



**Centrum
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Sokolovská 106/42
186 00 Praha 8 - Karlín

CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Child safeguarding refers to an organisation's responsibility to always protect the children and young people they come into contact with from all forms of violence and inappropriate conduct. In organisations, preventing abuse requires protocols and procedures but also leadership, accountability, and cultural change. It means listening to girls and boys and transforming the entire organisation's structure to put their rights, dignity, and safety at the heart of every decision.

Since 2016, the aspiration for improvement has been developed through projects and continuous training activities to educate workers into specific and appropriate methodologies and approaches. Each time this has made it possible to demonstrate the power of our original intuition and person-oriented approach to promote social change. We want to make sure that the Democratic Education Centre's teachers, managers and facilitators do everything in their power to report and respond to the children risks of abuse and exploitation, particularly sexual exploitation.

Since its establishment, Democratic Education Centre (DEC) has been fully committed to promoting actions to ensure well-being, protect and promote rights, and foster the development of children, their families, and communities. For the DEC, ensuring children well-being means creating opportunities for a dignified, intense, and gratifying life. It means offering children the possibility to eat appropriately, be cared for, receive medical treatment, carry out recreational, sporting, and social activities according to age, and cultivate their most intimate aspirations freely. For our organisation, the commitment to the protection and promotion of rights means building every project and every intervention following the guidelines defined by the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of the Child, improving life contexts such as family, school, community and making them safer, richer in opportunities, more suitable for the life of children and their constructive growth. Promoting development means looking at the child as he or she may become, aiming at the inner growth of a mature and responsible individual, interpreter of vibrant life, capable of contributing proactively, consciously, and responsibly to the



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improvement of the surrounding environment. This idea of children and the surrounding individuals' development is the founding element of DEC's interventions.

The DEC is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of children. We have zero tolerance for child abuse.

Everyone working at the DEC is responsible for the care and protection of children and reporting information about child abuse.

By the adoption of Child Safeguarding Policy, the DEC works for a widespread diffusion of EU values: inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination prevail. These values are an integral part of our organization life.

Commitment to the protection

- **No violence against children is justifiable.**
- A rights-based approach to children care and protection requires a paradigm shift. While respecting and promoting human dignity and physical and psychological integrity, children should always be considered individuals with rights rather than 'victims'.
- The concept of dignity requires that every child be recognised, respected, and protected as a rights-holder and a unique and valuable human being with an individual personality, specific needs, interests, and privacy.
- Children's rights must be listened to and their views considered in all decision-making processes. Similarly, children's empowerment and participation shall be fundamental to childcare and protection strategies and programmes.
- Children's best interests must be a primary consideration in all matters involving or affecting them, mainly when they are victims of violence and when preventive measures are to be adopted.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is:

1. To facilitate the prevention of child abuse occurring within the DEC.
2. To work towards an organisational culture of child safety.
3. To prevent child abuse within the DEC.
4. To ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities for identifying possible occasions for child abuse and for establishing controls and procedures for preventing such abuse and/or detecting such abuse when it occurs.
5. To provide guidance to staff/volunteers/contractors as to action that should be taken where they suspect any abuse within or outside of the organisation.
6. To provide a clear statement to staff/volunteers/contractors forbidding any such abuse.
7. To provide assurance that all suspected abuse will be reported and fully investigated.



3. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are those considered for applying this policy. The terminology is the same used by most international agencies and other child protection organisations.

A child, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1 (UNCRC), is any human being under the age of eighteen.

Violence refers to any non-intentional behaviour by parents, guardians, other adults, adolescents, or children that results in potential or actual harm to the child or adolescent's health, development, or dignity. Such conduct may be intentional or unintentional and includes both acts of omission (e.g., neglect) and acts of commission (e.g., abuse).

Child protection means any responsibility, measure or activity undertaken to safeguard children from harm.

Child abuse means all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation of a child and includes any actions that results in actual or potential harm to a child.

Child maltreatment means any act deliberately carried out by a parent or a person in a position of power, responsibility, and trust towards a child or young person causing potential or actual harm to his/her safety, well-being, dignity, and development. It encompasses all forms of physical and psychological damage having in common abuse of power and a betrayal of the child's trust by the adult.

Within this broad definition, five main categories of maltreatment can be identified: physical maltreatment, sexual abuse, psychological maltreatment, neglect or negligent treatment and exploitation.

Physical abuse

Any conduct that causes actual or potential physical harm to a child or adolescent carried out by an adult or a peer. In contrast to other forms of maltreatment, physical maltreatment is characterised by the following elements:

- the unpredictability of conduct: the child or adolescent does not know what may trigger anger and aggression and is constantly moving in uncertainty;
- Anger attacks: aggressive behaviour determined by anger and the desire to exert substantial control over the child or adolescent. It follows that the greater the anger, the more intense the maltreatment;
- Fear is a means of controlling the child's or adolescent's behaviour. It is not uncommon for the abuser to believe that the child or adolescent must be afraid to behave appropriately. Abusers, therefore, create a climate of intimidation to correct the behaviour and gain respect and obedience. However, in this way, the child does not learn to behave correctly and grow, but only to avoid beatings.

