



**CHILD AND ADOLESCENT
PROTECTION POLICY AND CODE OF
CONDUCT**

AIM

This policy aims to promote positive interactions and to guarantee children and adolescents are protected from every form of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

It outlines the procedures the Community Foundation of Agrigento and Trapani (from now on the Foundation) follows to better address misconduct and minimise any risk of abuse.

In laying out a clear set of procedures, The Foundation wants to play a key role in ensuring the health, safety and well-being of children and youth under its care and supervision.

This sense of responsibility is known as the Duty of Care, an expression that refers to the obligation every organisation has to provide an adequate level of child protection and guarantee a safe environment for children and adolescents. In fulfilling its responsibility, The Foundation works to create a safe and harmless space where young people are not only protected and valued but also feel embraced and heard.

The Foundation believes that an organisation which values children is far more likely to also protect them. For this reason, it adopts a participative and preventive approach to child protection.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

The Foundation commits to providing a safe space for children and adolescents by actively involving staff members and partners in the outlining of its protection policies and related procedures.

The policy is binding for employees and collaborators, volunteers, members of the executive board, the director and members of the steering committee.

The Foundation provides training sessions for staff, volunteers and members of statutory bodies on issues related to maltreatment and abuse, potential risks and prevention methods and offers a guideline for appropriate behaviour to follow and necessary boundaries to set when working with children and young people. The training reduces the risk of potential harm and contributes to creating a respectful, safe and child-friendly environment. Staff, volunteers and members of statutory bodies are required to comply with the policy.



The Policy is also shared with children and adolescents.
They also participate in the auditing process of the policy.
Creating an open and responsive culture demands that:

children and adolescents are heard so they feel part of an attentive and welcoming place;

They are encouraged to voice their ideas, views, fears and concerns knowing that they will be always given serious consideration;

children and adolescents are made aware of what child abuse is and are advised on what to do if they become aware of any abusive conduct;

children and young people learn all about their rights and protection strategies so they can play an active role in defending themselves and their peers.



The content of this policy will be delivered in a way all children and adolescents fully understand.

The Foundation believes that every organisation is responsible for minimising the risks of child maltreatment and abuse.

For this reason, the policy is also shared with:



families and
caretakers;



partners expected to comply
with the policy and provide
support and cooperation;



donors, government officials
and other relevant parties.



UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Understanding children and young people and learning about child abuse and the damage it causes is the first step to create and maintain a safe environment.

Violence is a very common term today and can be used in different circumstances. It derives from 'to violate', i.e. to break boundaries.

Child abuse is extremely common yet very difficult to detect, partly as a consequence of minimization/denial and partly because it occurs largely within families. That's why it often remains unreported and invisible, exacerbating the physical and psychological suffering of the victims.

Violence is the exercise of physical or verbal force to inflict injury on someone or cause damage to them.



Child abuse includes all forms of violence and ill-treatment against children and adolescents. These phenomena are extremely complex and vary greatly depending on the age of the victim, the type and severity of the violence, the context in which it occurs and the relationship between victim and perpetrator.

Such conduct can be either intentional or unintentional and includes both omissive acts (e.g. negligence) and commissive acts (e.g. abuse).

Within this broad definition, six main categories of maltreatment can be identified: physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, sexual abuse, negligence, exploitation and witnessing violence.

Although there is a broad consensus on the existence of these categories of abuse, there is no unanimous agreement on their definition.

The Foundation adopts the same terminology as most International agencies, the United Nations and other organisations dealing with child and adolescent protection.



CHILD MALTREATMENT

It comprises every form of abuse and neglect that occur at the hands of parents and other authority figures, which results 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

This involves potential or actual physical harm or injury to the child or adolescent at the hands of parents or peers.

Unlike other forms of abuse, with physical abuse the following elements are present:

- Unpredictability. The child never knows what is going to set off the abuser. There are no clear boundaries or rules. The child is constantly walking on eggshells, never sure what behaviour will trigger a physical assault.
- Lashing out in anger. The abuser acts out of anger and the desire to assert control on the victim. The angrier the abuser, the more intense the abuse.
- Using fear to control behaviour. Abuser (may it be a parent/guardian or peer) believes that the child need to fear them in order to behave, so they use physical abuse to "keep the child in line." However, what children are really learning is how to avoid being hit, not how to behave.



SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is an especially complicated form of abuse because of its layers of guilt and shame. Recognizing that sexual abuse doesn't always involve body contact is important. Exposing a child to sexual situations or adult material is sexually abusive, whether or not touching is involved.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Words don't leave visible scars but can hurt. Emotional abuse can severely damage a child's mental health or social development. Emotional abuse is a persistent behaviour occurring over a long period that impairs the child's or adolescent's affective, cognitive and relational development and damages their self-perception. It can assume different forms and is often combined with other types of maltreatment. As it does not normally involve physical injury, it is difficult to prove and oftentimes requires the intervention of the authorities.

