



## **Child Safeguarding Policy**

### **I. RATIONALE FOR POLICY**

Children Believe envisions a world where every child has a voice and the ability to achieve their full potential. We exist to create a future of hope for children, families and communities by helping them develop the skills and resources to overcome poverty and injustice. Children Believe condemns all forms of child abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation. We are committed to protecting children. We are also committed to preventing and responding to child abuse that may occur during the delivery of Children Believe-supported programs, interventions or initiatives.

Children Believe endeavours to promote and safeguard children's best interests. This policy aims to prevent and respond to any acts of commissions and omissions, whether deliberate or inadvertent, among its practices, policies or processes that expose children to the risk of any kind of harm including abuse, neglect or exploitation.

This policy promotes children's rights and is underpinned by the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols. It is also supported by the national legislation of the countries in which Children Believe operates. Children Believe recognizes that all children have equal rights to protection and that some children require special protections.

### **II. POLICY OBJECTIVE**

The overarching purpose of the Child Safeguarding Policy is to ensure the safety and well-being of all children by establishing robust preventive measures to protect them from abuse, exploitation, and harm. The policy aims to raise awareness among staff, volunteers, and communities, create safe and accessible reporting mechanisms for child protection concerns, and promote a child-centered approach to responding to incidents. It emphasizes accountability, enforces a zero-tolerance stance towards child abuse, and collaborates with relevant partners to uphold the highest standards of child protection, ensuring that children's rights are respected and their welfare is prioritized.

### **III. POLICY SCOPE**

This policy is updated to reflect Children Believe's unwavering commitment to protect all children who come into contact with Children Believe as a result of its programs, sponsorship services, marketing, communication, policy influence and advocacy work, as well as any of its business activities, to the maximum possible capacity and to entirely safeguard children from deliberate or inadvertent actions that place them at risk of child abuse, sexual exploitation, neglect, injury, or any other harms.

This policy is applicable equally to all persons working for Children Believe including but not limited to employees, volunteers, Board members, interns, and consultants ("Representatives"); partner organizations and their representatives who are responsible for implementing programs or projects on behalf of Children Believe ("Partners"); and vendors, suppliers and third-party service providers ("Third-Party Service Providers") (see 3. Definitions).

This policy is a 24 X 7 X 365 policy, meaning it applies during or outside of working hours every day of the year. All Children Believe Representatives, Partners, and Third-Party Service Providers are required to acknowledge in writing that they have read and are aware of this policy, and that they are committed to ensure its full adherence and implementation.

#### IV. POLICY DETAILS

1. **Adherence:** This policy requires that:

- a) Staff who work with children shall be well-suited to Children Believe's mission and shall undergo strict child safeguarding recruitment practices.
  - b) Everyone associated with Children Believe is aware of its obligations and responds appropriately to issues of child abuse and the sexual exploitation of children.
  - c) Anyone who represents Children Believe behaves appropriately towards children and never abuses the position of trust that comes with their role as a member of the Children Believe organization and their responsibility to uphold Children Believe's mission, vision and values.
  - d) Everyone who represents Children Believe must actively create a safe environment for children who come into contact with the organization.
  - e) The design and implementation of all program and influence work, including humanitarian emergency responses, are assessed for risks to children and have the mechanisms to ensure child safeguarding.
  - f) All offices establish and maintain systems that promote awareness of child safeguarding, enable the prevention of harm, and facilitate the reporting of and response to safeguarding concerns.
- i. By strictly applying and adhering to these requirements, Children Believe ensures safety for children and demonstrates its commitment of being a child-safe organization that honours and upholds children's rights and aspirations.
  - ii. If any part of this revised policy conflicts or becomes inconsistent with other applicable laws of Canada or countries of operation, the law of the land will prevail over this policy and this policy will be deemed modified, if necessary, to conform to such law.

2. **Consequences for Non-Compliance:**

- a) Immediate and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against Representatives, Partners, and Third-Party Service Providers for all policy non-compliance or violations, up to and including termination and criminal prosecution as per prevalent laws.
- b) Partner organizations will lose Children Believe grant support and business contracts will be terminated. If a donor contravenes the policy, the relationship will be concluded and appropriate action, which may include criminal proceedings, will be instituted.
- c) Children Believe will report incidents to local law enforcement and child welfare authorities.

