

3.6. Child Protection Policy

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Responsible person	CEO	Scheduled review date	June 2020

Introduction

Assisi has a long history of working with children and is serious about its duty of care to respect, protect and safeguard children.

As outlined in Assisi's Strategic Plan 2017-2020, Assisi is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. Assisi recognises that children are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and believes that all children have the right to be safe and protected.

Purpose

The Child Protection Policy aims to provide a safe, protected and nurturing environment for all children involved in Assisi's projects.

The Policy details the systems and processes Assisi will undertake to prevent abuse and to act expeditiously when intervention is required, including:

- Recruitment and screening processes
- Code of Conduct
- Reporting procedures
- Breaches of policy
- Training
- Risk management

Scope

This policy applies to all of Assisi's staff, volunteers, contractors and Committee of Management members (hereinafter referred to as "personnel"). All personnel have a moral and legal obligation to protect children and report suspected or confirmed threats or harm.

Assisi is firmly committed to working with its in-country partner organisations and other relevant stakeholders to ensure Assisi projects comply with this policy, and to support partners to strengthen their own child protection practices.

Definitions

Assisi adopts DFATs definitions, as found in DFATs Child Protection Policy, 2017.

Abuse:

Abuse includes:

Physical abuse—the use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviour includes shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning.

Neglect—the failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing.

Emotional abuse—refers to a parent or caregiver’s inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts toward a child, or a pattern of failure over time to provide a child with adequate non-physical nurture and emotional availability. Such acts have a high probability of damaging a child’s self-esteem or social competence.

Sexual abuse—the use of a child for sexual gratification by an adult or significantly older child or adolescent. Sexually abusive behaviours can include fondling genitals; masturbation; oral sex; vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object; fondling breasts; voyeurism; exhibitionism; and exposing the child to, or involving the child in, pornography.

Ill-treatment—disciplining or correcting a child in an unreasonable and seriously inappropriate or improper manner; making excessive and/or degrading demands of a child; hostile use of force towards a child; and/or a pattern of hostile or unreasonable and seriously inappropriate degrading comments or behaviour towards a child.

Child or children:

In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ‘child’ means every human being under the age of 18 unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Child exploitation:

One or more of the following:

- Committing or coercing another person to commit an act or acts of abuse against a child.
- Possessing, controlling, producing, distributing, obtaining or transmitting child exploitation material
- Committing or coercing another person to commit an act or acts of grooming or online grooming
- Using a minor for profit, labour, sexual gratification, or some other personal or financial advantage

Grooming: Generally, refers to behaviour that makes it easier for an offender to procure a child for sexual activity. For example, an offender might build a relationship of trust with the child, and then seek to sexualise that relationship (for example by encouraging romantic feelings, or exposing the child to sexual concepts through pornography)

Online grooming is the act of sending an electronic message to a recipient who the sender believes to be under 16 years of age, with the intention of procuring the recipient to engage in or submit to sexual activity with another person, including but not necessarily the sender; or of sending an electronic message with indecent content to a recipient who the sender believes to be under 16 years of age.

Harm: Any detrimental effect on a child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. Harm may be caused by financial, physical or emotional abuse, neglect, and/or sexual abuse or exploitation whether intended or unintended.

Working with children: Working with children means being engaged in an activity with a child where the contact would reasonably be expected as a normal part of the activity and the contact is not incidental to the activity. Working includes volunteering or other unpaid works.

Unacceptable risk: The portion of identified risk that cannot be tolerated, and that must be either eliminated or controlled. For people deemed an unacceptable risk, control mechanisms are not considered appropriate.

Policy

Child Safe Recruitment and Screening

Assisi is committed to preventing a person from working with children if they pose an unacceptable risk to children, and will follow child safe recruitment and screening processes as outlined in the Human Resources section of Assisi's Good Practice Manual. The level of checks varies depending on the position and the potential contact with children. The checks include:

- Child safe interview questions, referee checks, working with children checks, and national Police Checks.
- All job advertisements and position descriptions detail Assisi's commitment to protecting children.
- Employment contracts detail expectations regarding a safe organisation environment, as well as clear provisions for dismissal, suspension or transfer to other duties for any personnel who breach the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct.

Code of Conduct: Standards of Professional Behaviour

Assisi's Code of Conduct includes clear guidelines as to what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in relation to working and interacting with children. It establishes a common understanding of the standards of behaviour and appropriate boundaries expected of staff and those in close contact with children and it promotes transparency and accountability.

All Assisi personnel are expected to sign and adhere to the Code of Conduct.

Reporting procedure

Assisi has adopted principles that will underpin intervention when abuse has been identified.

- The rights and welfare of the child is of prime importance. Every effort will be made to protect the rights and safety of the child throughout the investigation.
- Assisi will treat all concerns raised seriously and ensure that all parties will be treated fairly and the principles of natural justice will be a prime consideration.
- All reports will be handled professionally, confidentially and expediently.
- All reports made in good faith will be viewed as being made in the best interests of the child regardless of the outcomes of any investigation. Assisi will ensure that the interests of anyone reporting child abuse in good faith are protected.

