

Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid

Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Child Protection - Programs set by Mercy Hands to prevent abuse, violence against children at home and or in the community.

Who is this document for?

This document sets out Mercy Hands Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures and it is addressed to:

- 1- Board Members
- 2- Organization Staff
- 3- Partners of the organization
- 4- Visitors
- 5- Donors of projects

Why this policy?

Because

- We are committed to protecting all children from all forms of abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation and to promoting their well-being and development. We are also committed to protecting children from injury or other harm caused by the way we organise, fundraise, design, plan, implement, monitor and handover our activities.
- We work in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child according to article (1) which means a child is every human being below the age of eighteen years old, and the U.N. Secretary General's Bulletin on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.
- **We work to end all forms of abuse and exploitation against all children.** This includes children who may have increased vulnerability to abuse, exploitation or other harm due to characteristics such as age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, minority status, disability, social or economic status, perceived affiliation with armed forces or armed groups, or due to their displaced or refugee status.
 - We take a **Zero Tolerance approach** to all abuse and exploitation against children

Why does Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid need a Child Protection Policy?

1. Children remain highly vulnerable to abuse and protection concerns are significant. Mercy Hands wants to make explicit our commitment to the promotion of the safety and security of the children in our care, as well as the vulnerable adults we work with.
2. Sometimes children can be harmed as a result of unintended actions or misunderstandings by staff or volunteers. Personnel may not understand what is safe and what a professional conduct entails when interacting with children is. In some cases, they can also behave in a certain way with a child that places the child and themselves in an unsafe situation despite good intentions
3. Minimize the risk of harm to children

DEFINITIONS - For the purposes of this Policy the following definitions apply.

- **Child:** Refers to every human being under the age of 18.
- **Child Safeguarding:** Child safeguarding is an accountability system made up of policies, procedures and actions that we take to ensure our organization is safe for children. It is our responsibility to make sure our staff, programmes and operations do not directly or indirectly harm children, and do not expose them to the risk of harm and abuse. The policies and procedures that we put in place aim to both prevent and respond to any harm caused to children as a result of their interaction with our organization.¹

Mercy Hands Child Safeguarding has four main parts that, when put in place together, create a child safe environment:

- **Awareness** – understanding by everyone involved in Mercy Hands programs and activities on how to provide with a framework for maintaining a child safe organization and the role everyone plays in embedding this into everyday practice.
- **Prevention** - child safeguarding is a preventative practice to reduce the opportunity of a child being harmed as a result of coming into contact with MH programs or activities.
- **Reporting** – MH has a professional, well managed and confidential process for reporting any concerns which might threaten the safety or wellbeing of a child. MH personnel has the obligation to report such concerns and obey the process in place. personnel have an obligation to report.
- **Responding** – MH personnel has a clear understanding of safe interactions with children and how to identify conduct towards a child that may be unsafe, unacceptable or unprofessional in order to immediately respond to any child safeguarding concerns and reports.

¹ Iraq Child Protection Sub Cluster Inter-agency Child Safeguarding Policy. Final version: November 2019

Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid - Child Protection Policy:

Core Statement

Mercy Hands recognizes the personal dignity and rights of children towards whom it has a special responsibility and a duty of care and respect. Mercy Hands, and all its staff and volunteers undertake to do all in our power to create a safe environment for children and young people and to prevent any harm or abuse to them. Mercy Hands is committed to acting at all times in the best interests of children.

For the purposes of this policy, Mercy Hands regards children as those who are under the age of 18. This policy applies to all children with whom Mercy Hands has contact regardless of age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, minority status, disability, social or economic status, perceived affiliation with armed forces or armed groups, or due to their displaced or refugee status.

Mercy Hands intends that its child protection procedures will ensure a safe and protected environment for vulnerable children in regard to the organization's work and activities.

Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid - Context and Work:

Principles of child protection,

Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid believes that all staff and volunteers need to be aware of our policy and commitments in relation to child protection even though some of our staff and many volunteers may never have any unaccompanied contact with children through their work.

Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse occurs when adults (or other children) hurt children under the age of 18, either physically, emotionally, sexually or by neglect.

