



## **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

## Executive Summary

REPSSI is a regional, child-centered development organization whose vision is that “Communities and families nurture, protect and empower children and youth to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing”. As a regional organization, we contribute to promoting enabling environments for communities and families in East and Southern Africa to preserve and nurture the psychosocial wellbeing of children and youth, so that they can live with hope and dignity.

This policy sets out common values, principles and beliefs and describes the steps that will be taken in meeting our commitment to protect children. REPSSI is committed to protecting children from all forms of physical, emotional or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse as reflected in the International Child Protection instruments cited in Annexure 2.

We believe that child protection is crucial to ensuring that children have the rights, confidence and environment in which they can make choices, express their views and communicate effectively with other children and adults. Children cannot become empowered change agents to improve their lives and that of their families and communities if they are not safeguarded from abuse, discrimination and harm of any kind, be it physical, sexual, emotional or neglect

## Goal

To protect children from abuse of all kinds in the delivery of psychosocial support programmes.

## DEFINITIONS<sup>1</sup>

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

**Vulnerable children**: Children who are at risk of abuse, such as children with physical and mental disabilities, homeless children, child sex workers and children impacted by disasters.

**Child protection**: An activity or initiative designed to protect children from any form of harm particularly arising from child abuse or neglect.

**Abuse**: Is an act of ill treatment that can harm or is likely to cause harm to a child's safety, well-being, dignity and development. Abuse includes all forms of physical, sexual, psychological or emotional ill treatment.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, definitions are adapted from Save the Children Alliance.

**Child abuse:** will be committed regardless of any justification or reason that may be provided for the ill treatment including discipline, legal sanction, economic necessity, the child's own consent to it, or in the name of cultural and religious practice.

**Physical Abuse:** involves the use of violent physical force so as to cause actual or likely physical injury or suffering, (e.g. hitting, shaking, burning, female genital mutilation, torture.)

**Emotional or psychological abuse:** includes humiliating and degrading treatment such as bad name calling, constant criticism, belittling, persistent shaming, solitary confinement and isolation).

**Sexual Abuse:** includes all forms of sexual violence including incest, early and forced marriage, rape, involvement in pornography, and sexual slavery. Child sexual abuse may also include indecent touching or exposure, using sexually explicit language towards a child and showing children pornographic material.

**Neglect:** is deliberately, or through carelessness or negligence, failing to provide for, or secure for a child, their rights to physical safety and development, resulting in significant impairment of the child's health or development including a failure to thrive emotionally and socially. It can include the failure to provide compulsory education or access to medical care. These actions or failure to act must be intentional. For example, a parent who willfully withholds primary education from a child despite having the necessary resources for that child to receive a primary education is neglecting that child.

**Child exploitation:** is the use of children for someone else's advantage, gratification or profit often resulting in unjust, cruel and harmful treatment of the child. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, moral or psychosocial development.

**Sexual exploitation:** is the abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes; this includes profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the exploitation of another as well as personal sexual gratification.

**Economic exploitation:** of a child is the use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes child labour, domestic work (beyond a reasonable or necessary level of household work), recruitment and involvement of children in armed conflict, use of children for criminal activities including the sale and distribution of narcotics, involvement of children in any harmful or hazardous work.

**Child pornography:** In accordance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 'child pornography' means 'any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes.'

**Child-sex tourism:** The sexual exploitation of children by men or women who travel from one place to another, usually from a richer country to one that is less developed, and there engage in sexual acts with children.

**Bullying:** is the repeated and deliberate use of aggression and power to cause physical pain or emotional distress. Bullying can be verbal, physical, unpleasant gestures, social coercion, social exclusion, or any combination of these.

**Online grooming:** The act of sending an electronic message with indecent content to a recipient whom 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.

**Violence:** is defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as ‘all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.’ WHO defines violence as ‘the intentional use of physical force or power, *threatened or actual*, against a child, by an individual or group, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity.’

**Corporal or physical punishment (and the threat of it):** includes hitting the child with the hand or with an object (such as a cane, belt, whip, shoe, etc); kicking, shaking, or throwing the child, pinching or pulling their hair; forcing a child to stay in uncomfortable or undignified positions or to take excessive physical exercise; and burning or scarring the child.

**Humiliating or Degrading Punishment:** takes various forms such as psychological punishment, verbal abuse, ridicule, isolation, and ignoring the child.

**Harm:** is the result of the exploitation, violence, abuse and neglect of children and can take many forms, including impacts on children's physical, emotional and behavioural development, their general health, their family and social relationships, their self-esteem, their educational attainment and their aspirations.

**Working with children:** Working in a position that involves regular contact with children, either under the position description or due to the nature of the work environment.

**Personnel:** Personnel either employed by an organisation, or engaged by an organisation on a sub-contract basis, or engaged by an organisation on a voluntary or unpaid basis.

**Criminal record check:** A check of an individual's criminal history record.

**Police clearance certificate:** The certificate showing the results of a criminal record check, issued by the police or other authority responsible for conducting such checks.

