

NAMMA Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy

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Section A: Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- State the commitment of the North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA) to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and the prevention of abuse, exploitation and neglect.
- Set out common values and principles and provide guidance on safeguarding and protection issues and good practice.
- Set out procedures mandatory for NAMMA representatives.
- Ensure that all NAMMA representatives know their responsibilities in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults from harm.

Scope

This policy provides guidance and procedures that must be followed by all NAMMA representatives, wherever in the world they are working.

This policy covers children and vulnerable adults.

Definitions

A child is a person who is under 18 years of age, as recognized in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

In this policy, “adult” means a person aged 18 years or over. The broad definition of a “vulnerable adult” is someone who may be in need of community care services by reason of mental health or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation for any reason.

Harm is ill-treatment (including physical abuse, sexual abuse and non-physical forms of ill-treatment) or the impairment of health (physical or mental) or development (physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioral). Neglect or inaction, particularly in the context of a relationship of responsibility or trust, can be forms of harm.

Safeguarding is the process by which we protect children and vulnerable adults' health, wellbeing and human rights, enabling them to live free from harm.

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the board and staff leadership of NAMMA to create an organizational culture that promotes safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults by upholding principles of transparency and accountability on such matters.

All representatives of NAMMA are expected to follow the guidelines and procedures of this protection policy, including the reading and signing of the code of conduct and reporting procedures for suspected protection violations.

Principles

All children and vulnerable adults have equal rights to protection. NAMMA understands that children form a special group of individuals who face great challenges on a worldwide scale. People with power and influence in communities, be they geographic, professional, religious, or voluntary associations can abuse or exploit children and vulnerable adults. This calls for preventive action to protect them against abuse and appropriate responses where there are alleged incidences of violations.

NAMMA uses a rights-based approach when working with children. This approach is based on the four broad child rights areas of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). These are the child's rights to survival, development, participation and protection.

Using the child's right to protection as a core principle, NAMMA strives to ensure that measures and systems are in place to protect children and vulnerable adults from all forms of abuse and maltreatment by any NAMMA staff member or other representative. The policy also recognizes that children and vulnerable adults have differing levels of capacity depending on age and development that can affect the ability to protect themselves and make decisions about their own lives. The policy includes assessing the ability of individuals to understand and make decisions in any actions related to safeguarding and protection.

This policy, including the code of conduct, is easily accessible to all staff and other representatives by direct email distribution and by posting on the NAMMA website (namma.org). Staff should promote the code of conduct in all situations where the organization is responsible for bringing children into contact with adults.

Section B: Safeguarding

This section provides procedures and guidelines that should be followed to safeguard children and vulnerable adults and prevent abuse taking place by any representative of NAMMA. It also includes a section on reducing risk when working with partners.

1. Staff recruitment procedure

Current and potential employees with direct or regular contact with children shall undergo a screening procedure to check for any child abuse-related criminal record.

Supplementary information for all jobs should state that a child protection policy exists and that a screening process is in place. The following wording should be used: *“NAMMA operates rigorous recruitment and selection procedures that reflect our commitment to child protection.”*

The child protection policy and code of conduct will be made available to all job applicants at the point of application. This policy will be signed off on the hiring of the applicant.

Current and future staff, consultants and volunteers who will be coming into direct contact with children and vulnerable adults, based in the United States or in countries where there is a reciprocal agreement on disclosure should have standard background checks or any other police checks applicable in countries where the consultant resides. Evidence of checks will be kept on file together with the consultant’s other records.

All application forms will include a declaration relating to criminal convictions.

For employees working directly with children, three employment references should be taken up on all applicants before appointment to post. These should be from the last three employers and include answering a question such as “Would you have any concerns about this person working with children or coming into contact with children or vulnerable adults?”

It is essential to verify the qualifications required for the post to help detection of false employment histories or backgrounds. Originals of qualification certificates should be viewed by the NAMMA staff, copied and kept on file.

Individuals will be required to produce proof of identity at the final interview. This must include government issued photo ID and two documents of proof of place of residence.

2. Code of conduct

This code of conduct constitutes a set of standards for appropriate behavior. It also gives guidance to avoid situations that increase chances of behavior that may be classified as inappropriate when in the company of children and vulnerable adults. The code of conduct should be interpreted in a spirit of transparency and common sense, with the best interests of the child or vulnerable adult as the primary consideration.

