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## **What is a Child Protection Policy?**

All of Outreach Foundation's work is aimed at creating positive and sustainable change in the lives of children and youth in Hillbrow and beyond. A critical part of achieving this includes striving to keep children safe. This policy therefore outlines the principles, standards, guidelines and procedures we follow and insist upon in carrying out our work as an organisation. This policy is guided and also upholds the standards of the South African Children's Act 38 of 2005.

## **Why do we need a Child Protection Policy?**

Children are especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and ill treatment at the hands of carers, other project workers and those with access to their personal information.

Organisations working with children have been, are and will continue to be vulnerable to harbouring abuse until clear Child Protection policies and practices are in place and the issues are brought into the open.

Organisations without adequate protection policies and practices are more vulnerable to false or malicious accusations of abuse which can destroy an organisation's reputation, alongside acting as a smoke screen to potential abuse in another organisation.

## **1) Child Protection Definitions**

The following definitions are helpful in determining the meaning behind many terms widely used when talking about child protection; this section should not be used as an exhaustive guide.

*For the purposes of this policy, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN convention of the Rights of the Child.*

## **2) Child Abuse**

We recognise child abuse as falling into four main categories:

**Physical Abuse:** including hurting or injuring a child, such as hitting, shaking, scalding, or suffocating. It includes giving a child harmful substances, such as drugs, alcohol or poison

**Sexual Abuse:** including direct or indirect sexual exploitation or corruption of children by involving them (or threatening to involve them) in inappropriate sexual activities

**Emotional Abuse:** repeatedly rejecting children, humiliating them or denying their worth and rights as human beings

**Neglect:** the persistent lack of appropriate care of children, including love, stimulation, safety, nourishment, warmth, education and/or medical attention.

It is important to understand that a child who is being abused may experience more than one type of abuse

We also class discrimination, harassment and bullying as abusive and recognise the harm to the child both physically and emotionally.



### **Direct contact with children**

We understand this to be being in the physical presence of a child, whether contact is occasional or regular, short or long term. Direct contact could involve delivering talks such as to schools or youth groups; project visits or attending conferences at which children are also present.

#### Counselling of Children

*It is imperative to obtain written consent from parents or legal guardians before counselling minors.*

### **Indirect contact with children**

Having access to information on children, such as children's names, locations (addresses of individuals or projects), photographs or case studies

Providing resources for organisations that work 'directly' with children. Albeit indirectly, this nonetheless has an impact on children, and therefore confers upon the donor, or donor organisation responsibility for child protection issues

## **3) Specific Child Protection Requirements**

This section outlines the detailed requirements for its trustees, staff, partners, and individuals/organisations visiting our partners and projects.

#### Trustees

Trustees are bound to the principles and practice of this policy and review its content and implementation annually through its designated audit committee

All trustees are required to obtain a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure check

Expected to sign Railway Children's Statement of Commitment

Attend relevant child protection training and keep abreast on changes in child protection legislation

#### Staff, interns and volunteers

All Outreach Foundation staff, full/part time/temporary or acting as a volunteer are bound to the principles and practice of the Child Protection Policy and it forms part of their terms of employment.

All staff members with direct or indirect contact with children will

- be required to obtain a police check
- be expected to sign Outreach Foundation's Statement of Commitment
- Attend relevant child protection training and keep abreast on changes in child protection legislation.

A copy of the most recent Child Protection Policy will be presented to each new member of staff as part of their induction.

If work carried out on behalf of the Outreach Foundation involves no contact with children either directly or indirectly and no access to information regarding children, (e.g. accountant, auditor), then no formal procedure is necessary – if there is any uncertainty about the issue of contact then this should be raised with the Executive Director.



Individuals/Organisations visiting our projects/partners

We endeavour wherever possible to orientate and inspire support for our work through the media and communication materials, presented by individuals with a breadth of field experience. However, on occasions, after careful consideration on the impact and disruption to the children in our projects, we do allow visits by donors, supporters, media, celebrities and/or politicians where we can determine a tangible benefit for the children or the broader issue.

Anyone travelling either as a representative of the Outreach Foundation, or where the Outreach Foundation is responsible for that person will be accompanied by an Outreach Foundation member of staff at all times.

In addition all visitors are requested to sign the Outreach Foundation's Statement of Commitment and adhere to this policy at all times. Expect to receive a briefing from a delegated Outreach Foundation representative, with particular emphasis on the Code of Conduct and Communication guidelines.

#### **4) Code of Conduct**

This Code of Conduct should be interpreted in a spirit of transparency and common sense, it is important to consider the best interests of the child at all times and for this to inform your behaviour. In particular:

- Never use violence, force or abuse of any kind against a child or other person you may encounter during your visit, whatever the provocation
- Always behave in a calm, positive, supportive and encouraging way with the children, avoid swearing and any loud or aggressive behaviour
- Always treat the children with the utmost respect. Carefully avoid any language or actions which the child may find insulting, demeaning, condescending or humiliating. Do not refer to the children as 'street children' or any similar term in front of children or their families. Be very aware of discrimination, race, culture, gender, disability, religion, and sexuality
- Try to avoid placing yourself in a compromising or vulnerable position, be accompanied by a second adult whenever possible – keep in mind that actions, no matter how well intended are always subject to misinterpretation by a third party
- Do not engage in or allow sexually provocative games with children to take place, and do not kiss or touch in anyway a child in an inappropriate or culturally insensitive way.
- Children can crave physical affection, wait for appropriate physical contact to be initiated by the child first and be aware of the vulnerability in the adult-child relationship and be especially alert to taking advantage of this at all times
- Do not give gifts or lend money to children without first agreeing the appropriateness of this gesture with a member of the project staff
- Do not ask a child questions which may be construed as sensitive or intimate without first consulting with a member of staff member responsible for the child.
- Do not attend a project under the influence of alcohol or drugs and do not smoke in front of the children.
- The content of counselling sessions with children has to remain strictly confidential at all times