## Guiding principles

The child protection policy is guided by these principles:

**Zero tolerance of child abuse:** Child abuse is never acceptable. REPSSI's commitment to enhancing children's resilience and psychosocial health means a commitment to ensuring that all children with whom REPSSI is in contact are safeguarded from harm. REPSSI will not knowingly engage, directly or indirectly, anyone who poses an unacceptable risk to children, or partner with an organisation that does not meet REPSSI's child protection compliance standards in their operations and activities.

**Recognition of children's interests:** All countries that REPSSI operates in have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and obligations of the convention. REPSSI advocates that all partnering organisations/institutions/ individuals commit to upholding these rights.

**Sharing responsibility for child protection:** Ensuring that all people undertaking work on behalf of REPSSI are aware of the need to protect children and that systems are in place to protect children. Supporting REPSSI staff and partners to minimize the risks to children. Taking care to ensure that children who have experienced trauma and psychosocial distress are protected from potential abuse and exploitation.

**Risk management approach:** Ensuring that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse. Ensuring that staff and others connected with REPSSI are clear on what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children.

**Awareness raising and education:** Ensuring that all people undertaking work on behalf of REPSSI are aware of and understand the problem of child abuse and the risks to children. Using REPSSI's expertise in psychosocial support to highlight knowledge of child protection, including with children themselves. Ensuring that REPSSI draws attention to the problems of child abuse, neglect and exploitation and the need to ensure proper child protection procedures to protect and support such children in all REPSSI's advocacy, knowledge management and capacity building activities.

## STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT<sup>2</sup>

REPSSI's vision is that Communities and families nurture, protect and empower children and youth to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing.

REPSSI recognises that the abuse and exploitation of children happens in all countries and societies across the world. All child abuse involves the abuse of children's rights. Children in situations of poverty, conflict and HIV face many forms of potential abuse.

The situation of *all* children must be improved through the promotion of their rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes the right to freedom from abuse and exploitation.

### Purpose

To ensure that:

- Ensure all REPSSI staff, partners and associates uphold children's rights and promote the protection of children.
- Partner organizations are assisted in making sure children in their care, or with whom they interact, are safeguarded.
- Positive steps are taken to ensure the protection of children.
- Any concerns around child abuse raised by children, staff or others are taken seriously.
- Children, staff or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns are supported and protected.
- Appropriate and effective measures are taken in instigating or co-operating with any subsequent process of investigation

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Save the Children UK Statement of Commitment

## CODE OF CONDUCT

REPSSI's commitment to enhancing children's resilience and psychosocial health means a commitment to ensuring that all children with whom REPSSI is in contact, directly or indirectly through partners, are safeguarded from harm.

Abuse includes:

- physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse of a child;
- violence, or the threat of violence, against a child;
- exploitation of a child - in which a child is expected to undertake activities for the advantage, profit or gratification of another person that is unjust, cruel or harmful;
- neglect - deliberately or through carelessness or negligence, failing to ensure that a child is physically or emotionally secure, leading to impairment of a child's physical, psychosocial or moral development.

REPSSI recognizes that children are individuals with their own needs, wishes and feelings. In all cases, children must be listened to and supported as a priority. All children have an equal right to protection, including those who are disabled and living with HIV and regardless of gender, sexuality, culture, religion or legal status.

REPSSI also recognizes that adults affected by the policy have a right to be provided with information about the child protection policy, training to understand its application, and support in the event of an allegation or report.

This code of conduct applies to

- all people who are employed by REPSSI
- REPSSI's Board of Directors
- all volunteers working for REPSSI
- all people who are working under contract for REPSSI.
- People who are employed by other organizations but are undertaking activities (for example, training) in partnership with REPSSI.
- Institutions and organizations that are in partnership with REPSSI.
- People/ institutions that are accredited by REPSSI.

The code of conduct is to be reviewed as and when need arises and adapted for inclusion in all partner memorandums and endorsed by the REPSSI Executive Directors.

It is important for all staff, volunteers and people contracted to REPSSI to:

- be aware of situations which may present risks and manage these
- plan and organise the work and the workplace so as to minimise risks

- as far as possible, be visible in working with children
- ensure that a culture of openness exists to enable any issues or concerns to be raised or discussed
- ensure that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour does not go unchallenged
- talk to children about their contact with staff or others and encourage them to raise any concerns
- empower children – discuss with them their rights, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what they can do if there is a problem.

### **Confidentiality:**<sup>3</sup>

All those who adhere to this code of conduct must be extremely careful in protecting information and must only pass on this information via the reporting process described below. The status of the child suspected of being abused should not be disclosed to any persons outside of the reporting structure without the informed written consent of the child.

Confidentiality is difficult. When a child discloses abuse, the person who is party to the disclosure cannot promise to keep any secrets since they are under obligation to report the abuse. For this reason, it is essential to make clear the fact that it may not be possible to keep such information wholly confidential. The reporting procedure should be explained in a manner appropriate to the child's situation. Ideally this should be done before any such matter arises.

