

Child Protection Policy

“Violence against children is a global concern that is often predictable and preventable. Children of all ages, gender, backgrounds, and identities are at risk of being hurt physically, sexually, psychologically and through neglect.”ⁱ

*International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC)
Child Protection – Action Plan 2015-2020*

Children compose nearly half of the Palestinian population. Investment in this social group is important in order to guarantee children’s rights and provide them with the opportunity to live in dignity and safety.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2012, 51.0% of children are exposed to abuse physically and psychologically from parents; psychological abuse is 66.3% more common than physical abuse.

Wi’am Center for Conflict Resolution & Transformation Child Protection Policy, in line with the Wi’am vision outlines our commitment to create a safe environment for children and young people and, in line with their rights under the UN Convention and the Palestinian Child Law in the article 42 and 43 on the Rights of the Child, to prevent their physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

Wi’am staff has the same ethical and legal duty as all other citizens, to keep children safe from harm in their homes, schools and communities. This policy addresses the particular additional responsibility that staff and volunteers have to ensure that the work of Wi’am and programs associates, do not expose children to risk.

The purpose of this policy is to keep all children that we target safe and promote their rights. This policy makes it clear to everyone that children must be protected, helps to create a safe and positive environment for children, and shows that Wi’am is ensuring that the policy is being implemented, evaluated and reported.

We, as Wi’am are taking seriously our values, mission and principles to protect children from violence. We serve in development, protracted crisis and emergencies. This includes internal rules to ensure policies, procedures, systems and operational responsibilities are in order to protect volunteers, staff, board members, contractors and beneficiaries especially children that all the partners interact with.

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Definition:**Age of Child:**

According to the Palestinian Child Law No. 7 of 2004 and its amendments, the child is defined as any human being under the age of eighteen years, including the unborn.

Definition of Child Protection:

Child protection, or addressing violence against children, refers to ensuring children are safe from all forms of physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse.

Abuse comes in many forms:***Emotional abuse:***

It 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. It may include a repeated rejection or belittling of a child, or the making of threats, which has the intent to scare and frighten. It can also result from excessive demands that place expectations on a child beyond their capacity, or by witnessing forms of violence, including domestic violence.

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 well-being in a development or emergency context, the risk of this form of abuse can also become evident when someone uses their position to withhold assistance in order to gain favors or advantage.

Physical abuse:

It includes actions that cause harm and injury to a child. Physically abusive behavior includes shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning.

Sexual abuse:

It 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. It is the use of a child for sexual gratification by an adult or significantly older child or adolescent. Sexually abusive behaviors can include fondling genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis,

finger or any other object, fondling breasts, voyeurism, and exhibitionism and exposing the child to, or involving the child in, pornography. Sexual abuse may involve siblings or other family members, or persons outside the family.

Exploitation:

It refers to one or more of the following:

- Committing or coercing another person to commit acts of abuse against a child
- Possessing, controlling, producing, distributing, obtaining or transmitting child exploitation material (material that explicitly or implicitly depicts a child as a victim of torture, cruelty or physical abuse or material that represents a child who is engaged in, or appears to be engaged in a sexual pose or activity, or is in the presence of a person who is in engaged in, or appears to be engaged in, a sexual pose or activity)
- Committing or coercing another person to commit an act of grooming (behavior that makes it easier for an offender to procure a child for sexual activity), including online grooming.
- Child labor - work that children should not be doing because they are too young to work, or because it is dangerous or otherwise unsuitable for them.

Advantages of implementing a Child Protection Policy:

1. Children are protected: No policy can offer complete protection for children, but following this policy minimizes the risk to children of abuse and exploitation.
2. Wi'am is protected by implementing this policy and it will be clear about how they are expected to behave with children and what to do if there are concerns about the safety of a child.
3. Wi'am is protected by implementing this policy which makes a clear commitment to keeping children safe. The policy also aims to move the staff towards best practice in this area and deter potential abusers from joining the staff.

Underlying Principles:

A set of Underlying Principles that informs the policy on safeguarding children; these principles are consistent with our mission and professional commitment.

1. As local NGO, our first responsibility is to create safe environments for children and young people and to protect them from any form of harm or abuse.
2. Duty of Care: the burden of responsibility falls on everyone to care and protect children.

3. All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation. We must intervene on behalf of any child suspected of being abused.
4. Wi'am and its staff must first listen attentively and then offer a compassionate, just and prompt response to any person alleging any form of abuse.
5. Staff, board members, contractors and beneficiaries especially children accused of abuse also deserve to be treated with compassion.
6. Honesty and transparency should characterize all of our actions.
7. Anyone who raises concerns about serious malpractice will be protected from victimization or any other detrimental treatment if they come forward with serious concerns, provided concerns are raised in good faith.

Code of Behavior for employees and volunteers:

All Staff/volunteers must comply with the agreed Child Protection Code of Conduct of the organization that sets stringent standards for personal behavior. The organization expects staff to use common sense and avoid actions or behaviors that could be construed as child exploitation and abuse in the course of their work in the organization.