3. **Minimum Standards:**

- a) Children Believe follows a zero-tolerance approach for any violations to its Child Safeguarding Policy. Our zero-tolerance approach includes all Children Believe Representatives, Partners, and Third-Party Providers.
- b) We believe that every person has the identical right to protection irrespective of any individual characteristic pertaining to their age, gender, ability, culture, racial origin, religious belief, or sexual identity. Children Believe's Child Safeguarding Policy and its accompanying procedure will be the minimum standards that need to be followed even in countries where Children Believe's policy and procedure are more stringent than local laws or legislation.

4. **Principles** - This policy is committed to and guided by the principles of:

- a) **Personal responsibility.** All staff of Children Believe must demonstrate the highest standards of behaviour towards children both in their private and professional lives. All representatives and partners will be responsible to understand and promote this policy. All representatives of Children Believe must exercise proactive approaches to prevent, report and respond appropriately to any concerns or potential breaches of this policy and comply with this policy and its related procedures.
- b) **Universality.** This policy includes mandatory requirements that apply to everyone in all aspects of Children Believe's work regardless of how and where they work including during the response to humanitarian emergencies.

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- c) **Minimum standards-based approach.** Children Believe has adopted the ChildFund Alliance standards-based approach to child safeguarding. Our safeguarding standards and standards of staff behaviour are often higher than those of the national laws and community customs or traditions in our countries of operation. Nevertheless, it is our standards Representatives agree to when they join Children Believe, and they will be held accountable to these.
- d) **Openness.** We aim to create an environment in relation to child safeguarding issues where any issues or concerns can be raised and responded.
- e) **Transparency and accountability.** These are essential to ensure that poor practice can be addressed, potentially abusive behavior can be challenged, and best practice can be promoted.
- f) **Accountability to children and their communities.** Through strengthening our internal systems, standards and practice we will be more accountable to the people we aim to serve.
- g) **Children's participation and non-discrimination.** Children should be empowered to understand their rights, made aware of what is acceptable and unacceptable, and know what they can do if they have a problem or a concern.
- h) **The best interest of any children involved.** When dealing with a child safeguarding concern, the best interest of the child will be our priority and we will strive to ensure children's safety, health and well-being including meeting their emotional, psychological and physical needs.
- i) **Confidentiality.** All child safeguarding concerns, reports and investigations will be dealt with on a need-to-know basis and all records will be held securely. Likewise, communication will be confidential and secure to the extent practicable and appropriate under the circumstances and in accordance with applicable law.
- j) **Timeliness.** Considering the avoidable trauma that each child is exposed to, including the potential for increased or repeated abuse, timely responses are essential and the accompanying procedure establishes mandatory time limits on reporting and responding to concerns.
- k) **Compliance.** This policy will be implemented in adherence with the Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures of the Children Fund Alliance 2018 procedure, the U.N.C.R.C.1989, the Secretary General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse 2003, and with due consideration to the local legal frameworks.
- l) **Uniformity.** This policy applies during, after, and between work hours. Any deviation will attract appropriate corrective action as laid out in the Employee Handbook.
- m) **Partnership.** We will work together with our Partners and their local partners, networking agencies, and third-party service providers to promote child safeguarding within organizations and the wider community in which they operate.

## 5. Preparedness and Approach:

- a) **Policy orientation, adaptation or replication:** The implementation of this policy and administration of all child safeguarding procedures are sustainably ensured through ongoing orientation to the policy and its implementation procedures and protocols; as well as the adaptation or replication of the same policy and procedure by implementing partners or any other third parties including vendors, consultants, and visitors.
- b) **Rigorous Human Resources recruitment and management practices:** Children Believe ensures that its recruitment procedures attract the best possible people and talent to serve our mission. Those who are potential risks to children are deterred from applying and are not recruited into the organization. Criminal reference checks and/or alternate background checks as feasible relevant to the level of contact with children are required and are a condition for employment with Children Believe. Staff will be trained on our Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure once every two years with an aim to increase awareness about child protection and child safeguarding. This includes socialization of reporting mechanisms.
- c) **Safe child sponsorship and communications:** The child's right to privacy is important to Children Believe. The sponsorship relationship is carefully managed and child information securely stored to fulfill the child's right to privacy. All communication materials or means of communication are handled in ways that safeguard the child's rights.
- d) **Fast and easy reporting mechanisms and response procedures:** Children Believe establishes, updates, and maintains fast and easy reporting procedures in cases of concerns or allegations. Everyone has the obligation to report witnessed or suspected child abuse within 24 hours. The corresponding child safeguarding procedures detail these processes.

