

**SECTION 33**  
**PROTECTION POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

**A. GENERAL PURPOSE:**

The County is committed to the well being of those it serves. This policy is intended to establish requirements and procedures in an effort to prevent abuse by County employees and volunteers and to provide guidance on how to respond to allegations of abuse. All employees must comply with applicable laws and with these procedural guidelines.

**B. DEFINITIONS:**

As used in this section:

1. "Allegation" means a statement or accusation of abuse.
2. "Abuse" means sexual abuse, neglect, or other physical, mental, or emotional harm caused to a child or vulnerable adult, either intentionally or through gross negligence.
3. "Child or minor" means a person less than eighteen (18) years of age.
4. "Vulnerable adult" means a person 18 years of age or older whose ability to perform normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection is impaired due to mental, emotional, physical, or developmental disability or dysfunction, brain damage, or the infirmities of aging. Or, such persons as so defined in applicable State statutes.

**C. POLICY STATEMENT:**

The County directs that its employees and volunteers will be alert for any evidence of abuse. County employees and volunteers are responsible for reporting all suspected cases of abuse. County employees and volunteers are required by County policy to report such cases to their supervisor. Supervisors are required to report alleged abuse to law enforcement. County employees and volunteers need not verify that a child or vulnerable adult has in fact been abused. Any conditions or information that may reasonably be related to abuse should be reported. Legal authorities are responsible for investigating each case and taking appropriate action.

**D. BACKGROUND CHECKS:**

The County maintains the right to review the background of its employees and volunteers who work with children or vulnerable adults.

**E. CODE OF CONDUCT:**

While on duty, County employees and volunteers shall follow these protocols:

1. Where possible and practical, the “two-adult rule,” wherein two or more adults supervise all activities where children are involved and are present at all times, should be followed. County staff members or volunteers are encouraged to be accompanied by parent/legal guardians and/or community members on visits with children.
2. Inappropriate behavior towards children or vulnerable adults, including failure to follow the County’s behavior protocols, policy, and standards is grounds for discipline, up to and including criminal investigation and dismissal from employment, volunteer/internship position, or board/advisory council membership.

**F. TRAINING:**

County employees and volunteers who work with children or vulnerable adults are to be trained under the direction of the County Human Resources Department in specific policies and procedures regarding:

1. Definitions of Child Abuse
2. Preventive Measures
3. Guidelines for Showing Affection
4. After the Fact – Reporting, Documenting, Responding
5. Types of Disclosure

**G. REPORTING, INVESTIGATION, AND DISCLOSURE:**

County employees and volunteers should report every instance of suspected abuse. When a supervisor is informed of suspected abuse, he/she will notify the County Human Resources Director and law enforcement as soon as possible.

**H. CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORDS RETENTION:**

An allegation of abuse of a child or vulnerable adult is a serious issue. In following the County's Protection Policy for Child and Vulnerable Adults, it is essential that all parties maintain confidentiality. Sharing information which could identify a victim or an alleged perpetrator should be shared on a “need to know” basis and with guidance from the County Attorney’s Office and the County Human Resources Director. Unless abuse has actually been proven, it must always be referred to as “alleged abuse.”