

Children & Vulnerable Adults
Protection Policy
Sahaara Charitable Society

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POLICY STATEMENT

The Sahaara Charitable Society is committed to protecting the Rights of the Children in accordance to the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child) and the Law of the Land. We follow this Child Protection Policy to ensure the highest standards of Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection among our stakeholders. This Policy will guide the reporting of Child and Vulnerable Adults Abuse incidents, complaints and prompt redressal of the same.

SCOPE OF THE POLICY

This policy will endeavor to protect the child and vulnerable adults from all forms of abuse and uphold the rights of both as enshrined in the UNCRC. Handling of child and vulnerable adults abuse allegations against children and adults under our care, will be guided by this policy taking into cognizance the law of the land. This Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy provides a framework of principles, standards and guidelines to various aspects of organizational practice in relation to child and vulnerable adults protection.

This Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy will be applicable to the Board Members, Staff (Permanent and Contract), Consultants, Interns, Volunteers, Sponsors, Donors, Partners, Visitors, Contractors, Government stakeholders, children, relatives and parents coming in direct or indirect contact with the children under our care.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Every child is made in the image of God and has an unique purpose in life
- All children must be treated with respect and dignity
- It is the duty of all caregivers to ensure that children reach their full potential
- Every effort will be made to ensure children in our program are protected from all forms of abuse

DEFINITIONS

Child

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 1) a child is every human being below the age of 18 years. This policy will also cover the definition under JJ Act 2015.

Child protection

Child protection is a broad term to describe policies, standards, guidelines and procedures to protect children from both intentional and unintentional harm from any source. In this context, it applies particularly to the duty of our organization towards children in our care. UNICEF uses the term Child protection to refer to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children.

Vulnerable Adults protection

The definition of vulnerable as used above, is with relation to those women and men, who are our direct beneficiaries, above the age of 18.

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)

(Alternate definition for child abuse)

Child abuse refers to the intended and unintended maltreatment, whether habitual or not, of the child, including any of the following:

- Psychological and physical abuse, neglect, cruelty, sexual and emotional maltreatment.
- Any act, deed or word which debases, degrades or demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of a child as a human being.
- Unreasonable deprivation of his/her basic needs for survival such as food and shelter; or failure to give timely medical treatment to an injured child resulting in serious impairment of his/her growth and development or in his/her permanent incapacity or death.

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse is the inflicting of intended or unintended physical injury upon a child. This may include burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating or otherwise harming a child.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse is inappropriate sexual behavior with a child. It includes fondling a child's genitals, making the child fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism and sexual exploitation. To be considered 'child abuse', these acts have to be committed by a person responsible for or who comes in contact with the child. Sexual Abuse also includes online behavior involving showing the pornographic material, taking photos of the child in the nude, storing or producing child pornographic material.

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse is also known as verbal abuse, mental abuse, and psychological maltreatment. It includes acts or the failures to act by any stakeholder that have caused or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental trauma. This can include stakeholder using extreme and/or bizarre forms of punishment, such as confinement in a closet or dark room or being tied to a chair or threatening or terrorizing a child. Less severe acts, but no less damaging, are belittling or rejecting treatment, using derogatory terms to describe the child, habitual tendency to blame the child or make him/her a scapegoat.

Neglect: It is the failure to provide for the child's basic needs. Neglect can be physical, educational, or emotional. Physical neglect can include not providing adequate food or clothing, appropriate medical care, supervision, or proper weather protection (heat or cold). It may include abandonment. Educational neglect includes failure to provide appropriate schooling or special educational needs, allowing excessive truancies. Psychological neglect includes the lack of any emotional support and love, never attending to the child, substance abuse including allowing the child to participate in drug and alcohol use.

Stakeholders- Stakeholders will be Board Members, Staff (Permanent and Contract), Consultants, Interns, Volunteers, Sponsors, Donors, Partners, Visitors, Contractors, Government officials, children, relatives and parents coming in direct or indirect contact with the children under our care.

Definition of Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Violation

Violation of Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection in this context means:

- Any act or behavior that could increase the risk of child/adult being potentially abused.
- A failure to act in a situation when a child/adult is being abused

- Failure to follow the code of conduct or other prescribed protocol of this policy without any suitable justification.