Sexual abuse

Involving a child or adolescent, considered an object of gratification, in sexual activity, with or without physical contact, by an adult or peer. Some examples of sexual abuse are genital touching, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration, exposure to pornography, etc.



Psychological maltreatment

A behaviour repeated over time that impairs the child's or adolescent's emotional, cognitive, and relational development and self-perception. It can take many forms and often accompanies other types of maltreatment. It does not usually involve physical harm; therefore, it is difficult to prove and sometimes requires intervention by the authorities.

Some examples of psychological maltreatment to which a minor may be subjected:

- constantly belittling, humiliating and criticising;
- ridicule to belittle the child's personality, physical appearance or abilities;
- making the child feeling inadequate and unloved;
- making the child living in an atmosphere of intimidation and anxiety and make him/her victim of bullying;
- violence and abuse from others, such as parents, siblings and even pets.

Neglect and negligence

It is the inadequate attention to the child's or adolescent's material and emotional needs by parents or caregivers with the means to do so. It includes failure to protect the child from potential harm and to ensure and protect his/her basic needs such as medical care, education, and adequate emotional development, often to the point of exposing him/her to physical and emotional harm.

Exploitation

The use of the child for the benefit, gratification, or profit of third parties. Such activities expose the child to unfair, cruel, and dangerous treatment and are detrimental to the child's emotional, social, moral, and physical development. Two main categories of exploitation of children and adolescents can be identified:

- sexual exploitation of children and adolescents: by sexual exploitation, we mean any activity in which a person takes advantage of his or her position of power over, trust in, and vulnerability of a child or adolescent for sexual purposes and economic, social, or political gain. The child is thus exploited both as a sexual object and as a commercial object. Some examples of sexual exploitation: child prostitution, trafficking of minors for sexual abuse and exploitation, child pornography, sexual slavery.
- Economic exploitation of children and adolescents. Economic exploitation means the employment of a child or adolescent in work activities that are particularly risky and compromise their mental and physical well-being and jeopardise their right to education, health, and family. Economic exploitation implies a profit.

Reasonable grounds for belief

Reasonable grounds for belief are a belief based on reasonable grounds (see below) that child abuse has occurred when all known considerations or facts relevant to the formation of a belief are considered and these are objectively assessed. Circumstances or considerations may include the source of the allegation and how it was communicated, the nature of and details of the allegation, and whether there are any other related matters known regarding the alleged perpetrator.



A reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person believes that:

- a. the child needs protection,
- b. the child has suffered or is likely to suffer “significant harm as a result of physical injury,” or
- c. the parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

A ‘reasonable belief’ or a ‘belief on reasonable grounds’ is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation.

A ‘reasonable belief’ is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. For example, a ‘reasonable belief’ might be formed if:

- a. a child states that they have been physically or sexually abused;
- b. a child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves);
- c. someone who knows a child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused.
- d. Professional observations of the child’s behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused or is likely to be abused; and/or
- e. signs of abuse lead to a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused.

4. CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

The DEC adopts a Code of Conduct describing the appropriate behaviour to be adopted by its employees. The Code of Conduct is a strategic tool to ensure the well-being and safety of the children’s beneficiaries of projects. It provides a model of behaviour that the DEC considers suitable for establishing a relationship between adults and children.

Code of Conduct

The DEC staff, its partners and visitors who come into contact with children are expected to:

- treat children with respect, always recognising them as subjects of right, regardless of race, sex, colour, language, disability, religion, political or another opinion, national, ethnic or social origin;
- never violate children’s rights;
- developing children’s skills and potential;
- take children’s views seriously and respect their opinions;
- always inform children of their rights;
- taking care of the children’s environment, ensuring their safety and well-being (see Environment Policy);
- encourage children to express themselves freely;
- never be alone with a child;
- avoid any possible ambiguous situation that could lead to a complaint;



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- prevent high-risk situations and promptly react if abuse occurs;
- comply with local, national and international child protection laws;
- respect children's privacy.

The DEC staff, its partners and visitors who come into contact with children are required NOT to:

- resort to corporal punishment and using offensive and humiliating language in the presence of a child;
- humiliate, discriminate against children or behave contemptuously towards them;
- have sexual relations with children or involve children in any kind of sexual activity;
- have attitudes and physical contact with children that may be considered inappropriate or deplorable according to their culture and traditions;
- organise activities that may expose children to risks of abuse;
- establish a relationship with children that may constitute abuse or even exploitation;
- take photos or record videos that may result in any way harm children;
- disclose sensitive data that can help locate children. They should never circulate on the net, blogs or social networks or be accessible to the public.

Responsibilities

The Board of the DEC has ultimate responsibility for the detection and prevention of child abuse and is responsible for ensuring that appropriate and effective internal control systems are in place. The Board is also responsible for ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures and a Child Protection Code of Conduct are in place.

The director of the DEC is responsible for:

- Dealing with and investigating reports of child abuse.
- Ensuring that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are aware of relevant laws, organisational policies and procedures, and the organisation's Code of Conduct.
- Ensuring that all adults within the DEC community are aware of their obligation to report suspected sexual abuse of a child in accordance with these policies and procedures.
- Ensuring that all staff, contractors and volunteers are aware of their obligation to observe the Code of Conduct (particularly as it relates to child safety).
- Providing support for staff, contractors and volunteers in undertaking their child protection responsibilities.

All project managers must ensure that they:

- Always promote child safety.
- Assess the risk of child abuse within their area of control and eradicate or minimise any risk to the extent possible.
- Educate employees about the prevention and detection of child abuse; and
- Facilitate the reporting of any inappropriate behaviour or suspected abusive



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- Management should be familiar with the types of abuse that might occur within their area of responsibility and be alert for any indications of such conduct.

All staff/volunteers/contractors share the responsibility for the prevention and detection of child abuse, and must:

- Familiarise themselves with the relevant laws, the Code of Conduct, and the DEC's policy and procedures in relation to child protection and comply with all requirements.
- Report any reasonable belief that a child's safety is at risk to the relevant authorities (such as the police and/or the state-based child protection service) and fulfil their obligations as mandatory reporters.
- Report any suspicion that a child's safety may be at risk to their supervisor (or, if their supervisor is involved in the suspicion, to a responsible person in the organisation); and
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all children's emotional and physical safety.

REPORTING

Any staff member, volunteer or contractor who has grounds to suspect abusive activity must immediately notify the appropriate child protection service or the police. They should also advise their supervisor about their concern.

In situations where the supervisor is suspected of involvement in the activity, or if the person having the suspicion does not believe that the matter is being appropriately addressed or dealt with, the matter should be reported to the next highest level of supervision.

Supervisors must report complaints of suspected abusive behaviour or misconduct to the director and to any external regulatory body such as the police.

INVESTIGATING

If the appropriate child protection service or the police decide to investigate a report, all employees, contractors or volunteers must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Whether or not the authorities decide to investigate, the director will consult with the authorities to determine whether an internal investigation is appropriate. If it is decided that such an investigation will not conflict with any proceeding of the authorities, the director may decide to conduct such an investigation. All employees, contractors and volunteers must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Any such investigation will be conducted according to the rules of natural justice.

The director will make every effort to keep any such investigation confidential; however, from time to time other members of staff may need to be consulted in conjunction with the investigation.



After an initial review and a determination that the suspected abuse warrants additional investigation, the director shall coordinate the investigation with the appropriate investigators and/or law enforcement officials. Internal or external legal representatives will be involved in the process, as deemed appropriate.

RESPONDING

If it is alleged that a member of staff, contractor or a volunteer may have committed an offence or have breached the organization's policies or its Code of Conduct the person concerned may be stood down (with pay, where applicable) while an investigation is conducted.

If the investigation concludes that on the balance of probabilities an offence (or a breach of the organization's policies or Code of Conduct) has occurred then disciplinary action may follow, up to and including dismissal or cessation of involvement with the organization. The findings of the investigation will also be reported to any external body as required.

5. EMPLOYMENT OF STAFF

The recruiting method for staff, counsellors, volunteers, members, managers, interns, and trainees shall reflect the DEC's commitment to advocacy and protection of minors. It is mandatory to ensure that all necessary verifications are performed. All communications and procedures are in place to exclude anyone unsuitable to work with children. Potential damage can therefore be prevented or reduced as early as in the recruitment process. The DEC undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all workers and volunteers that aims to:

- promote and protect the safety of all children under the care of the organisation.
- identify the safest and most suitable people who share the DEC's values and commitment to protect children;
- prevent a person from working at the DEC if they pose a risk to children.

The DEC requires all workers/volunteers to pass through the organisation's recruitment and screening processes prior to commencing their engagement with the DEC.

The DEC may require applicants to provide a police check in accordance with the law and as appropriate, before they commence working at the DEC and during their time with the DEC at regular intervals.

The DEC will undertake thorough reference checks as per the approved internal procedure.



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Once engaged, workers/volunteers must review and acknowledge their understanding of this Policy.

6. PRIVACY

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety. The DEC will have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how the personal information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will be able to access it.

7. ASSESSMENT AND REVIEWING

Every three years, and following every reportable incident, a review shall be conducted to assess whether the organization's child protection policies or procedures require modification to better protect the children under the organization's care. The *policy* is updated at least once every three years. The DEC must carry out an annual self-assessment of the *policy* implementation to track the process for ensuring children's protection and identify areas for improvement.

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