There are 4 main types of abuse:

- **Physical abuse** is actual or likely physical injury to a child, such as hitting, kicking, pinching or shaking, where there is definite knowledge, or reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented.
- **Emotional abuse** is harm caused by persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection, such as degrading punishments, threats, calling names, not giving care and affection and bullying, resulting in adverse effects on the behavior and emotional development of a child like abuse of authority and discrimination.
- **Neglect** occurs when basic needs such as food, a safe environment and medical care are not met, or when there is failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, resulting in serious impairment of a child's health or development.

- **Sexual abuse** occurs if a child is pressured or forced to take part in any kind of sexual activity, whether or not the child is aware of or consents to what is happening. Sexual abuse includes incest, rape and fondling. It also includes non-contact activities such as showing pornography or inappropriate photographs.

Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid - Child Protection Procedures

1. Recruitment of Staff and Volunteers

- Mercy Hands administration will strive to conduct background checks for all candidates, especially for those who would be working with children.
- If a background check discloses any crime relating to child abuse or violence, Mercy Hands will not permit that person to become a staff member or volunteer.
- Adverts and job descriptions for any Mercy Hands employment will include a reference to the organization's commitment to child protection and our Child Protection Policy.
- Staff and Volunteers will be asked to read and sign a Code of Conduct, which becomes part of their contractual agreement for employment.

2. Ensuring Awareness and Prevention

- Mercy Hands commitment to child protection will be stated in appropriate organization documents and on our website. The organization will make its policy and procedures available to anyone who requests them.
- Mercy Hands expects all staff and volunteers to follow the stated code of conduct for behavior.
- All project managers have the responsibility to ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of the Policy, and to remind them of its provisions when the need arises.
- All events that are planned should ensure that child protection issues are considered as part of the risk analysis and/or health and safety arrangements.

3. Examples of Good and Bad Practice

Good Practice

- Always work in an open environment where possible and avoid being alone unnecessarily with a child.
- Promote, support and model positive conflict resolution techniques helping children to be considerate and kind with one another.
- Treat all children equally and with respect and dignity.
- Where close physical contact is necessary it should be done openly and in full view of others and, wherever possible, with the consent of the child or their guardians.
- Guests and visitors should always be accompanied by a volunteer or staff member when with a child.
- Be a positive role model. This includes a zero tolerance to the use of tobacco, alcohol or any other drugs in the company of the children.
- Ask permission from a MH project manager and their guardians before administering any form of medicine to a child.

Poor practice

- Allowing or engaging in inappropriate touching of any form.
- Engaging in rough or sexually provocative games.
- Allowing young people to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- Spending excessive amounts of time alone with a child away from others.
- Having 'favorites' and allowing a child to become dependent upon your particular attention.
- Making sexually suggestive comments to a child.
- Allowing allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Taking or using inappropriate photos of children.
- Failing to prevent harm coming to a child if this is within your capability.
- Sharing a child's history or medical information with people without the organization's express permission.

4. Dealing with Disclosures and Suspicion:

Mercy Hands recognizes that disclosures (i.e. when a specific allegation of abuse is made against a named individual) and suspicion (i.e. when concern is expressed concerning abuse that may have taken place or be in prospect) should always be investigated and acted upon swiftly, making the welfare of children the paramount consideration. Any information offered in confidence should be received on the basis that it will be shared with relevant people in authority.

If a child tells you they are being, or have been abused, or have witnessed abuse:

- Listen to, accept and take seriously what the child says and comfort them as necessary.
- Do not investigate, and do not inform, question or confront the alleged abuser.
- Reassure the victim that they have done the right thing by telling you.
- Let them know you need to tell someone else so we can help them. Do not promise total confidentiality.
- Record carefully what you have heard whilst it is still fresh in your mind. Include the date and time of your conversation and any incident disclosed.

If any member of staff or volunteer suspects abuse, or if a child makes a disclosure, or if a person external to Mercy Hands reports a suspicion or allegation relating to the organization staff, volunteers or activities, the following steps should be taken:

- Avoid any delay.
- Report this to the Executive Director of Mercy Hands.
- The Executive Director will ensure an assessment is made and a report given to the appropriate local authorities or Police Station if necessary and keeping survivor wishes and best interests of the child as the primary considerations. However, if urgent action is required to protect children this should be initiated immediately.

No staff member or volunteer will prejudice their own standing or position within Mercy Hands by responsibly reporting potential or suspected child abuse.

