

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

An Overview

Cohesion Foundation Trust (CFT) is a registered NGO founded in 1996. In the last seventeen years of its foundation, Cohesion has grown as a grassroots organization committed to striving for a world in which people and the natural environment are in harmony with each other, a world in which people, men and women, are in harmony with each other, a world in which all have enough to meet their genuine emotional and physical needs, and a world in which the diversity of humankind is celebrated.

Realizing that education has not only implications on livelihood activities, but also in the overall development of human being, CFT has been implementing education programme for children of migrant communities since the year 2005. CFT strongly believes that all children have equal rights and should get opportunities without any discrimination. So each child who does not have access to education and equal opportunities and are neglected, abused or exploited are representation of crimes and violation of our constitution. Cohesion, through its programmes, envisages institutionalizing lasting changes in the quality of life of deprived children through early child development interventions and by enabling deprived children, their families and their communities to meet their basic needs and to increase their capacities. We strongly believe that child development interventions can help reduce societal inequalities rooted in poverty by helping to provide young children from disadvantaged backgrounds with a more equitable start in life and a foundation for further growth, this is especially important for those living in rural and urban marginal areas.

Various strategies have been adopted to reach out to the above targetgroup, such as through residential hostels for children from migrant families, learning support for children in rural areas, support schools for children who migrate with their parents and early child education interventions. CFT over the years has worked with children in high migration and other villages and realizes that children are vulnerable to abuse/exploitation by the children themselves and also from adults. In an effort to ensuring protection to children from anykind of abuse, CFT has tried to create a child friendly environment withinits programmes, especially for children with occasional familycontact.

Learning from its experiences of working with children CFT felt the need to have a concrete child care and protection policy in place as it looks to reach out to children in other vulnerable geographies. The document draws from child care best practices from other organizations and policies.

CFT believes that working with children, it has an important responsibility to protect children Withinits care. This necessitates that CFT is equipped with necessaryinformation, standardized behaviour guidelines and knowledge to give the childsupport, guidance and help needed at any

particular time, keeping in mind the best interests of the child. The document is intended to give CFT staff members clear guidelines on how to handle various situations and continually ensure a friendly environment for children.

Definitions

Child: Any person under the age of eighteen (18) years as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Child protection: Child protection is a broad term to describe philosophies, policies, standards, guidelines and procedures to protect children from both intentional and unintentional harm. In the current context, it applies particularly to the duty of organisations- and individuals associated with the organisations- towards children in their care.

Child rights: Children have the “right to life, survival and development” where development encompasses physical, emotional, cognitive, social and cultural development.

Child abuse: ‘Child abuse’ or ‘maltreatment’ constitutes ‘all forms of physical and/or emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.’ (WHO, 1999)

Physical abuse: Physical abuse of a child is that which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. There may be single or repeated incidents (WHO, 1999).

Emotional abuse: Emotional abuse includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, so that the child can develop emotional and social competencies commensurate with her or his personal potential, and in the context the society in which the child dwells (WHO 1999).

Sexual abuse: Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent or, that violates the laws or special taboos of society.

Child protection incident:

- Any incident or act that causes harm to a child or has the potential to cause harm, as defined in CFT's child care policy.
- Any breach of the CFT child care policy which puts children in direct risk of harm.

Responsibilities of CFT staff

CFT follows a zero tolerance policy towards child protection concerns and issues. In this light it is important for CFT staff to own the child protection guidelines, as defined in this document and ensure that the same are adhered to in the organization by other staff members as well as outsiders. It is a **mandatory requirement** of all CFT staff members to immediately report any child protection concerns they have in accordance with guidelines. Failure to do so may result in significant emotional and/or physical damage to the child and will be considered dereliction of duty by CFT staff member(s). It is important that you ask your line manager for a copy of the child protection policy. Responsibilities for CFT staff members are as follows-

1. Always make sure the child is safe. Address any immediate health and welfare needs of the child.
2. Report any child protection concerns they have in accordance with applicable local office procedures. A report may be made to the relevant director (Country, Regional, National, IH) depending on the location of the abuse, or your line manager or designated Child Protection Focal Point immediately (but within 24 hours maximum).
3. An allegation of child abuse is a serious issue. In following the Child Protection Policy and local procedures, it is essential that all parties maintain confidentiality. You should share information purely on a need to know basis. In addition unless abuse has actually been proved to have occurred, you must always refer to "alleged abuse".
4. Cooperate fully in any investigation of concerns and allegations.
5. All Plan offices should have procedures in place related to reporting and responding to child protection issues. These should also be available in the local languages and the Staff should be oriented and conversant with the same. Ask the Child Protection Focal Point in your office for a copy of the local procedures.
6. If you are uncertain of what to do, you can speak to your senior manager.
7. It is the responsibility of the senior management to make available the child protection policy to all employees, interns and visitors.