This code is applicable to anyone acting as a representative of NAMMA, such as board members, staff, volunteers, consultants, and other visitors whose work requires him/her to be in contact with children and vulnerable adults or may bring children or vulnerable adults into contact with other adults.

Adults, as defined above, are expected not to:

- Spend time alone with a child or vulnerable adult, either at the adult or child's home, overnight, in a car or any other secluded place.
- Carry out personal activities on a child or vulnerable adult like bathing and dressing.
- Engage in inappropriate touch or physical contact with a child or vulnerable adult.
- Make sexually provocative gestures towards a child or vulnerable adult.
- Have a sexual relationship with a child or vulnerable adult.
- Physically assault or abuse a child or vulnerable adult.
- Make use of language that causes mental or emotional harm to a child or vulnerable adult
- Exploit children or vulnerable adults in any way or form.
- Discriminate based on race, color, sex, language, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status, gender, sexuality, religion, or political or other opinions.

In order to avoid the above from happening, it is encouraged that people take proactive action on risk minimization by making efforts to:

- Avoid compromising situations that increase vulnerability.
- Meet in public places as much as possible.
- Have parent/caregiver present when visiting or meeting children or vulnerable adults.
- Avoid actions that can be subject to misinterpretation by a third party.
- Get informed written consent from the parent or person with primary responsibility over the child or vulnerable adult before taking photographs or a statement from a child.

3. Working with partners

NAMMA expects all partners and other groups working with NAMMA to uphold best practice guidance on protection in all activities involving children and vulnerable adults.

All written agreements between other partners or agencies should reflect a commitment to the protection of children or vulnerable adults.

4. Communication about children or vulnerable adults

In its communication and fundraising strategy, NAMMA may at times use images and recordings of children and field texts. NAMMA has a responsibility towards the children and vulnerable adults that are portrayed and should ensure that they are treated with dignity as humans with rights by avoiding the following:

- Inaccurate representation of children or vulnerable adults through words and images.
- Communication that shames, degrades or victimizes.
- Taking pictures or statements from children or vulnerable adults without informed consent of caregivers.
- Depicting children or vulnerable adults in sexually provocative poses.
- Provide personal and physical information identifying the location of a child or vulnerable adult that could put them at risk should not be used in communications, including websites.

Section C: Identifying and reporting suspected abuse

This section identifies signs of abuse of children and vulnerable adults and how you should manage any disclosure of abuse. It also sets out the responsibility to report any suspected signs of abuse.

5. Signs of abuse

Before any form of behavior or act is reported as abuse, it is important that people become familiar with basic signs of abuse. However, it is crucial to note that abuse of children or vulnerable adults is not an easy situation to identify and care should be taken to put facts together and understand the context, as well as talk to the child or vulnerable adult where possible before drawing conclusions.

Possible signs of sexual abuse

- Physical indicators on genital areas, as may be reported.
- Sexualized behavior inappropriate to a child's age or vulnerable adults stage of development.

- Sexually transmitted infections.
- Pregnancy (depending on age).

Possible signs of physical abuse

- Bruises, burns, bites, cuts and dislocations.
- Excuses given to explain injuries.
- Refusal to discuss injuries.
- Aggressive behavior towards others.
- Withdrawal from physical contact.
- Fear of returning home or of having parents contacted.
- Self destructive tendencies.

Possible signs of emotional abuse

- Delayed physical, mental and emotional development.
- Increased anxiety.
- Low self esteem;
- Inappropriate emotional response to painful situations.
- Drug or alcohol abuse.
- Fear of new situations.

Possible signs of neglect

- Poor social relations.
- Low self esteem.
- Frequent hunger.
- Non-attendance at school.
- Poor personal hygiene.

6. Listening to a child's disclosure of abuse

When a young child or vulnerable adult makes comments or statements that relate to possible abuse, it is important to listen to what he or she is saying. Many children and vulnerable adults mistakenly believe they deserve the abuse. Generally, it should be assumed that children do not make up stories about this topic. Do not try to force words or images on a child or vulnerable adult in an effort to get more information. If you report suspected abuse, you do not need to prove that it occurred. A report is a request for an investigation. Child protection workers are trained to assess abusive situations, identify potential problems, and ensure the individual's safety.