This policy calls for the mandatory reporting of all child and vulnerable adults protection violations. All members within the scope of the Policy should report as they witness, suspect or come to know of any form of violation.

STANDARDS

Our Organization will follow the following standards in relation to Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection

1. Recruitment: Advertisements for Job vacancies will emphasize that our organization takes child protection seriously. The application forms of the applicants need to contain referral letters from two persons of standing in the community. The personal details of the applicant mentioned in the form needs to be thoroughly verified. This will be applicable for full time and part time staff, paid and unpaid volunteers, consultants, interns and anyone who will come in direct connection with the child through the program.

2. Induction: Orientation on Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection will be a mandatory part of the Induction process for all staff and volunteers. Every staff and volunteer joining the team will fully read through the Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policies of the organization and sign the pledge of commitment. A signed copy of the pledge would be maintained in the individual's file. (Sample Pledge of Commitment format is given in the Annexure)

3. Training on Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection (CVAP): All staff will undergo minimum 1 day training on CVAP (principles and standards of child protection) and a refresher course will be held every year **for all staff. At end of every refresher course, the staff and volunteers would sign the pledge of commitment to signify their recommitment.** All staff and volunteers new to Sahaara Charitable Society will be given appropriate child and vulnerable adults protection training as part of their induction program.

4. Awareness: Regular Awareness programs on rights of the child and vulnerable adults to protection (UNCRC document can be used as reference) will be held for volunteers, Board Members, Consultants, Interns, Parents and guardians and anyone associated with the organization.

Also, children and vulnerable adults under our care will be made aware of relevant aspects of the Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy (Personal Safety Education) appropriate to their age. **Awareness also needs to be provided on acceptable and unacceptable**

behavior of adults and where they can get help and support when they experience or witness abuse, harassment or exploitation.

5. Employment of Children: No child shall be employed for any reason by the organization either directly or indirectly. No staff shall employ children for work at their homes for any purpose at any point of time. Staff members found to be employing children are liable for impeachment.

6. Communication Protocols: We are committed to child protection in its publicity and external communications. All communications shall seek to preserve the child's dignity and protect each family's privacy.

7. Complaints against Staff: Any complaints of Child Sexual Abuse made by the child against staff, Board Members and volunteers, whether within the organization or outside will be taken seriously, immediately reported to any one of the Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Committee (CVAPC) members, and the staff will be withheld from all responsibilities (or suspended) until proven innocent. **All complaints of child and vulnerable adults abuse including anonymous complaints against the staff members will be handled with strict confidentiality and investigated immediately.**

If complaints are made by staff against other staff involving child sexual abuse, then the matter will be verified with the child through a counselor and on confirmation, action would be taken.

8. Reporting Protocol: When a child sexual abuse incident or the abuse of vulnerable adults happens, the staff must immediately report to his/ her reporting manager and finally escalate it to the CEO / CVAPC.

9. Failure to Report: Severe action will be taken against staffs who fail to report child or vulnerable adults abuse cases that come to their notice. A person found to be hiding facts or failing to report abuse will be treated as partner to the crime and action will be taken accordingly including immediate removal from his/her position.

10. Formation of Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Committee (CVAPC): This committee will be formed within the organization with representation from Management to handle all allegations relating to child protection within the organization. The CVAPC will also oversee the promotion of Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection in the organization. The name list of all members of the CVAPC with their contact details would be displayed in the premises for all to know. Details of the Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy will be available in the Staff Handbook.

If a CVAPC member is accused of child abuse in any form then the concerned person will step down and the Management reserves the right to appoint a person until the investigation is completed.

Composition of Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Committee:

The CVAPC will comprise of a *minimum* of three persons with one lady representative being mandatory. The CVAPC shall consist of 1) Nominee of the Board 2) A representative of staff nominated by the Management 3) An external member who is a mental health professional or experienced social worker from an NGO working on child-related issues. This Committee will function for a term of three years. After this period, new members would need to be selected by the Management.

10. Incident Management Plan by the CVAPC:

Allegations of abuse will be reviewed and investigated as determined necessary by the CVAPC of the organization. Violation of the prescribed code of conduct may result in disciplinary measures as applicable to the organization / law of the land.