Examples of emotional abuse include:

- Constant belittling, shaming, and humiliating.
- Calling names and criticising their look, personality or abilities.
- Frequent yelling, threatening, or bullying.
- Ignoring or rejecting a child as punishment, giving them the silent treatment or limiting physical contact with a child —no hugs, kisses, or other signs of affection.
- Exposing a child to violence against others, whether it is against the other parent, a sibling, or even a pet.



CHILD NEGLECT

Child neglect is a an act of caregivers or parents that results in failing to meet a child or adolescent basic needs, despite having the means to care for them. This includes failure to provide adequate supervision, health care, clothing, or housing, as well as other physical, emotional, social, educational, and safety needs to such an extent that the child's well-being and safety are compromised. This form of abuse also includes neglect (lack of care), carelessness (unsuitable care for the child's developmental stage or needs) and overcare (excessive care).



EXPLOITATION

Using the child or adolescent for one's own or others' advantage, satisfaction or profit. Such activities expose the child to unjust, cruel and dangerous treatment and result in damage to the child's emotional, social, moral development and psycho-physical health.

We can identify two main categories of child and adolescent exploitation:

- Sexual exploitation: any activity in which a person takes advantage of their control over a child or adolescent, of their vulnerable condition for sexual purposes or to gain economic, social or political profit or power. The child is exploited both as a sexual and commercial object. Some examples of sexual exploitation are child prostitution, trafficking of minors, child pornography and sexual slavery.
- Economic exploitation: by economic exploitation, we mean the employment of a child or adolescent in work activities that are so risky that the child's psycho-physical well-being is compromised and their right to education, health or to have a family is impaired. Economic exploitation implies profiting for the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, producing an impact on the economy of a given unit, be it the state, the community or the family. Some examples of economic exploitation are child labour, recruitment of children, also in war zones, child slavery, and kids' involvement in criminal activities, including drug dealing and other illegal or perilous work.



WITNESSING VIOLENCE

It has been defined as 'the child's or adolescent's experience of any form of maltreatment, carried out through acts of physical, verbal, psychological, sexual and economic violence, on significant adults, minors or other emotionally significant figures.



THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS TO PROTECTION AGAINST MALTREATMENT, NEGLECT, EXPLOITATION AND VIOLENCE.

The articles of the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** relating to the protection of children are art. 9 (separation from parents), art. 10 (family reunification), art. 11 (wrongful removal and non-return), art. 16 (protection of private life), art. 19 (protection from abuse, abandonment, neglect and exploitation), art. 20 (protection of the child outside the family environment), art. 21 (adoption), art. 22 (refugee children), art. 23 (children with disabilities), art. 24 (right to health and care), art. 25 (review and monitoring of forms of care), art. 32 (economic exploitation of children), art. 34 (sexual exploitation of children), art. 35 (sale, trafficking and abduction), art. 37 (protection from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and forms of unlawful deprivation of liberty), art. 38 (armed conflict), art. 39 (social reintegration), art. 40 (juvenile jurisdiction and minors in conflict with the law).

The articles not directly related to protection but which are essential complements to ensure the protection of the rights of children and adolescents are: art. 2 (prohibition of discrimination), art. 3 (best interests of the child), art. 4 (implementation of rights and cooperation), art. 5 (development of the child's capacities and support to the parent, extended family and community), art. 6 (right to life), and art. 7 (right to a name and nationality), art. 8 (protection of identity), art. 18 (parental responsibility), art. 26 (social security and welfare), art. 27 (adequate standard of living and social protection), arts. 28 and 29 (education), art. 31 (play, rest and leisure).



UNDERSTANDING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

The Foundation ensures the protection of children and adolescents with the following steps:

1. **raising awareness:** the Foundation ensures that staff, volunteers and members of statutory bodies are aware of the phenomena of child and adolescent abuse, neglect and exploitation and the potential risks associated with them.
2. **prevention:** the Foundation aims to ensure risk reduction through the dissemination of good practice, the creation of a safe and child-friendly environment and the encouragement of children and young people's participation.
3. **reporting:** the Foundation ensures that those involved in the organisation's projects and activities are clear about the measures to be taken and promptly report potentially dangerous situations for children and young people.
4. **response:** The Foundation is committed to ensuring that action is taken to support and protect children and young people in need.



ASSESSING RISK

The policy aims to encourage a deeper and greater awareness of child protection and safeguarding. It identifies risks to the children and adolescents safety in order to minimise any case of abuse since eradicating the issue is, sadly, virtually impossible.