What to do

- Accept what the child or vulnerable adult says.
- Keep calm.
- Don't panic.
- Do not appear shocked.
- Don't seek help while the individual is talking to you.
- Be honest.
- Look at the child or vulnerable adult directly.
- Assure them that they are not to blame for the abuse.
- Never ask leading questions.
- Try not to repeat the same questions.
- Never push for information.
- Do not fill in words, finish their sentences, or make assumptions.
- Be aware that the child or vulnerable adult may have been threatened.
- Make certain you distinguish between what the individual has actually said and the inferences you may have made. Accuracy is paramount in this stage of the process.
- Do not permit personal doubt to prevent you from reporting the allegation.
- Let the child or vulnerable adult know what you are going to do next and that you

will let them know what happens.

- Let them know that you need to tell someone else.

At the end of the disclosure

- Reassure them that it was right to tell you. Where appropriate, to the capacity of the child or vulnerable adult, ask them what they would like to see happen next.
- Let them know what you are going to do next.
- Immediately seek help from a direct superior or other person in a leadership capacity.
- Write down *accurately* what the person has told you. Sign and date your notes. Keep all notes in a secure place for an indefinite period. These are essential in helping your organization/ social services / the police decide what is best for the child or vulnerable adult.
- Seek help for yourself if you feel you need support.

7. Reporting suspected child abuse

If you suspect abuse or a child or vulnerable adult has made a disclosure of abuse, you should report concerns immediately. Reports should be made within 24 hours. Reports will be treated in strict confidence in the interest of all parties involved.

A concern relating to:

- staff or representatives of NAMMA.
- staff of NAMMA partner.
- child abuse in the community.

should be reported immediately to a direct superior, another person in a leadership capacity, or to the NAMMA board president.

The person to whom the report has been made should not carry out an investigation into the allegation, but should report the matter immediately to the board president.

Section D: Responding to reports of suspected abuse

This section sets out the responsibilities of NAMMA staff in responding to and managing cases of suspected abuse.

8. Investigation procedures

The Executive Director will convene a team to obtain further information, assess the concern, decide next steps and inform authorities as necessary. The team may include board members or other legal advisors. The team may appoint and delegate the investigation to an investigating officer if the matter requires further investigation.

Based on the evidence and careful deliberation on the case, the team will decide on whether the matter should be dropped, further handled internally or referred to the police depending on the level of assessed gravity and complexity. Where the allegation relates to a partner organization, the team will liaise with that organization to ensure appropriate steps are taken.

The process leading to decision making should be well documented and all facts or written allegations and responses stored securely by the Executive Director.

When a case is immediately dropped, the reasons for doing so shall be communicated to the person who reported the matter.

Thorough investigations will be carried out before such a decision or action is taken.

Arrangements will be made to provide supervision and support to those affected during and following an allegation.

The investigating team will liaise with the Executive Director and board president to manage the risk of any negative press or necessary disclosures.

The investigating team will be responsible for reporting to the Executive Director and external bodies including the police.

9. Disciplinary action

Following the completion of the investigation, NAMMA leadership, including and under the supervision of the board, will decide on appropriate action to take based on available evidence. This will follow the normal NAMMA disciplinary procedure.

Reports that are made maliciously or not in good faith could be considered an act of gross misconduct. Disciplinary action, which may result in dismissal, will be taken against any employee making such an allegation.

Section E: Implementation and Monitoring

This section sets out how the policy will be shared with all NAMMA representatives.

10. Implementation

All staff and other representatives will be made aware of the NAMMA's Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection policy and be requested to read it and sign the code of conduct. Signed copies of the policy will be stored securely in the employee's / representative's file.

It is the relevant leader's responsibility to ensure safeguarding measures are put in place. Where necessary, training will be provided for specific staff, e.g. those having direct contact with children or vulnerable adults; or researchers who would need training on children's participation and the sharing of information on children.

Training resources will be stored on our website. They will be regularly reviewed and updated.

A review of protection policy implementation will be included in relevant external program reviews.

The protection policy will be reviewed on a periodic basis and can be adjusted as necessary to reflect global changes and developments.

10. Representative's commitment to child protection policy and code of conduct

The following persons should sign a statement of commitment to the NAMMA Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct (see Appendix 1):

- all NAMMA staff.
- any representative/ consultant of the NAMMA who is expected to come into contact with children or vulnerable adults during the course of their work with the NAMMA.

Appendix 1

Statement of commitment to child and vulnerable adult protection policy and code of conduct form

I have read and understood NAMMA's child protection policy, including the code of conduct on protection.

I agree to abide by the policy and principles therein and understand that I must raise any concerns I may have about the protection of children and vulnerable adults whilst working for or with NAMMA with my direct superior (or other responsible person) in a confidential manner.

Name (printed):

Position:

Signature:

Date: