

POLICY

Child Safeguarding

Established:	July 2018	Review frequency:	Every three years
Prepared by:	P Simmons/R Cunningham (2021)	Approved by:	Board

Purpose

To protect children from abuse, harm and exploitation; and promote their rights, safety and wellbeing

Introduction

GraceWorks Myanmar (GWM) is committed to being a child-safe organisation where children's rights and their safety are promoted and protected. We take our commitment, roles and responsibilities seriously to ensure the safety of children when undertaking our work. We also seek to provide guidance to GWM's staff, volunteers and partner organisations regarding our expectations and commitment to child safeguarding.

The child safeguarding framework outlined here ensures GWM is aligned to best practice, including the principles and practices set by the Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Child Protection Policy (2018) and the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct. While the term 'child protection' has been used in the development sector to describe protecting children from harm, GWM prefers the term 'child safeguarding' to acknowledge the broad range of activities implemented by our organisation to prevent harm and promote safety, wellbeing and the rights of children.

Definitions

Child

As defined by the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Right of the Child, a child or young person is considered to be a person under the age of 18 years.

Child safeguarding

Child safeguarding refers to the broad range of activities organisations need to perform to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, and prevent harm. (Child Wise, 2021)

Child abuse

Child abuse relates to 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 a child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. (WHO, 2006)

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is the intentional use of physical force against a child that results in, or has a high likelihood of resulting in, harm for the child's health, survival, development or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning and suffocating. Much physical violence against children in the home is inflicted with the object of punishing. (WHO, 2006)

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse refers to inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts toward a child and/or a pattern of failure over time to provide a child with adequate non-physical nurturing and emotional availability. Such acts of commission or omission are likely to damage a child's self-esteem or social competence. Examples include rejecting, isolating, terrorising, ignoring and corrupting. (WHO, 2006)



Neglect

Neglect includes isolated incidents and patterns of failure over time to provide for the development and wellbeing of a child in one or more of their health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions. (WHO, 2006)

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to or is not developmentally prepared for, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by adults and other children who are, by virtue of their age or stage of development, in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim. (WHO, 2006)

Child sex tourism

Child sex tourism relates to the exploitation of children for sexual purposes by people who travel locally or internationally to engage in sexual activities with children. (UN, 2012)

Child trafficking

Child trafficking is recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving a child for the purpose of exploitation, even if it does not involve means such as violence, deception or coercion. (UN, 2000)

Statement on our commitment to child safeguarding

GWM has a zero tolerance approach to child abuse. We are committed to taking all necessary steps to ensure all children and young people we work with are provided a child-safe environment at all times. We are committed to protecting children from abuse, harm and exploitation by:

- ◆ Promoting the rights of all children
- ◆ Providing the safest possible environments and programs/projects for children
- ◆ Acknowledging that every child has the right to survival, development, protection and participation as stated in the UN Convention on Human Rights of the Child (UNCHRC).

Guiding principles

Our guiding principles, adapted from ACFID's Code of Conduct, include that we:

- ◆ Believe any form of child abuse and exploitation is unacceptable and will not be tolerated
- ◆ Believe all children should be equally protected regardless of their gender, nationality, religious or political beliefs, age, sexual orientation, family and social background and culture, economic status, physical or mental health, or criminal background
- ◆ Recognise our duty of care to take all reasonable steps to ensure children are safe from harm
- ◆ Believe all children have the right to be safe at all times; will proactively work to provide safe and protective programs/projects, activities and environments; and will base all decisions regarding the welfare and protection of children on the 'best interests of the child' principle
- ◆ Take seriously our duty of care and legal obligations to protect children, with the protection of children being the responsibility of all staff, volunteers and partners
- ◆ Will consult children, where possible, in the continual development of this policy and the implementation of child-safe practices, including ensuring children in our programs/projects are given opportunities to express their views on matters affecting them
- ◆ Require adherence to this policy by all staff, volunteers and partners
- ◆ Will ensure all staff, volunteers, partners and other relevant stakeholders are aware of this policy and their responsibilities.

Risk management

We are committed to ensuring all programs, projects and activities undertaken in Australia and Myanmar include a risk assessment and strategy to minimise identified risks, including child safeguarding risks.