Where possible and appropriate, a written statement could be used to get the child's permission to share the information with selected other people according to the reporting process. This process must be discussed with the child to ensure that he/she knows what to expect at all times. The child should be kept informed at all times of the discussion and consulted on all decisions.

Records will be kept in a locked, safe place which is not accessible to those outside the reporting process. Information may only be shared with relevant parties and it must always be done in such a way that confidentiality is maintained.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Heartbeat's Sponsor Child Protection Code



## Declaration of Acceptance

I will:

- Commit to a background check if requested by REPSSI.
- Openly declare any allegations or investigations or transgressions or existing criminal records upon me regarding child offences.
- Treat children with respect regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status
- Not use language or behaviour towards children that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate.
- Not engage children in any form of sexual activity or acts, including paying for sexual services or acts, with children below the age of consent.
- Wherever possible, ensure that another adult is present when working in the proximity of children.
- Not invite unaccompanied children into my home, unless they are at immediate risk of injury , in physical danger or when there are other persons in the home.
- Not sleep close to unsupervised children unless absolutely necessary, in which case I must obtain my supervisor's permission, and ensure that another adult is present.
- Use any computers, mobile phones, or video and digital cameras inappropriately, and never to exploit or harass children or to access child pornography through any medium (see also 'Use of children's images for work related purposes')
- Refrain from physical punishment or discipline of children.
- Refrain from hiring children for domestic or other labour which is inappropriate given their age or developmental stage, which interferes with their time available for education and recreational activities, or which places them at significant risk of injury.
- Comply with all relevant country and local legislation, including labour laws in relation to child labour.
- Immediately report concerns or allegations of child abuse in accordance with appropriate procedures.
- Refrain from engaging in any demeaning exploitative or abusive behavior with children.
- Not act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse.
- Not behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative towards children.
- Not do things for children of a personal nature that is inappropriate or potentially abusive.
- Refrain from acting in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse.
- Ensure that child participation in programmes does not exploit, shame, humiliate, undermine and degrade children or result in any form of emotional abuse to children.
- Report on any possible or suspected child abuses cases using the recommended steps of action detailed in Annexure 2.

## Use of children's images for work related purposes

When photographing or filming a child for work related purposes, I must:

- Before photographing or filming a child, assess and endeavour to comply with local traditions or restrictions for reproducing personal images.
- Before photographing or filming a child, obtain consent from the child and a parent or guardian of the child. As part of this I must explain how the photograph or film will be used.
- Ensure photographs, films, videos and DVDs present children in a dignified and respectful manner and not in a vulnerable or submissive manner. Children should be adequately clothed and not in poses that could be seen as sexually suggestive.
- Ensure images are honest representations of the context and the facts.
- Ensure file labels do not reveal identifying information about a child when sending images electronically.
- Try as much as possible to avoid the use of children's photos, or take it in such a way as not to be able to identify children's faces.

REPSSI considers acceptance of this code of conduct as a precondition of any relationship with REPSSI for any and all persons mentioned above. This policy should be signed and dated before commencement of this relationship. REPSSI will keep the Declaration of Acceptance on file.

I understand that the onus is on me, as a person engaged by REPSSI, to use common sense and avoid actions or behaviours that could be construed as child abuse when implementing REPSSI programme activities. **I hereby declare that I have read and understand the REPSSI Child Protection Policy and agree to abide by its contents.**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name & Position:** \_\_\_\_\_

**At:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Annexure 1: International child protection instruments

Instrument	Source
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	<a href="http://www.unicef.org/crc">www.unicef.org/crc</a>
African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child	<a href="http://www.africa-union.org/officialdocuments/treaties">www.africa-union.org/officialdocuments/treaties</a>
Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography	<a href="http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/dopchild.htm">www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/dopchild.htm</a>
Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict	<a href="http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/protocolchild.htm">www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/protocolchild.htm</a>
Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child	<a href="http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/25.htm">www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/25.htm</a>
ILO Convention 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour	<a href="http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm">www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm</a>

You see if suspect abuse. When you have concerns about the safety of a child, it is your duty to report them to the relevant authorities. The person in REPSSI who has received the allegation must:

It is essential to avoid delay as any inaction may place the child at further risk!

- Ensure that the relevant senior manager within REPSSI is informed. REPSSI Office per Head Office.
- If it is essential to act immediately, due to the risk to the child/ren, the local authorities should be informed as soon as possible.

## Annexure 2: HOW TO RAISE CONCERNS – STEPS FOR ACTION

3. Concerns should normally be reported in the same working day. Ensure detailed written records are made relating to reporting on child abuse. In cases where the organization/ institution presented does not investigate the allegations made in a confidential manner, have these procedures they agree to follow the REPSSI recommended steps for action.
4. Report your concerns to your line manager / main contact in REPSSI. If this is the person who is suspected of abuse, discuss your concerns with their Manager / Head of Human Resources / Executive Director or Board Member. That written consent has been obtained from the child if possible, or that the child/ caregiver understands the implications.

Discussions should cover: the nature of the concern and proposed next steps. In most cases, all future action will be undertaken by the line manager. You must maintain confidentiality process. Document all action taken and the findings.

