the activity may be perceived by the child and by others, you should consider whether:

- The activity you are engaging in with a child is known to, and approved by, the leadership of VUSC and/or the parents of the child. All interactions with a child should be transparent.
- The activity or behaviour you are engaging in would raise concerns in the mind of a reasonable observer as to its appropriateness.
- The activity or behaviour is directly and objectively tied to your job function.
- The organization may be detrimentally affected by the activity or behaviour.
- The activity or behaviour may be reasonably regarded as posing a risk to the child.
- The activity or behaviour may contribute to a child's discomfort.
- The activity or behaviour may appear inappropriate to the organization, the child's family, or the public.

In addition, always consider the child's reaction to any activities, conversations, behaviour, or other interactions, and avoid criticizing, embarrassing, shaming, blaming, or humiliating a child. Do not place inappropriate expectations on a child. Use your instincts as a guide. Ask yourself: "Whose needs are being met by the activity or behaviour?" The purpose of an activity or behaviour should always be to meet the child's needs, not the adult's needs.

Tip: If the child seems uncomfortable with the activity or behaviour, that is a good indication that the activity and/or behaviour is unwelcome and should stop. You need to reassess the activity or behaviour and consult with the President of VUSC before continuing.

### **General Rules of Behaviour**

Employees/volunteers of our organization must:

- Treat all children with respect and dignity.
- Establish, respect, and maintain appropriate boundaries with all children involved in activities or programs delivered by the organization.

- Always adhere to the organization’s policies and procedures in dealing with children.
- Treat all disclosures, allegations, or suspicions of sexual or other unlawful or inappropriate behaviour involving a child seriously - an employee/volunteer must report all disclosures, allegations, or suspicions of inappropriate or unlawful behaviour as set forth in this Code of Conduct to Protect Children.

Employees/volunteers of the organization must not:

- Engage in any sort of physical contact with a child that may make the child, or a reasonable observer feel uncomfortable, or that may be seen by a reasonable observer to be violating reasonable boundaries.
- Engage in any communication with a child within or outside of work that may make the child uncomfortable or that may be seen by a reasonable observer to be violating reasonable boundaries.
- Engage in any behaviour that goes against (or appears to go against) the organization’s mandate, policies, or Code of Conduct to Protect Children, regardless of whether they are serving the organization at that moment.
- Conduct their own investigation into allegations or suspicions of inappropriate behaviour - it is an employee/volunteer’s duty to report the matter to the President of VUSC or child welfare, not to investigate

### **Ranges of Inappropriate Behaviour**

It is important for all employees/volunteers to understand that behaviours, as they relate to the safety and protection of children, fall into a continuum.

On one end of the continuum are those behaviours that are unlawful. Unlawful behaviours are those that are criminal or that breach child welfare or related legislation, and include such things as child abuse, sexual assault, sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching, sexual exploitation, procurement, luring, child pornography offences, corrupting morals, indecent acts, voyeurism, etc.

Unlawful behaviours need to be reported to the child welfare agency and/or law enforcement for investigation. This Code provides you with information about how to submit such a report.

At the other end of the continuum are those behaviours that are inappropriate but are of such a nature that it is believed they can be addressed and corrected through additional training, supervision, and monitoring. Inappropriate behaviour could range from one-time behaviours to multiple instances and could include behaviour that is repeated even after it has been brought to the attention of the employee. It includes such things as telling inappropriate jokes to or in earshot of a child, confiding in a child with personal stories and having unauthorized contact with a child outside of work duties.

Inappropriate behaviour needs to be brought to the attention of management so it can be followed up formally and internally. The organization will determine if the behaviour is inappropriate and how it will be addressed.

In the middle of the continuum are those behaviours that may either be unlawful or inappropriate, depending on the overall circumstances. Or it may be behaviour that is initially seen as behaviour that could be corrected through additional training, supervision, and monitoring, but upon following up and learning more information, it is determined the behaviour is more serious and warrants a formal investigation.