#### **5) Communication Guidelines**





Communicating the issues is a critical part of the Outreach Foundation's commitment to galvanising support and shifting perception of Hillbrow and other inner city areas. However, to avoid damage or risk to the very children we strive to protect and help we must adhere to the following guidelines at all time:

- \* Avoid language and images that could degrade, victimise or shame children
- \* Make generalisations which do not accurately reflect the nature of the situation
- \* Capture images out of context – try to accompany pictures with an explanatory caption

Restrict access to printed and electronic personal information about children to the minimal amount of people possible – information that could be used to identify the identity or location of a child could cause them to be put at risk and must never be used in any form of media or communication (website, digital, general communications, talks etc.) .

Every child has a right to be accurately represented through both words and images. Portrayal of a child should not be manipulated or sensationalised in any way, an accurate and balanced depiction and children and their circumstances helps preserve the child's dignity.

Try to ensure stories of children are told in their own words, rather than speak on their behalf.

In images children must be appropriately clothed and not depicted in any poses that could be interpreted as sexually provocative. To the greatest extent possible informed consent should be sought (permission of the child or the child's parent/guardian/NGO responsible) before taking or using images for publicity, fundraising, awareness-raising or any other purpose, which should be made clear to the consent-giver. Please remember to ask the permission of the child themselves before taking pictures.

Individuals or organisations requesting the use of the Outreach Foundation's resources, such as photographs, must seek permission with us before using the images, copy etc. and receive written consent. Failure to do so could be subject to legal action.

## **6) Reporting and Reaction Protocol**

The following outlines the process for reporting and reacting to witnessed, suspected or alleged child abuse and/or violation of this Policy.

### *Allegations from a Child*

If a child informs you that s/he is uncomfortable or concerned with a specific person's (adult or child) behaviour towards them, the following steps must be taken:

Reassure the child that s/he is right to report the behaviour to you.

Listen carefully and calmly to the child and if absolutely necessary, ask open and non-leading questions to clarify the allegation so that you will be able to later report the incident accurately. Avoid questioning where possible – rather, make a referral to an appropriately qualified person (one of the key failings in dealing with disclosures of abuse is to contaminate the disclosure by inappropriate questioning and failure to report to the appropriate person).

If it is necessary to ask questions try not to repeat the same questions to the child, as this gives him/her the impression that they did not give correct information the first time or worse are not believed.

Do not promise secrecy to the child, tell them that you must report the incident as this is in their best interest.





Make certain you distinguish between what the child has actually said and the inferences you may have made – accuracy is paramount in this stage of the procedure.

Do not let personal doubt prevent you from reporting the allegation.

Let the child know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens.

Make an immediate verbatim note of the conversation and store this somewhere safe where the contents will remain confidential and undisturbed.

Make a senior member of the Outreach Foundation aware of the incident immediately – where significant child protection disclosures are made a referral to social services and/or police takes place.

Following information or allegation of harm to a child, the Outreach Foundation will take the appropriate steps within its power to protect the child from harm. If any information about the maltreatment or abuse of a child is suspected it is the responsibility of each individual to report their concerns as inaction may place the child in further danger.

If an allegation of a violation of the Child Protection Policy, principles or practice of child protection is made concerning a named individual from a verifiable source against a trustee, employee or volunteer they will immediately face suspension from their employment/association/ role whilst the Outreach Foundation undertakes an independent investigation.

Depending on the outcome of the investigation, if it comes to light that anyone associated with the Outreach Foundation commits acts in relation to children – whether within or outside the context of Outreach Foundation’s work – which are criminal, grossly infringe children’s rights, or contravene the principles and standards contained in this document, the organisation will take immediate disciplinary action and any other action which may be appropriate to the circumstances. This may mean, for example, for:

Employees, volunteers – disciplinary action/dismissal

Trustees – ending the relationship with the organisation

Partners – withdrawal of support/funding

Depending on the nature and circumstances of the case, Outreach Foundation will also consider involving authorities such as the police to ensure the protection of children and criminal prosecution where appropriate.





## STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

To the Outreach Foundation's Child Protection Policy

### FOR INDIVIDUALS:

"I, \_\_\_\_\_ [name of individual], have read and understood Outreach Foundation's Child Protection Policy. I agree with the principles contained therein and accept the importance of adhering to the principles and practices outlined in the policy.

### FOR ORGANISATIONS:

"I, \_\_\_\_\_ [name of individual], on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ [name of organisation], have read and understood Outreach Foundation's Child Protection Policy. \_\_\_\_\_ [name of organisation], agrees with the principles contained therein and accepts the importance of adhering to the principles and practices outlined in the policy.

\_\_\_\_\_

*(Print name)*

*(Job title / role)*

*(Signature)*

*(Date)*