Guidelines for communication and the use of children's images

GWM does not often use children's photos, case studies and stories to promote our work. However, when we do, any GWM staff, volunteers or other representatives taking, using and/or storing photos of children, or using any form of media communication, are bound by this policy and required to ensure children are portrayed in a respectful, appropriate and consensual manner.

Our guidelines on the use of children's images and stories – in line with, and adapted from, ACFID's Code of Conduct – are as follows:

- ◆ A child is always to be portrayed in a dignified and respectful manner and not in a vulnerable or submissive manner. Children are to be adequately clothed and not in poses that could be seen as sexually suggestive.
- ◆ Informed consent is always to be sought and documented for the use of a child's story and/or image. When asking for consent, details are to be given regarding how, where and for how long the story, information and/or image will be used, with examples provided. This is to include explanation that we cannot control the use of images once they are in the public domain (eg provided via the internet), nor who sees those images (eg if unsecured online, they can be viewed by anyone with internet access).
- ◆ No identifying information about a child's location is to be used when publishing images.
- ◆ Local cultural traditions are to be assessed regarding restrictions for reproducing personal images.
- ◆ Images are to be an honest representation of the context and facts.
- ◆ When sending electronically, file labels are not to reveal identifying information.
- ◆ Children are not to be portrayed in isolation, but rather, as part of their community.
- ◆ Children are not to be portrayed as weak, isolated and vulnerable. Images of children are to portray them as resilient humans and as partners in the development process.
- ◆ All images and information about children are to be stored safely and only accessible by authorised personnel.

Personnel recruitment and selection

GWM is committed to child-safe recruitment, selection and screening practices. We will not knowingly engage, directly or indirectly, anyone who poses a risk to children. Our practices aim to recruit the safest and most suitable people to work in our programs/projects and wider operations. Our child-safe practices include:

- ◆ Screening all staff and volunteers, including National Offence History Checks and, where practical, Working with Children Checks (Victoria), and undertaking three verbal referee reports
- ◆ Further assessing suitability for working with children and young people through the application process and by undertaking interviews that include behaviour-based questions
- ◆ Referring any identified issues with potential candidates to the CEO, who will determine if the person is suitable to be involved with GWM activities based on the information provided
- ◆ Requiring all staff and volunteers to provide proof of identify including their birth certificate, passport, driver's licence and relevant qualifications
- ◆ Including a clause in contracts (for staff, volunteers and consultants) that they must agree to this policy and can be dismissed, suspended or transferred to other duties if they are under investigation, found in breach or found to be otherwise non-compliant
- ◆ Giving a copy of this policy to all those having contact or working with children for their formal acknowledgement they will abide by it (with a signed copy kept on their personnel file).

Our induction process for staff, volunteers and consultants includes a briefing on child safeguarding issues and this policy. We incorporate annual refresher training for personnel, including the incident reporting process and any other matters relevant to child safeguarding practices. We remain committed to updating our people of any changes to this policy or matters relevant to child safeguarding practices in the field.

Educating GWM on child abuse and the Child Safeguarding Policy

We are committed to educating staff, volunteers and partners about child safeguarding. This includes how to reduce risks and create child-safe environments. We promote child-safe practices that keep children safe in relation to GWM's activities and life in their own community, and provide information about child



safeguarding to the children and wider community members where we work. This includes reporting child abuse if they have concerns about GWM staff, volunteers, partners or others. Key practices include:

- ◆ Requiring all GWM people to participate in child safeguarding training as part of their induction
- ◆ Providing refresher child safeguarding training to all GWM people annually
- ◆ Ensuring all training is informed by international child safeguarding best practice and delivered by child safeguarding specialists
- ◆ Undertaking capacity building and training in child safeguarding with all development partners who work with us to implement programs/projects that involve or affect children.

Working with partners

GWM ensures that any implementing partner is a child-safe organisation by including partners in the scope of GWM's Child Safeguarding Policy and procedures. Our Child Safeguarding Policy and broader Code of Conduct are included in all partnership agreements and contracts. We also:

- ◆ Actively monitor the implementation of agreed child safeguarding measures and external compliance obligations with our partners on an ongoing basis via project reports, project visits and annual audits
- ◆ Work with partners to undertake a child safeguarding risk assessment for all program/projects and activities involving or affecting children – monitored throughout the life of the program/project.

Responding to, and reporting, child safeguarding concerns

We consider the abuse and exploitation of children to be completely unacceptable and have a zero-tolerance approach. We take all concerns, allegations and reports of child abuse seriously, and act on these reports immediately, as well as any alleged breach by our people of our Code of Conduct. Where an allegation has been made that a person engaged with GWM – on a short-term or permanent basis, including board members, staff, volunteers, partners, consultants and those engaged in one-off programs/projects – has abused or exploited a child or breached our Code of Conduct, we will investigate and take appropriate action as deemed necessary. Key aspects of this process involve ensuring:

- ◆ The child/children are given medical care, if required, and is/are in a safe environment
- ◆ Children in these situations are heard and validated and given additional protection, if required, if the perpetrator has not been arrested
- ◆ The affected child is/children are treated with respect and dignity throughout the entire process and referred to appropriate health and support services where necessary.

There are key elements to the reporting process:

- ◆ Concerns or allegations are to be reported immediately where practical, or within 24 hours, to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Country Director (Myanmar) via info@gwm.org.au.
- ◆ The person making the report needs to complete a confidential Incident Reporting Form.
- ◆ The CEO, Country Director (Myanmar) and designated board member will review the incident report and determine the appropriate actions. This includes reporting to local police and/or child safeguarding authorities when it is suspected or becomes clear that a crime has been committed, and elevating this to the Australian Federal Police if related to child sex tourism, sex trafficking or pornography.
- ◆ In consultation with the affected people, the CEO, Country Director (Myanmar) and designated board member will implement the action plan to address the incident, manage risk and prevent reoccurrence.
- ◆ If the report is about the CEO or Country Director (Myanmar), our Complaints Handling Policy applies.

Disciplinary action will be taken against anyone found to:

- ◆ Fail to report a child safeguarding concern
- ◆ Intentionally make a false allegation
- ◆ Make a minor or serious breach of this policy and/or our Code of Conduct.

Disciplinary action may include the following sanctions:

- ◆ GWM staff and volunteers – refresher training or increased supervision for minor breaches; suspension or dismissal for serious breaches
- ◆ GWM consultants and partners – termination of relations including contractual/partnership agreements
- ◆ All parties – reporting to authorities where relevant.



Confidentiality

- ◆ The CEO, Country Director (Myanmar) and designated board member will maintain copies of all documents, ensuring they are accurate and current. All files will be stored securely and confidentially.
- ◆ All information regarding a child safeguarding concern will only be shared with the CEO, Country Director (Myanmar) and designated board member. The names of people involved, and details of the report, will remain confidential. Information will only be released when required by Australian or overseas law, or when a report to police or child safeguarding authorities is made.

Involving children and young people

GWM is committed to child and youth participation, as outlined in ACFID's Code of Conduct. We do this by providing opportunities for children's views to be heard and incorporating their views into our policies and programs/projects. Children are asked for their feedback about staff and volunteers, and services. They are consulted in the development and review of this policy and asked to contribute to the Code of Conduct regarding what they consider to be appropriate/inappropriate behaviours. Children are also informed of our child abuse reporting process and who to contact if they are at risk, have been abused or are concerned about another child.

References and related documents

References

- ◆ ACFID Code of Conduct, and Guidelines for the Development of a Child Safeguarding Policy (2018)
- ◆ DFAT Child Protection Policy (2018)
- ◆ Child Wise – <https://www.childwise.org.au/news/42/what-is-child-safeguarding>
- ◆ World Health Organization, *Preventing child maltreatment: A guide to taking action and generating evidence* (2006) – www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/child_maltreatment/en/
- ◆ UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography* (2012)
- ◆ UNHRC, *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children* (2000)
- ◆ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p3 – <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html>

Related documents

- ◆ Code of Conduct
- ◆ Risk Management Policy
- ◆ Complaints Handling Policy
- ◆ Communications and Media Policy
- ◆ Child Safeguarding Incident Reporting Form
- ◆ Principles and Practices for Partners Guideline

Review

Previous reviews: July 2021
Next review: July 2024

Agreement

I agree to be bound by this Child Safeguarding Policy.

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____