For example, one instance of grooming behaviour may initially be seen as inappropriate, but of such a nature that it can be dealt with internally. However, upon following up on the behaviour and learning more about the overall circumstances and any prior inappropriate behaviour, the behaviour may be elevated to something that warrants a report to the child welfare agency. Consider the following example:

A report is submitted internally about an employee/volunteer exchanging unauthorized emails with a child outside of his/her work duties. The initial information indicates that the emails are of a general nature. After the organization follows up, it learns that some of the emails were sexual in nature, and it learns that the employee/volunteer has exhibited other inappropriate behaviour that had not been reported previously. Each instance of inappropriate behaviour, if considered separately and without context of the other behaviours, might be characterized as something in the nature of “poor judgment” that is capable of correction. However, once all behaviours are considered in context with each other, it may be sufficient to warrant a report being made to the child welfare agency and/or law enforcement.

For the protection of children in our care, all instances of inappropriate behaviour will be followed up on. Behaviours of concern will be reported to the child welfare agency and/or law enforcement for further investigation whenever we deem such action to be warranted.

### **What Constitutes Inappropriate Behaviour**

Inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated, especially as it relates to the well-being of the children involved in activities or programs delivered by the organization.

Inappropriate behaviour falls on a continuum, as noted in the section above headed “Ranges of Behaviour.”

Behaviour considered inappropriate is that which may be seen by a reasonable observer to be violating reasonable boundaries, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Communication that goes beyond the employee/volunteer’s responsibilities with the child and/or does not occur within the context of their duties and responsibilities. For example:
  - a. Making personal phone calls to a child and/or one or more members of the child’s family.
  - b. Having personal electronic or cell phone exchanges with a child and/or one or more members of the child’s family (email, text message, instant message, online chats, social networking (including “friending”), etc.), regardless of who initiated the exchange.

- c. Writing personal letters to a child or one or more members of the child's family.
  - d. Excessive communication (online or offline) with a child or the child's family, especially if this is not known to the child's parents.
  - e. Spending time with a child or the child's family outside of designated times and activities, especially if this is not known to the child's parents.
2. Favoring one or more children to the exclusion of others (for example, paying a lot of attention to, giving, or sending personalized gifts\*, or allowing privileges that are excessive, unwarranted, or inappropriate). \*Note: It is not inappropriate behaviour to give a contextually appropriate thank-you card, birthday card, seasonal card, or other nominal gift to the child, where such a gesture would be considered reasonable under the circumstances, provided that all gestures taken together are not excessive in number and that such exchanges are carried out within a work context, in the presence of other adults and with the full knowledge and consent of the organization.
  3. Using a personal cell phone, camera, or video to take pictures of a child, or allowing any other person to do so, as well as uploading or copying any pictures you may have taken of a child to the Internet or any personal storage device.
  4. Offering or providing rides to a child in your personal vehicle, or in the organization's vehicle, except when express parental consent has been granted, or in emergency situations.
  5. In addition to the foregoing, the following behaviour is considered serious and may trigger a report to child welfare in addition to any other internal disciplinary procedures:
    - a. Telling sexual jokes to a child or making comments to a child that are in any way suggestive, explicit, or personal.
    - b. Showing a child material that is sexual in nature, including signs, cartoons, graphic novels, calendars, literature, photographs, and screen savers, displaying, or keeping such material in a location where it is reasonably possible that a child may see it, or making such material available to a child.
    - c. Physically or emotionally harming a child.
    - d. Intimidating or threatening a child.
    - e. Making fun of a child.
  6. Whether or not a particular behavior or action constitutes inappropriate behaviour will be a matter determined by the organization having regard to all of the circumstances, including past behaviour, and allegations or suspicions related to such behaviour.

## Reporting Requirements

All employees and volunteers are required to report unlawful behaviour to police/child welfare and inappropriate behaviour or incidents to the President of VUSC. This requirement applies not only to behaviour or incidents that you personally witness, but also to those that you hear about.

Adults often worry that they may be overreacting and misreading a situation, and this may cause them to minimize concerning behaviour they witness or hear about. There is also a fear of damaging a working relationship by raising a concern about a work colleague. It can be hard to believe that someone you work with or someone you met through your work duties could harm a child, and it can be tempting to downplay a transgression in the hopes it will not be repeated.

Keep in mind that the focus always has to be on the behaviour, not the person. A person's character or their position in the organization has nothing to do with whether that person's behaviour is appropriate or inappropriate in a given situation. It cannot be about whether you are "right" or "wrong," it must be about doing the best you can to identify behaviour of concern so it can be dealt with appropriately.