The Foundation defines, assesses and manages situation of potential harm using a community-based approach that takes into account specific risk factors linked to the area of intervention (education, health, attendance and protection). For every project, programme and activity, the Foundation identifies appropriate strategies to reduce risks to a minimum.



PREVENTIVE MEASURES

A. Safe recruitment and job advertising

Safe recruitment is a set of practices to help make sure new staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children and young people. It's a vital part of creating a safe and positive environment and making a commitment to keep children safe from harm. These will ensure that staff and volunteers are recruited safely and fairly and that children's safety is being considered at every stage of the process.

When recruiting new staff, the Foundation evaluates

- candidate motivation to work on child and adolescent issues;
- safeguarding responsibility awareness;
- understanding of physical and emotional needs of children and adolescents in community settings;
- candidate believes in honesty, equality, reliability and loyalty;
- good references;
- criminal records checks



B. Agreements and partnerships: measures to follow when selecting a partner and when working with them.

Choosing the right partners is essential to ensure children's and adolescents' safety.

When choosing new partners, the foundation evaluates:

- awareness of the physical and emotional needs of children and adolescents in community settings;
- a shared mission, a common set of values and strategies.

Agreements with partners include:

- continuous discussions on safeguarding children and possible approaches;
- assistance, if needed, in drafting a Child and Adolescent Protection Policy;
- engaging partners in the creation of a Child and Adolescent Protection Policy.



C. Communication principles

All communications (with donor relations, fundraising, awareness campaigns, etc.) must be respectful of the dignity of children and adolescents. Their personal information and images must be selected with consideration of the child's best interests and published only after having been authorised by the child or adolescent and the parent or legal guardian. Images must show children and adolescents wearing appropriate clothing and in appropriate poses. Every publication requires that the language is never patronising and that children and adolescents are never presented as victims but that their dignity is protected and respected. Project titles should stress the objectives and results rather than the problems and vulnerabilities of the area of intervention.

Organisations, groups and individuals outside the Foundation who wish to make use of the material must sign an agreement concerning the correct and appropriate use of such material.

As for relations with donors, the Foundation will assess their ethical values before signing a cooperation agreement.



D. Child and adolescent protection training

Child and adolescent protection training

Child and adolescent protection training is the conceptual framework for human development, at the operational level, is aimed at promoting, protecting and guaranteeing these rights through development projects, policies and processes.

The Foundation is committed to providing support, supervision and regular training sessions, tailored to the needs of the staff and specifically designed for the local context. Training sessions are conducted in a participatory manner to encourage staff members to raise any problems or critical issues that need addressing.

The Foundation ensures that every new staff member is well trained and has a deep understanding of:

1. the basic elements of the Child and Adolescent Policy;
2. the possible forms of child abuse and how to recognise them;
3. the procedures for reporting suspected breach of the policy.



E. Code of Conduct

The Foundation works to ensure that staff have high standards of conduct in both their professional and private lives. While the Foundation does not intend to impose values on staff on how they lead their private lives, the Foundation's status in the world depends very much on its reputation. Illicit behaviour or inappropriate attitudes of staff, co-workers, volunteers and members of statutory bodies that may adversely affect the Foundation's reputation will not be tolerated, either during working hours or otherwise.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT CHILD ABUSE

To guarantee children and adolescents safety, it is essential to lay out a simple and clear reporting system for any suspected abuse.

For this purpose, the Foundation appoints a Child Protection Officer (CPO) within the organisation who is responsible for handling any reports of child or adolescent abuse.

The reporting procedures must be simple and easily accessible and must ensure that two key values are observed:

- confidentiality: there will be no public disclosure of the names of reporters, what was reported and the identity of the suspected abuser unless the case is brought before a judge and witnesses are heard.
- loyalty: if the accuser is part of the staff, volunteers and members of the statutory bodies will be supported by the organisation to the best of their abilities and possibilities and, by the legal principle of presumption of innocence, will be presumed innocent until proven guilty.



WHO CAN MAKE A REPORT FOR SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE?

A child or adolescent, a parent, a family member, a member of staff, a volunteer, a member of statutory bodies or work partner.

WHAT CAN BE REPORTED?

Any suspicion of abusive behaviour towards a child, any concern about the safety of a child or adolescent.

HOW CAN I MAKE A REPORT?

You can make a report by writing a letter or sending an e-mail, making a phone call, requesting a meeting or any other viable way, so that also children and adolescents can make a report.

WHO DO I REPORT IT TO?

You can report to the Child Protection Officer (CPO)





Final audit of the Policy

The Foundation will evaluate the implementation of the Policy annually and in a participatory fashion.

Child Protection Officer (CPO) Contact

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