## 6. Responsibilities

- a) All Children Believe Representatives are responsible to implement this policy and are expected to remain alert and responsive to any child safeguarding risks, and acquire relevant knowledge and skills that will enable them to promote strong safeguarding practices, understand the child safeguarding policy and procedures, and conduct themselves in a manner consistent with them.
- b) All Children Believe Representatives have an obligation to report violations of this policy in a timely manner, including that a child has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed, according to the reporting requirements detailed in the accompanying procedure to this policy.
- c) All Representatives must cooperate fully and confidentially in any investigation of concerns or allegations.

## V. POLICY AUTHORITY AND OFFICERS

- a. Authority to approve this policy: Board of Directors
- b. Executive champion of this policy: Chief International Programs Officer and Chief People & Culture Officer
- c. Authority to develop procedures: Country Directors
- d. Authority to approve procedures: Chief International Programs Officer

## VI. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING, COMPLIANCE AND REPORTING

The Executive Champion is responsible the implementation of this policy including its publication, communication, training and change management, development and implementation of the related policy procedures, forms and guidelines as well as cascading the policy to Country Offices (where applicable).

The Approval Authority identified in Section Va is ultimately responsible for compliance with this policy. The Executive Champion will report on compliance with this policy to the policy Approval Authority on a regular basis.

## VII. POLICY REVIEW

This policy and related procedures must undergo an in-depth review **every 2 years**, but may be reviewed at any time as needed. The Executive Champion will initiate and lead the policy or procedure review process and will provide updates to the Approval Authority on the progress and key dates.

## VIII. RELATED DOCUMENTS

The following internal and external documents support the application of this policy:

- a. Internal Documents:
  - Children Believe Standard Operating Procedure Manual for Child Sponsorship
  - Children Believe Employee Handbook
  - Children Believe Letter of Agreement/MOU
  - Whistle-Blower Policy
  - Code of Conduct
  - Protection from Sexual Abuse & Exploitation (PSEA) Policy
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  - Child Safeguarding Procedure
- b. External Documents:
  - United National Convention on the Rights of the Child
  - Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019) ChildFund Alliance

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- In-country applicable laws and regulations
- Keeping Children Safe: Child Safeguarding Policy Guidelines with Sample Child Safeguarding Procedures, ChildFund Alliance (2018)

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## DEFINITIONS

**Executive Leadership Team (ELT):** The most senior level of staff leadership within Children Believe comprised of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Marketing and Development Officer (CMDO), Chief International Programs Officer (CIPO) and Chief People & Culture Officer (CPCO). The CEO may alter the composition of the ELT as required from time to time. One person may hold more than one position. Titles may change at the discretion of the ELT or the Board.

**Executive Champion:** A member of the ELT with overall responsibility for an assigned policy including: drafting, carrying out appropriate consultations / assessment, evaluating implications of the policy including risks and costs and seeking legal advice where necessary, developing and carrying out the communication, change management and implementation plan, writing any related procedures, standards or guidelines, monitoring compliance through regular reviews of the policy as well providing oversight to cascading the policy to Country Offices. The Executive Champion may designate a delegate, who must be named.

**Child:** A person under the age of 18 regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally.

### Child Abuse, Neglect or Exploitation

**Physical Abuse:** The use of physical force by another person that causes actual or likely physical injury or suffering (e.g., hitting, shaking, burning, female genital mutilation, torture).

**Emotional Abuse:** Any humiliating, degrading or intimidating treatment, such as bullying (including cyber bullying), constant criticism, persistent shaming, solitary confinement or isolation.