Categories of incidents that need to be addressed by staff/volunteer under this Code of Conduct to Protect Children include the following:

1. Reports of Unlawful Behaviour from a Child regarding either:
2. a) employee /volunteer of the organization; or  
b) someone other than an employee/volunteer of the organization (e.g., parent, teacher, babysitter) must be reported to child welfare and/or law enforcement.
3. Unlawful Behaviour Witnessed by an Employee/Volunteer of the club. Any incident of alleged unlawful behaviour either:
  - a) witnessed by an employee/volunteer regarding another employee/volunteer of the
  - b) club; or
  - c) witnessed by an employee/volunteer regarding someone other than an employee/volunteer of the organization (e.g., parent); must be reported to child welfare and/or police in accordance with the Reporting and Documenting Complaints Policy re: Unlawful Behaviour. If you do not know the identity of the child, take steps to find out who the child is- depending on the situation, steps may need to be taken to protect that child from additional harm, the child may need to make a statement to police, etc.

Note: If you are a witness to abuse in progress, it is expected that in addition to reporting what you see, you will also do what you reasonably can to stop or disrupt the interaction. The steps may vary according to what you are witnessing and what personal safety considerations may exist for you and/or the child being abused. If you do not feel you can intervene safely, you should immediately get additional help, whether by calling the police, involving other employees, etc.

4. Inappropriate Behaviour Involving an Employee/Volunteer. Inappropriate behaviour that is either:
  - a) reported to the employee/volunteer by a child or third party regarding another employee/volunteer of the organization; or
  - b) witnessed by the employee/volunteer and involving another employee/volunteer; must be reported to the President of VUSC in accordance with the Reporting and Documenting Complaints Policy re: Inappropriate Behaviour. In addition to reporting, if you witness the inappropriate behaviour, you should take steps that can safely be taken to stop or disrupt the interaction, as outlined in #2 above.
  
5. Inappropriate Behaviour Involving Third Parties. Inappropriate behaviour that is either:
  - a. reported to the employee/volunteer by a child or third party regarding a third party; or
  - b. witnessed by the employee/volunteer and involving a third party; must be reported to the President of VUSC in accordance with the Reporting and Documenting Complaints Policy re: Inappropriate Behaviour. In addition to reporting, if you witness the inappropriate behaviour, you should take steps that can safely be taken to stop or disrupt the interaction, as outlined in #2 above.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you are not sure whether the issue you have witnessed or heard about involves unlawful behaviour, or inappropriate behaviour, discuss the issue with the President of VUSC who will guide you through the process. Remember: You have an independent duty to report all unlawful behaviour directly to child welfare.

#### **Consequences of Failing to Adhere to this Code of Conduct to Protect Children**

Depending on the circumstances, failure to adhere to the Code of Conduct to Protect Children by an employee/volunteer may result in follow-up by the organization to:

1. gather information about what happened and
2. determine what, if any, disciplinary action is required; and/or
3. a report to child welfare or law enforcement (or both).

Consequences, disciplinary or corrective actions will be as determined by the Discipline Committee of Valley United Soccer Club and will be based on the nature and severity of the incident, as well as information learned during follow-up, and any past behaviour of concern.

If, in following up on a concern, we believe the behaviour exhibited by an employee, volunteer or a third party may constitute unlawful behavior we will report the behaviour to child welfare and possibly law enforcement.

In addition, in circumstances where multiple behaviours are reported, where inappropriate behaviour is recurring, or where one instance of inappropriate behaviour is of serious concern, the organization may refer the matter to child welfare and/or law enforcement for investigation. Failure to adhere to the Code of Conduct to Protect Children by any employee/volunteer will result in follow-up to look into the situation and disciplinary action if necessary. Appropriate consequences/disciplinary actions are to be determined by the Discipline Committee of VUSC and will be based on the nature and severity of the incident.

I agree to comply with the Code of Conduct to Protect Children for Valley United Soccer Club.

Employee/volunteer's signature	Date
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**If You Have Questions**

While working for the organization you may be presented with issues and scenarios that have not been addressed specifically in this Code of Conduct to Protect Children, or that you need further guidance on. Should that occur, you are encouraged to approach the President of VUSC for guidance and direction on the next steps.