5. Mercy Hands Management Responsibilities and Plan of Action;

If a member of staff is the subject of an allegation of child abuse, that staff member will be asked to take leave from their duties on full pay until an investigation has been completed. If a volunteer is the subject of an allegation of child abuse, that volunteer will be asked to withdraw from their work until an investigation has been completed. In both cases, it should be made clear that suspension does not imply guilt but rather protects all parties while an investigation is undertaken.

If a disclosure of abuse takes place in which the alleged abuser is a member of staff or a volunteer, or the incident has taken place on Mercy Hands premises or in connection with NGO activities, Mercy Hands will inform the local authorities. If a suspicion is expressed, Mercy Hands will undertake a risk assessment and then take appropriate action, which may involve contacting local authorities.

If an allegation of child abuse is made involving a member of Mercy Hands staff, this allegation, together with a record of the investigation undertaken and the outcome, will be recorded in their personal files.

Confidentiality regarding these records will be scrupulously maintained and information will only be released to the Manager of the staff member concerned or to those in positions of authority externally who have reason to need it for the protection of children.

If an incident of child abuse takes place in connection with Mercy Hands as an organization or any of its activities, Mercy Hands undertakes to provide support for the alleged victims and the alleged abuser whilst an investigation is carried out. Mercy Hands will also seek to ensure that any continuing support needed after a situation has been resolved is made available.

If a member of Mercy Hands staff is found to have committed acts in relation to children that are criminal, or which contravenes in a serious way the principles and standards set out in this policy, Mercy Hands will take disciplinary action and/or any other action that may be appropriate to the circumstances. If volunteers are found to have committed such acts, the volunteer relationship will be terminated.

6. Photos and Videos - Seeking consent to share images of children and young people

When is consent needed?

Children should always be consulted about the use of their image and give consent to it being used and shared.

For young people under 16, MH will get parental consent to use an image.

In situations where under 16s are separated from their parents (for example if they are in care) MH should seek consent from someone who holds parental responsibility (for example the child's care giver or the local authority).

For 16- to 17-year-olds, MH will decide if it's appropriate to obtain parental consent, depending on the activity and the young person's circumstances. If MH decides that parental consent is not required, then MH will consider whether it should still inform parents that the child's photograph is being shared. In most circumstances, parents have a legal parental responsibility for their children up to the age of 18.

How MH will get consent

- Make sure children, young people, their parents and guardians understand what they are agreeing to.
- Make them aware that a photo or video is being taken.
- Explain what the image is going to be used for.
- Ask for their consent to share their image and record this on a written consent form.
- Tell them how long their consent is valid for and how long you will keep the image for.
- Explain what MH will do if a child or their parents change their mind and withdraw consent at a later stage.
- Make it clear that if a child's image has been used online or in printed publications it will be very difficult to recall it if consent is withdrawn.
- Keep a record of the written consent that parents, guardians and children have given for images being used.
- We have set up the following guidelines for the taking and use of photographs and videos:
 - Children should always be appropriately clothed in photographs or videos and not in any way exploitative.
 - Children should not be photographed when in compromising activities or positions.
 - No inappropriate photos should be used online for any reason by any person.
 - No photos distributed in any medium should be accompanied by the child's full name. First names alone may be used.
 - Photos/video used for any for profit or fundraising efforts should have explicit permission from the Executive Director and should only be used to raise funds for Mercy Hands.

7. Reviewing the Child Protection Policy

Mercy Hands will ensure that this policy is reviewed every 2 years and that an annual report on any incidents relating to child protection is written.

8. How will MH implement this policy?

We acknowledge the risk to children across our organization's staff, activities and operational procedures. We will progressively implement this Policy through taking action in the following areas and we accept these areas as our minimum standards. The following activities have been endorsed by the Iraq Inter-agency Child Safeguarding Policy and MH embraces the same activities in its daily work:

1. Job advertisement, recruitment and selection:

1.1 Job advertisements, job descriptions and terms of references clearly state the level of contact with/responsibility for children that the position requires. Safe recruitment procedures are put in place based on the level assigned.

1.2 Include child safeguarding commitment and responsibility statements in job advertisements, job descriptions, terms of reference, employment contracts and include child safeguarding questions in interviews.

1.3 Conduct reference checks before making employment offers. Include child safeguarding questions in these reference checks based on the level of contact with children.

1.4 Job advertisements highlight the need for successful candidates to undertake a formal criminal record check or to complete a self-declaration on any criminal convictions.