1. Who should report?

It is mandatory for all Assisi personnel to report any witnessed, suspected or alleged incidents of child abuse or any breach of the Child Protection Policy and/or the Assisi Code of Conduct.

2. What should be reported?

Any disclosure, concern or allegation regarding the safety, abuse or exploitation of a child (this includes actual, suspected, or risk of abuse or harm to a child).

This may relate to a child and/or personnel involved in Assisi's work both in Australia and overseas. It may also include a concern about a child or person outside of the organisation programs, such as a community member. Overseas child abuse investigations will comply with local laws and penalties.

3. When to report?

Concerns should be raised immediately.

4. Process for reporting

Making a report:

- If Assisi personnel become aware of a Child Protection incident in Assisi's work in Australia and/or overseas they must immediately report it to the Assisi Chief Executive Officer.
- They should immediately document any relevant information which details how they learned of the incident, and/or other witnesses or persons who may have relevant information.
- If it is not possible or appropriate to report to the Assisi Chief Executive Office, a report should be made to the Committee of Management President.

Acting on the report:

- Once an incident has been reported to the Assisi Chief Executive Officer, the Chief Executive Officer will report to the Committee of Management President.
- The Chief Executive Officer and/or Committee of Management President will then, if required, gather more information to:
 - identify immediate and potential risks to the child or young person;
 - develop and implement an Action Plan to ensure the child's safety.
- The Action Plan will include but is not limited to the following:
 - report the matter to local police and/or the child protection authority; **and/or**
 - ensure referral and support for the child; **and/or**
 - report the incident to the Australian Federal Police when it is suspected or becomes clear that a crime has been committed regarding child sex tourism, child sex trafficking and child pornography ; **and/or**
 - manage internally in accordance with Assisi's human resources procedures if not a criminal Code of Conduct matter; **or**
 - take no further action; **and**
 - report the incident to DFAT at childwelfare@dfat.gov.au.

Risk Management

Assisi recognises the importance of proactively assessing and managing risks to children in order to reduce the risk of harm. This occurs in several ways:

1. Risk Assessment at the organizational level

Assisi maintains an organisational wide Risk Register that is reviewed every quarter or in the case of an incident. This register assesses child protection risks such as: risk of non-

compliance with policy, risk of systems and procedures failure, support and compliance from in-country partners, emergencies and disasters, reputation and so on. Mitigation strategies are also put in place.

2. Risk Assessment in projects

All projects and activities include child protection risks as part of their project level risk assessment. Mitigation strategies are put in place for any risk identified and these (and any emerging risks) are actively monitored throughout the activity/program cycle or in the case of an incident.

Breaches of Policy

A failure to comply with the Child Protection Policy and/or the Assisi Code of Conduct may lead to disciplinary action, legal action, or criminal investigation and prosecution.

Training and awareness

Assisi is committed to ensuring all staff, volunteers, Committee of Management, consultants and advisors are aware of this Child Protection Policy and Assisi's Code of Conduct.

Upon induction, or after any policy revisions, all will be provided with a copy of the Policy; briefed on the Policy as part of their orientation or induction; and required to understand the requirements of the Policy.

Those who may have contact with or who are or may be working with children, are required to participate in regular child protection awareness training.

Assisi's induction and orientation process will cover all aspects of the Child Protection Policy. All staff and volunteers are to receive appropriate training regarding abuse awareness, protection of participants and current legislative environment.

Working with Partners

Assisi is committed to working with partners to develop, strengthen and maintain their own organisational policies and procedures to keep children safe and protected. This includes supporting them to develop policies, codes of conduct, child safe recruitment, participate in training and identify and mitigate risks to children in projects. Further they will be supported to develop reporting procedures in line with the local laws of their country.

Assisi and partners will prioritise improving procedures in projects that are deemed to be the greatest risk to children's safety, such as projects that work directly with children. Where required, direct child protection activities will be incorporated into project objectives and plans.

All Memorandum of Understanding and Project Agreements will clearly include Assisi's expectations regarding maintaining children and vulnerable persons' safety, and partner obligations as recipients of Australian funding (such as DFAT).

Roles and Responsibilities

As outlined in the Policy Overview, there are roles and responsibilities that apply to all policies. In addition, the following apply specifically to this policy.

Responsibilities of the Committee of Management:

- Remain aware of potential breaches in child protection and report these as per the reporting procedure.

Responsibilities of Chief Executive Officer:

- Remain aware of potential breaches in child protection and report these as per the reporting procedure.
- Ensure risks to children are considered in all project risk assessments.
- Proactively put in place measures to promote child protection including arranging timely and appropriate training for personnel and partners in issues of child protection and supporting partners to develop their own child protection policies.
- Ensure all personnel are aware of this policy and sign Assisi's Code of Conduct.

Responsibilities of all other personnel:

- Remain aware of potential breaches in child protection and report these as per the reporting procedure.
- Comply with this Policy and Assisi's Code of Conduct.

Relevant documents

Assisi – Code of Conduct

Assisi – Human Resources section

Assisi – Program Manual

Assisi – Risk Management Procedures

ACFID – Code of Conduct

DFAT – Child Protection Policy

DFAT – Child Protection Code of Conduct.