

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

OPU protects the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse and is committed to keeping children safe (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 19). OPU has a common commitment to the prevention and protection of child from physical and mental abuse and promotes effective actions aimed to ensure children wellbeing. The abuse and exploitation of children happens in all countries and societies across the world. This policy sets out common values, principles, and beliefs and describes the steps that will be taken in meeting of our commitment to protect children.

Children

In line with the UNCRC, for the purposes of the present Policy, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years. (UNCRC Article 1).

Abuse

In line with WHO definitions, 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.

Physical abuse is defined as those acts that cause actual physical harm or have the potential for harm. Sexual abuse is defined as those acts where a perpetrator uses a child for sexual gratification. Emotional abuse includes the failure of a caregiver to provide an appropriate and supportive environment, and includes acts that have an adverse effect on the emotional health and development of a child. Such acts include restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment.

Neglect

Neglect refers to the failure of a caregiver to provide for the development of the child in one or more of the following areas: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions.

OUR POLICY AND COMMITMENT TO PROTECT CHILDREN

Our values, principles and beliefs

- Child abuse is never acceptable; all violence is preventable.
- All child abuse involves the abuse of children's rights. The organization is committed to safeguarding all children, irrespective of ability, ethnicity, faith, gender, sexuality and culture. Every child is recognized, respected and protected as a rights holder and as a unique and valuable human being with an individual personality, distinct needs, interests and privacy.

- All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation. Types of risk may vary according to the child and that the means of addressing risks may also vary.
- The situation of all children must be improved through promotion of their rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes the right to freedom from abuse and exploitation.
- Preventing harm to children should be a commitment that staff, partners and others make whilst at work and outside of work. The organization has a commitment to protect children with / for whom the work is conducted.
- When the organization works through partners, they understand that they represent, or are identified with the organization at all times and have a responsibility to meet minimum standards of protection for children in their programs.
- Organization does everything possible to minimize risk and address concerns and incidents appropriately when they arise.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND WHAT WE WILL DO

OPU recognizes that all OPU staff, partners and others coming into contact with children have a fundamental duty of care towards them. OPU condemns all forms of abuse and violence against children that can be perpetuated outside and inside the organization.

We will meet our commitment to protect children from abuse through the following means:

Awareness

We will ensure that all staff, partners and others is aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children, and all the procedures about the prevention, identification, disclosure, reporting and responding of abuses. Within the process of recruitment, we outline our commitment to child safeguarding as well as to support meeting the child protection responsibilities and engage positively with children and communities.

Prevention

We will ensure - through trainings, awareness and good practice - that staff, partners and others minimize the risks to children. Staff, partners and others have signed up to the child protection policy.

Reporting

We will ensure that staff, partners and others are clear what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children and will be able to identify sources of support for children and their families. Fair, secure and transparent reporting channels are put in place in all types of programs that fulfill the right of stakeholders to be heard.

Responding

We will ensure that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse to guarantee that safe environments for children are created in all aspects of OPU work within fundraising or program implementation, and where children are respected, protected and empowered as their capacities may evolve. Local procedures have to be developed with the assistance of local advisers in accordance with local law. This policy and local procedures are made available in local languages.

In order that the above standards of reporting and responding are met, OPU staff, partners and others will also ensure that they:

- take seriously any concerns raised;
- take positive steps to ensure the protection of children who are the subject of any concerns;
- support children, staff or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns;
- act appropriately and effectively in instigating or co-operating with any subsequent process of investigation;
- are guided through the child protection process by the principle of 'best interests of the child';
- listen to and take seriously the views and wishes of children;
- work in partnership with parents / care givers and / or other professionals to ensure the protection of children.

INTERNAL PROCEDURES AND HOW WE WILL ENSURE OUR COMMITMENTS ARE MET

OPU will ensure that

- All OPU staff, partners and others will sign up to and abide by the Code of conduct.
- All staff and volunteers, partners and others will have access to a copy of the child protection policy.
- Recruitment procedures will include checks on suitability for working with young people.
- Induction will include briefing on child protection issues, including summary of legislation governing welfare / safeguarding / protection of children and details of health and other services that may be accessed as part of victim response as well as information on the kinds of behavior seen in the local area that may cause harm to children.
- Every workplace will display contact details for reporting possible child abuse and every member of staff will have contact details for reporting, including details of any government bodies or organizations with statutory authority for the safeguarding of children. Systems will be established to investigate possible risk, abuse once reported and how to deal with it.
- Training, self-audit, learning opportunities and support will be provided by OPU members as appropriate to ensure commitments are met and to minimize and prevent risks. The guiding principle is that the safety of the child is always the most important consideration. Complaint boxes, helplines and community-based child protection mechanisms are in place.

CODE OF CONDUCT AND OUR ACCOUNTABILITY

OPU monitors and reviews its safeguarding measures and reports regularly on whether these measures are working. All OPU staff must sign up to and abide by this Code of Conduct:

Staff, partners and others must never

- hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children;
- develop physical / sexual relationships with children;
- develop relationships with children, which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive;
- act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse;
- use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive;
- behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative;
- have a child / children with whom they are working to stay overnight at their home unsupervised;
- sleep in the same room or bed as a child with whom they are working;
- do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves;
- condone, or participate in, behavior of children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive;
- act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse;
- discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favor particular children to the exclusion of others.

This is not an exhaustive or exclusive list. The principle is that staff should avoid actions or behavior which may constitute poor practice or potentially abusive behavior.

It is important for all staff and others in contact with children to

- be aware of situations which may present risks and manage these;
- plan and organize the work and the workplace so as to minimize risks;
- as far as possible, be visible in working with children;
- ensure that a culture of openness exists to enable any issues or concerns to be raised and discussed;
- ensure that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that poor practice or potentially abusive behavior does not go unchallenged;
- talk to children about their contact with staff or others and encourage them to raise any concerns;
- empower children - discuss with them their rights, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what they can do if there is a problem.