Reporting Procedures

These are non-negotiables to be followed for reporting and reacting to witnessed, suspected or alleged child abuse and/or violation of the Child Protection Policy.

- 1- Allegation of abuse must be reported to team leader or supervisor immediately after abuse or concerns of abuse take place.
- 2- This has to be done through phone (if very urgent) and followed in a document (reporting format) which has to be filled up by typing.

- 3- Dialogue with concerned abused child to ensure he/she feels protected and safe and to understand the depth of allegation and its extent.
- 4- In case of an allegation by a named individual from a verifiable source, the accused will not be allowed to come in direct contact with children.
- 5- If needed, CFT will form an independent committee of external people to look into child protection issues that the organization is unable to justifiably address internally or if there is a conflict of interest with people in the organization who are supposed to address the issue.

Incident	Action	Why you should report
<p>Child abuse committed by a CFT staff member Accusation, suspicion, report of any form of child abuse by any CFT staff member inside or outside of working hours</p>	<p>The incident should be reported to immediate senior authority. If someone from senior management is being accused, the complaint should be registered with organization head. In case of a deadlock, the issue should be taken to an independent committee that is specifically constituted to look into child protection matters</p>	<p>To ensure that CFT takes necessary steps to prevent further abuse against the child or other children.</p>
<p>An incident involving the breach or related concern of CFT CP policies or procedures by an CFT staff member</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A breach of the CFT Child Protection policy ▪ Staff member refuses to sign CFT Child Protection policy 	<p>The breach should be reported to the senior management. If necessary steps are not taken in time to address the concerns, the breach should be brought to the notice of the organization head. Any member not willing to sign the policy should be contacted to understand the reasons for his/her action. It is mandatory that everyone who works for CFT follows the policy.</p>	<p>To ensure that CFT takes all necessary steps to fulfil its commitment to protect children from abuse.</p>
<p>A child protection incident that is committed by someone other than aCFT staff member. If aCFT staff member is made aware or witnesses physical, sexual, emotional abuse or the gross neglect of a child in the communities or in the course of our work.</p>	<p>The incident should be reported to senior management and with their help brought to the notice of parents of the concerned child or village elders. In case the incident involves a CFT visitor/guest, he/she should be asked to cease any contact with the child. In such cases the incident should be formally reported to the seniors/organization of the concerned person</p>	<p>To ensure that local level action is taken to ensure the safety and protection of any child who is being abused.</p>

Policy framework

CFT understands that concerns related to child protection cannot be addressed sufficiently until appropriate provisions are made in HR policies and practices. In line with this thought, CFT endeavours to follow strictest recruitment and training practices that will promote the principles laid down in the child protection policy.

Recruitment

All employees, trustees, contractors, suppliers, interns and volunteers (paid or unpaid, full time or part time, temporary or long-term) having direct or indirect contact with children have to face a thorough and standardised recruitment and interview process. Will have to sign a statement of commitment to the organisation's CPP.

Induction and training

There has to be opportunities within the organisation to develop and maintain the necessary skills and understanding, to safeguard children.

- A full day orientation on Child Protection issues for all new recruits (contractual/paid staff, trainee and community volunteers etc.) to be given within 1 month of joining with a copy of the policy for reference.
- Orientation of all existing staff on Child Protection policies and procedures within 30 days after the CPP comes into force.
- Half day refresher training for personnel every 1 year, to remind them of procedures and update on new developments.
- Orientation of children on all relevant aspects of CPP within 2/5 days of their arrival and refresher courses every 3 months.
- Orientation of donors and visitors on behaviour and communication protocols before interaction with children
- One pager on behaviour protocols to be displayed on notice boards of all units.