1.5 Where feasible, conduct checks of formal criminal records based on the position and level of contact with children and use it to inform decisions, based on the type of offense, if any are revealed. Ask candidates to complete a criminal self-declaration form if formal criminal checks are not possible.

2. Child Safeguarding Induction and Training:

2.1 Obtain signature to state commitment to the Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct. This must be included as part of the employment contract.

2.2 Induct all new staff on child safeguarding when they join the organization. New staff to sign to state receiving, understanding and commitment to the Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct. The length and comprehensiveness of the induction will vary according to the level of contact with children.

2.3 Train new staff with a key child safeguarding position (e.g. management, Child Safeguarding Focal Points), provide a refresher training after one year of the completion of training.

2.4 Support partners to implement child safeguarding measures and require them to follow our Policy if they do not have their own.

2.5 Train our partners and their Child Safeguarding Focal Points on our Child Safeguarding Policy and their responsibilities.

3. Child Safeguarding Awareness Raising:

3.1 Display the Child Safeguarding Policy in all of our offices and any infrastructure in the communities where children and their families come into contact with our organization. Display the Policy in the relevant language and in child friendly language.

3.2 Use child friendly materials to ensure that children and their families are aware of and understand the Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct.

3.3 Ensure children and their families are informed about how to report if they are concerned that violations have taken place. Ensure that reporting mechanisms are in the appropriate language and are safe and accessible.

3.4 Include child safeguarding as a permanent agenda point in management meetings.

4. Media and Communications:

4.1 Obtain informed consent (from the child’s caregiver) and/or informed assent (from the child) before creating or using any visual, audio or written information about them for official communications.

4.2 Protect children’s privacy by never disclosing their real name or location in official communications. Do not share any details about them that may make them traceable.

4.3 Do not share or use children’s or their families’ information (visual, audio, written) obtained through work activities on any personal social media accounts (for example, this includes Instagram, Facebook, SnapChat). This includes their names, photos, location or any details about them.

4.4 When contracting media partners to work with us ensure they have read, understood and signed the Child Safeguarding Policy.

5. Safe program design and implementation:

5.1 Consider child safeguarding through every step of the program cycle, from designing a project, to implementing it and monitoring and evaluating it.

5.2 Ensure there are trained and qualified staff in positions working directly with children. Ensure that children are adequately supervised at all times.

5.3 Conduct risk assessments for projects directly involving children before the project starts. Ensure that mitigated risk levels are at a safe level before an activity goes ahead.

5.4 Include child safeguarding measures as an activity in projects where relevant, e.g. education and school projects.

5.5 Ensure that child safeguarding training needs/targets are explicitly accounted for in project proposals.

5.6 Advocate for the resources needed to implement child safeguarding measures to be outlined explicitly in projects proposals and budgets.

6. Reporting

6.1 MH will assign Child Safeguarding Focal Points for reporting purposes in each project location.

6.2 Alternative safe, accessible and child-friendly reporting mechanisms are established.

6.3 Suspected harm caused to children by an organisations’ staff or programmes is reported. Harm suspected to have been caused by someone or something external to the organisation is also reported.

6.4 All staff are mandated to report child safeguarding concerns and incidents through their organisation’s internal child safeguarding reporting procedures.

6.5 Organisations must report serious child safeguarding concerns and incidents to donors as required in their partnership agreements. If a confirmed incident violates local law, survivor wishes and best interests of the child must be the primary consideration in decisions to report to authorities.

7. Response

7.1 All child safeguarding reports, whoever they come from (children, adults, organisation staff etc.) will be taken seriously and all information related to the report treated confidentially.

7.2 The safety and best interests of the child will be the immediate and fundamental consideration in all Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct concerns or incidents.

7.3 Any child or children affected will be provided with the care they need in line with best practice child protection case management, supported by trained case management professionals. In the case MH would not have the internal capacity to provide case management for child or adolescent survivors, we will refer to an organisation who can.

Code of conduct

There are rules and procedures that will minimize the risk of an incident occurring or being alleged. Most of these are common sense and will already be followed, but it is important that staff and volunteers specifically check that they are being implemented in any event, which involves babies, children or young people. Mercy Hands will do everything it can within its control to safeguard children by creating **awareness and accountability**, putting in place **preventative** child safeguarding policies and procedures, supporting staff and partners to implement these and immediately **responding** to and **reporting** issues that pose a risk to the safety and/or wellbeing of a child.