The CVAPC will handle allegations in the following manner:

- Any allegation of abuse should be brought to the knowledge of any member of the Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Committee (CVAPC). The CVAPC may seek the complaint in writing or may themselves render such complaint in writing.
- The CVAPC will then examine the child/adult, other witnesses, parents or other persons concerned with the abuse. This needs to be done in a child friendly manner. The parents or guardians of the child need to be informed not later than 24 hours of receiving information about the abuse. If the allegation is of a sexual nature against children, the CVAPC should report the incident to the local police and ensure that an FIR is registered immediately or brought to the notice of the CWC.

- In case of child abuse violating any sections under the POCSO Act or a crime relating to breaking the Indian Penal Code, the CVAPC shall facilitate the registration of the First Information Report (FIR) with the police.
- The individual suspected of having committed the child/adult protection violation or child/adult abuse will be given an opportunity to be heard.
- The CVAPC may make recommendations pending the inquiry regarding any immediate action that needs to be taken to protect the children/adults. In case of alleged sexual abuse by any staff, volunteer, or other persons in authority, the person shall be removed from active duty and or/ prevented from entering the organization premises with immediate effect pending inquiry.
- The inquiry before the CVAPC shall be conducted preferably within one month, and completed not later than three months of having received the complaint.
- If the alleged abuser is found guilty after completion of inquiry by the CVAPC with regard to an act or omission of child/adult abuse or exploitation, the abuser shall be dealt with commensurate to the act or omission. Steps such as warning, demotion, suspension and termination of services without prejudice to existing State/Labor laws and / or penal action will be taken.
- The decision of the CVAPC needs to be recorded in writing and a copy forwarded to the Management, the child through parents or guardians, the vulnerable adult and to the alleged abuser.
- The records of the inquiry shall be treated as confidential. These will be preserved by the Management.
- In case of dismissal of a complaint pertaining to verbal, emotional and physical abuse, no action will be taken against the alleged abuser or the child/adult who had complained.
- The children involved in the allegations will be referred to or provided counseling services to help overcome the trauma they have been through.

BEHAVIOUR PROTOCOLS AND CODE OF CONDUCT

Employees, Managers, Team Leaders, Board Members, Teachers, and Volunteers:

- Shall treat every child and vulnerable adult with dignity and respect regardless of differences of ethnicity, ability, gender, class or economic circumstances.
- Shall not engage in any act of child or vulnerable adult abuse, physical or sexual; child labor; pornography, or commit any act in violation of national laws on children's rights, whether engaging in program related activities or during personal time.
- Shall not commit any form of psychological abuse, such as verbally or physically intimidating, threatening, humiliating, or coercing a child.
- Shall not hug, caress, fondle the child or touch the child in a way that makes the child uncomfortable. Shall not make any physical gestures in a manner that is found to be sexually provocative.
- Shall not use any computers, mobile phones, video cameras, cameras or social media to exploit or harass children or access child exploitation material through any medium.
- Shall not be alone with a child in a private place that cannot be readily seen by other responsible adults. Always keep doors open and be visible to others when with children. (This does not apply to parents with their own children or responsible caregivers appointed by the parent.) Whenever possible, ensure that another adult is present when working in proximity of children.
- Shall not hire children as house helps or employ any child in any business, including home, commercial or entrepreneurial business establishments.
- Shall not use physical punishment for disciplining children and youth. This prohibition includes slapping, hitting, or any other physical force during program activities.
- Shall ensure that all events and activities involving any children are in the best interests of the children involved. Ensure that chaperons/ escorts of both sexes are present with children while they are taken out on project activities or field trips.
- Consent of the parents should be taken while taking children for any outdoor activity. Constant efforts shall be made to educate children on their rights, issues of abuse and exploitation.
- Shall report any suspected abuse immediately to the Child Protection Committee.

- Shall comply with all relevant Indian and State legislation, including all child related laws.

ANNEXURE

Pledge of Commitment: (this pledge shall be made by all staff and volunteers)

I, _____ have read and understood the Organization's Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy, including the code of conduct.

I acknowledge that this Commitment states expectations of me in my service and / or association with the activities of the organization. With my Signature affixed herein, I agree to abide by this Commitment.

NAME: _____

JOB TITLE/POSITION: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____