Behaviour protocols

These protocols will ensure that all personnel understand and abide by behaviours which will help in creating a child safe environment where children's physical and mental integrity / space / privacy are respected.

Appropriate behaviour towards children

- Respect the dignity of each child.
- Consider each child as unique individual with specific characteristics and needs and thus accept each child with all the good and bad things with in him/her.
- Observe attitude of children with patience and understand them within the local context in which they live.
- Be empathetic rather than sympathetic towards children.
- Views of children to be listened, valued and taken seriously with objectivity.
- Encourage to express their feelings as well as participate in decisions, which affect them at the same time ensuring confidentiality.
- Work with children in ways that enhance their inherent capacities and capabilities and develop their potential.
- Act on children's concern/problems immediately.
- Appreciate their good efforts and performances since it would be rewarding and reinforcing for further development.
- As far as possible, work with children in a place within the view of others.

Standards and Procedures

As CFT's work with children is actualized through interventions like residential hostels, early child care facilities and learning classes it is important that there are clear standards and procedures to ensure safety of children in such environments.

A child in a hostel or classroom is vulnerable to physical, sexual or emotional abuse and / or neglect. If there are lapses in the care provided for them, the child can suffer to such a degree that it constitutes significant harm. These standards and procedures, if followed thoroughly, will ensure that children who are part of CFT's programs have a safe and secure experience.

It is the responsibility of all CFT staff members to ensure these standards are met. For program specific standards/procedures, the Program Managers have the responsibility to ensure adherence of their team as well as any other infrastructure need to fulfil these standards. The senior management of CFT should ensure that each team, regional office, center etc. is fully aware and has all the means to achieve these standards.

Hostel standards

Infrastructure

1. Drinking water is available in all boarding houses at all reasonable times.
2. Boarders know emergency evacuation procedures from sleeping and living areas in each boarding house.

3. Fire drills are regularly (at least once per term) carried out in 'boarding time'.
4. Emergency lighting, fire alarms and fire fighting equipment are regularly tested, and this is detailed in the appropriate records.
5. Boarding houses (including dormitories and living areas) and other accommodation provided for boarders should be appropriately lit and ventilated, suitably furnished, accessible to any boarders with disabilities, and adequately maintained.
6. The organisation of boarding houses or units should operate satisfactorily and provide appropriate protection and separation of boarders by age and gender.
7. Boarding accommodation is reserved for the use of those boarders designated to use it, and protected from access by the public.
 - a. Suitable and adequate security measures are in place to prevent unauthorised access by the public to boarding houses
8. Bedding is clean and suitable for the age of boarders, and is sufficiently warm in winter.
9. Suitable facilities for both organised and private study are available to boarders.
10. Adequate toilet and washing facilities are readily accessible to boarders, with appropriate privacy.
11. Boarders have access to a range and choice of safe recreational areas, both indoors and outdoors.
12. Indoor and outdoor areas used by, or accessible to, boarders should be free from reasonably avoidable safety hazards.
 - a. Sleeping, living and recreational areas, indoors and in the school grounds, are free of significant hazards to boarder safety (e.g. trailing flexes, overloaded sockets, unguarded heaters).
13. Boarders know which areas and activities are out of bounds.
14. Suitable accommodation should be available for the separate care of boarders who are ill.
 - a. Boarders who are ill at school can be cared for satisfactorily and separately from other boarders where necessary, within boarding, sick bay or sanatorium accommodation.

Health, Food and hygiene

1. Appropriate first aid and minor illness treatment are available to boarders at all times, with access to medical, dental and optical services as required.
2. Boarders who are ill should be regularly checked and adequately looked after by a member of staff, and be able to summon staff assistance readily and rapidly when necessary.
3. Significant health and personal problems of individual boarders should be identified and managed appropriately.
4. Meals should be provided to boarders which are adequate in quantity, quality and choice, and provision is made for special dietary, medical or religious needs.

- a. Meals provided for boarders are nutritious, reasonably balanced, and adequate infrequency, hygiene and temperature.
5. Crockery, cutlery and dining facilities are sufficient and clean.
6. There is sufficient time at mealtimes, taking into account any necessary queuing time, for boarders to finish their meals properly.
7. Staff and pupils involved in preparing food for others have received appropriate training in food handling and hygiene.
8. There are constant checks to ensure mosquitoes and other harmful insects are not breeding inside the boarding rooms.