This code of conduct applies to all Mercy Hands staff and partners, including implementing partners, contractors, volunteers, day laborers. This code of conduct is based on the recommendations of children safeguard adopted by Board, Staff, focal points and administrators.

The following will be signed by all members of Mercy Hands and volunteers:

I will:

1. Treat all children equally and with respect regardless of any individual characteristics.
2. Do everything in my control to minimize the risk of children being harmed during the planning, implementation and evaluation of work activities, including carrying out risk assessments.
3. I will contribute to a safe environment for children.
4. Immediately report any concerns or incidents of sexual abuse, exploitation or violence against a child that I become aware of, whether it is related to my organization or harm caused by someone or something external to Mercy Hands.
5. Ask for support if I have concerns about, or do not fully understand the Child Safeguarding Policy.
6. After I have signed the Code of Conduct I will inform a Child Safeguarding Focal Point if there is any situation where I am unsure or it is not clear to me if it is potentially a breach of the Code of Conduct.
7. Inform Mercy Hands of any charges or convictions relating to child abuse or exploitation that I am subject to that occur before or during my association with MH. This includes charges or convictions that occur under Iraqi traditional law.
8. Use positive and non-violent methods at all times when interacting and working with children.

9. Empower children and their families through providing them with information on their rights and how to report concerns or incidents of abuse.
10. Whenever possible ensure that there is another adult with me when I am working with individual children, or that I can clearly be seen by other staff or adults.
11. Obtain informed consent from children and their caregivers before taking their photograph, video or audio recording for professional reasons, and before using their photograph, video or audio file for professional reasons. Where possible I will obtain written consent.
12. Promote children taking part in decisions that affect them, particularly concerning their safeguarding, and considering their age and maturity.
13. Ensure that I treat confidential information about children and their families with respect, I will not share it with others either verbally, electronically, on paper or on social media, except if it is part of an approved organizational process or part of the case management service, and with informed consent from the child and their family.
14. Remain aware of the power imbalance between adults and children and behave in a child friendly way that sets a positive example for children at all times.
15. Report information that I know is false or spread malicious information about co-workers that I know is false.

I will not:

1. Physically discipline a child at any time, including hitting, kicking, scratching, punching, and biting.
2. Get married to a child, regardless of the legal minimum age or any judicial consent that is given.
3. Engage in traditional practices that may be harmful to a child's healthy development.
4. Pay a child either money, or through food or other goods unless it is part of an agreed and approved activity by Mercy Hands.
5. Withhold any basic care items from children such as water or food, as a way of disciplining them.
6. Act in a way that may humiliate, degrade, belittle or disempower children and cause them emotional harm.
7. Discriminate against or treat one child or a group of children favorably over another group that may result in exclusion or neglect of a child's or a group of children's needs.
8. Take photos or videos of children that portray them as passive victims, or when they are not appropriately dressed.
9. Take photos or videos of children that are for my personal use, or post pictures or videos of children on my personal social media channels.
10. Use photos or videos of children in professional communication who are particularly vulnerable to be identified even if their identity has been changed, for example children associated with armed groups, unaccompanied children, or children that have been abused or exploited in any way.
11. Use language or behavior in front of children that is inappropriate through being sexualized, abusive, derogatory or otherwise negative.
12. Assist a child with any aspect of their personal care (for example, taking them to the toilet, helping them wash) if they are capable of doing this themselves.

13. Invite a child or their family to my home unless it is an exceptional protection measure approved by my supervisor.
14. Transport a child alone unless it is an exceptional protection measure approved by my supervisor.
15. Sleep in the same bed or room as a child beneficiary unless it is an exceptional protection measure approved by my supervisor, and where another adult is present with me.
16. Develop, publish, watch or share child pornography through any source, or show material of a pornographic nature to children.
17. Develop relationships or display behavior with children that may be perceived to be, or become, exploitative, abusive or in-appropriate.
18. Share my personal email address, phone number or social media account details with children or their families, or request these details from children or their families, unless it is strictly for service provision. If needed I will only share my MH email and/or phone number, I will never share my social media account details.
19. Introduce or encourage a child to engage in harmful or dangerous activities.
20. Work with children while I am under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

By signing this code of conduct, I hereby agree to uphold its principles to the best of my ability at all times:

Full Name:

Title:

Project:

Date and signature:



October 2020
Khaldoon Al-Moosawi
Executive Director