**Neglect/Negligent Treatment:** Persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, for example by failing to provide adequate food, clothing and/or shelter; failing to prevent harm; failing to ensure adequate supervision; or failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

**Sexual Abuse:** The use of a child in a sexual act by another person, including indecent touching, voyeurism or exhibitionism. Sexual abuse includes incest, early and forced marriage, rape, involvement in pornography, sexual slavery, or forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities. It includes the act of grooming a child with the intention of establishing a sexual relationship.

**Sexual Exploitation:** A form of sexual abuse that involves children being engaged in any sexual activity in exchange for money, gifts, food, accommodation, affection, status, or anything else that they or their family needs. The terms "child prostitution" and "child sex tourism" describe forms of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation also includes the exchange of sex for benefits from Children Believe programming.

**Commercial Exploitation:** The abuse of a child where some form of remuneration is involved whereby the perpetrators benefit in some manner. This involves exploiting a child in work or other activities in violation of their rights, for the benefit of others and to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, moral or social-emotional development. It includes, but is not limited to, child labour.

**Child Labour:** Work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development.

**Grooming:** Wilful cultivation of emotional relationships with those in positions of vulnerability or inequitable power, with vested intention of manipulating the relationships for sexual advantages at a later stage. Trapping unsuspecting children in any kind of relationship with the intention of establishing a sexual relationship.

**Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** An overarching term for violence directed toward or disproportionately affecting children because of their actual or perceived gender identity. Sexual exploitation and abuse is a form of GBV.

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**Child Safeguarding:** Involves collective and individual responsibilities and actions taken to ensure that all children are protected from deliberate or unintentional acts that lead to the risk of or actual harm by Children Believe staff, representatives and third parties who come into contact with children or impact them through our development interventions, humanitarian responses, and operations. Includes direct program implementation, work through partners, and management of children's personal data.

**Child-sensitive Information:** This covers any information that can potentially be used to trace a child's identity. This includes name, address, government-issued identification number, date and place of birth, mother's maiden name, biometric records, and any other information pertaining to that child such as medical, educational, financial or employment information. It includes responses to surveys or questionnaires that may be traced back to an individual child or family member.

**Children Believe Representatives** ("Representatives"): All staff members associated with or working on behalf of Children Believe anywhere in the world. Includes but is not limited to employees, Board members, volunteers, consultants, day labourers, seconded workers, and interns. Includes the executive leadership team (ELT) including but not limited to those with titles of "Director," "Manager," "Chief," "Vice- President," "President/CEO," etc.

**Vendors, Suppliers and Third-Party Service Providers** ("Third-Party Service Providers"): Current and potential consultants, contractors, sub-contractors, sub-recipients, suppliers, vendors, and institutional donors.

**Partner Organizations** ("Partners"): All non-Children Believe entities and their staff and representatives who have entered into any partnership, grant, sub- grant, or sub-recipient agreement with Children Believe and who are responsible and accountable for implementation of the intended program or for carrying out any project activity. Includes but is not limited to civil society organizations; community-based organizations; local, regional, national and international NGOs; other aid agencies; and government institutions, agencies and organizations. For the purposes of this policy, Partners and Third-Party Service Providers fall under one of the following categories:

**Category 1:** Partners/Third-Party Service Providers who have direct contact with children are required to follow Children Believe's Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure or their own internal policy and procedure.

**Category 2:** Partners/Third-Party Service Providers who have access to child data are required to take all appropriate measures to ensure the protection and confidentiality of child data including not using child data inappropriately. The creation of an organization policy by such Partners/Third-Party Service Providers is encouraged in order to protect the confidentiality and proper handling of child data.

**Category 3:** All other Partners/Third-Party Service Providers who complete work on behalf of Children Believe are encouraged to commit to the protection of all children in their business operations. As part of the selection process, Children Believe will give special consideration to Partners/Third-Party Service Providers who demonstrate, through their internal policies and practices, their commitment to keeping children safe.

**Supporters:** Supporters include sponsors, individual donors, visitors, or guests such as members of the media.

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