Reporting, Feedback & Record keeping

1. Adequate records should be kept in relation to individual boarders' health and welfare needs and issues.
2. There are individual records for boarders, containing relevant health and welfare information provided by parents and recording significant health and welfare needs and issues.

Staff recruitment and checks

1. Any guardians appointed by the school should be subject to the same recruitment checks as staff, and their care of pupils should be monitored.
2. The Head, or a senior member of the school's staff, regularly monitors the school's records of risk assessments, punishments, complaints and accidents, to identify any issues requiring action.
 - a. Reasonable action is taken to reduce risks identified by risk assessments.
1. The staff supervising boarders outside teaching time should be sufficient in number and deployment for the age, number and needs of boarders, and the locations and activities involved.
2. Boarders are at all times under the responsibility of an identified member of staff. Each boarder knows which member of staff is responsible for them at all times, has the means to contact that member of staff if necessary, and that member of staff has the means to call for and receive staff back-up if necessary.
3. There are satisfactory cover arrangements for boarding staff sickness and absence.
4. The boarding staff group in day to day contact with boarders includes staff of both genders where this is practicable within the school's staffing structure.
5. Boarders temporarily away from the school site remain under the overall responsibility of a duty member of staff, and are able to contact a member of staff in an emergency.
6. Staff know the whereabouts of boarders (or know how to find their whereabouts) in their charge at all times – this includes a signing out and back in system for boarders permitted to leave the school.

7. Staff should be present and accessible to boarders as necessary, in each boarding house at night.
8. There is at least one adult member of staff sleeping in each boarding house at night, responsible for the boarders in the house.
9. All staff with boarding duties have job descriptions reflecting those duties, receive induction training in boarding when newly appointed, and receive regular review of their boarding practice, with opportunities for continuing training in boarding.
10. The induction training programme for all staff, including gap staff, includes guidance
11. on child protection.
12. There is an appropriate process for the regular review of the performance of each member of staff with boarding duties by a more senior or experienced member of staff (e.g. through individual supervision meetings or a staff appraisal system).
13. Job descriptions clearly state, and staff are themselves clear about, the person to whom each member of staff with boarding duties is accountable.
14. All staff with boarding duties are provided with up to date written guidance on the school's boarding policies and practice.
15. There is an up-to-date staff handbook or similar written guidance, which is given to all staff with boarding duties.
16. There is a staff disciplinary procedure, which includes provision for precautionary suspension of staff where necessary pending investigation or final decision following allegations.
17. Staff supervision of boarders should avoid intruding unnecessarily on boarders' privacy.

Policy and Response

1. The school should have an effective policy on countering bullying,
2. The school should have, and follow, an appropriate policy on responding to complaints from boarders and parents.
3. The complaints procedure is available to all staff, boarders and parents.
4. The school should have, and follow, an appropriate policy on countering major risks to health, including substance abuse.
5. Personal, social and health education provides age
6. The school should be capable of satisfactorily managing crises affecting boarders' welfare.
7. There are planned responses to a range of foreseeable major incidents or crises, such as outbreaks of illness, fires, serious allegations or complaints or significant accidents.
8. Boarders have opportunity to contribute views to the operation of boarding provision.
9. Each boarder should have one or more members of staff to whom he or she can turn for personal guidance or with a personal problem.

10. Within the school, there is no inappropriate discrimination on grounds of gender, disability, race, religion, cultural background, linguistic background, sexual orientation or academic or sporting ability. These factors are taken into account in the care of boarders, so that care is sensitive to different needs.
11. Staff contact parents about any significant welfare concerns relating to their child at school.
12. There is an appropriate process of induction and guidance for new boarders.
13. There are arrangements for new boarders to have guidance from more experienced boarders.
14. Boarders have access to information about events in the world outside the school, and access to local facilities which is appropriate to their age.
15. Supervision arrangements for boarders' use of any local facilities outside school are appropriate to the age of the boarders involved, and the facilities used are of a suitable type without unreasonable risks to boarders.