1. Exchange of money, employment, goods, assistance or services for sex, including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behavior is prohibited.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not an excuse.
3. Wi'am employees or volunteers may not engage in any form of harassment, discrimination, physical or verbal abuse, intimidation, favoritism or exploitative sexual relations
4. Where a Wi'am employee or volunteer develops serious concerns regarding abuse or sexual exploitation she/he must report such concerns to the appropriate body within Wi'am concerned and local legal authorities where appropriate.
5. When working with children, avoid actions or behavior which may constitute poor practice and never act in ways that may place a child at risk of abuse.

Guidelines for involvement of children in programmes

6. Staff, trainers and volunteers must seek permission from parents before doing any activities with their children such as taking pictures, individual sessions, documenting the cases and to protect the confidentiality of the cases and the dignity of the children.

7. Staff/volunteers should not spend time alone with children; ensure that all contact is within sight and hearing of other people.
8. Do not take children alone in a car, even for short journeys, unless this is unavoidable for safety reasons. If this is unavoidable, make sure an adult caretaker or another member of staff is aware it is happening.
9. Adopt non-violent means of disciplining children.
10. Provide access for children and young people to talk to others about any concerns they have and encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable enough to point out attitudes and behavior they do not like.

Education and Training for keeping children safe:

The following procedure will be followed when a new member of staff commences work at The organization:

1. All staff, trainers, local and international volunteers at Wi'am will be required to sign a form declaring any ongoing or previous court convictions or investigations.
2. All staff will be provided with a copy of the Child Protection Policy for W'iam when they are recruited and required to sign a document stating that they have received, read, understood and agreed to abide by the policy.
3. Educate each staff and volunteer to listen carefully and to document the case confidentially.
4. Complaints managers training: This course provides head of staff, managers, project directors, child protection officers and other advisors with the skills and information they need to handle sensitive concerns and complaints consistently, and in accordance with the organization policy.
5. Every 3 years the staff will review the policy if needed.

PEOPLE

Staff Selection

The aim of the policy regarding recruiting staff is to discourage potential abusers from applying for positions and to reassure other applicants of the organization's commitment to the protection of children and the prevention of abuse.

1. Safe Recruitment:

Wi'am operates within strict guidelines to ensure that we recruit only those staff, trainers, volunteers and other caretakers who are suitable to work with children. All personnel have a role and responsibility to ensure children are safe.

2. Advertisement:

When advertising for a job, we stress the fact that Wi'am is an equal opportunity employer without any discrimination to gender, race, and socio-political affiliation.

3. Application Forms and Contracts:

When we advertise for any post that involves interaction and work with children, it includes a confidential disclosure of any conviction or felony. The Child Protection policy is attached to all application packs and the code of behavior must be signed along with all employment contracts.

4. Interviews:

Any job interview that involves working directly with children and entails working with the same child repeatedly should include a discussion of the individual's previous work and interaction with children with questions that are designed to fathom the person's background, attitude, approach and experience.

5. Appointment:

Checking applicant's employment history and at least two referees- including a question to the referees asking about the suitability of the person to work with children and attend to their different needs.

Appointment in any job will always be liable to reference checks and positive clearance by seeking resources such as head of the family, academic reference, local institutions references.

We need to do a scrutiny investigation to make sure that the applicant has a clean record and that there is no risk. This applies to all staff, part-timers, trainers and volunteers, since any role in the organization places the holder in a position of trust within the community, beneficiaries which may be open to abuse and lack of honesty.

Child Protection Officer (CPO):

We will entrust this position to a member of the staff whose responsibility is to:

1. Ensure that all staff are aware of the organization CPP and guidelines of behavior.
2. Provide periodic CPP in-service training for staff/volunteers/managers.
3. Receive and refer reports of abuse

Responding to Child Abuse Allegations and Suspicions:

In the event of a child disclosing an incident of abuse, it is essential that this is dealt with sensitively and professionally by the staff member involved. So, if a staff member makes an allegation of child abuse against another staff member and it is proven to be false then that person could face disciplinary action that might entail suspension or even dismissal from work.

The following are guidelines to support the staff member dealing with the report:

1. React calmly.
2. Listen carefully and attentively and take the child seriously.
3. Reassure the child that they have taken the right action in talking to you.
4. Ask questions for clarification only. Do not ask leading questions.
6. Check back with the child that what you have heard is correct and understood.
7. Do not express any opinions about the alleged abuser.
8. Record the conversation as soon and in as much detail as possible. Sign and date the record.
9. Ensure that the child understands the **procedures that will follow**.
10. Pass the information to the CPO; do not attempt to deal with the problem alone.
11. The appropriate reporting form should be used to keep a record of the incident. This should be filled in by the member of staff who receives the first report of the incident.
12. Treat the information confidentially.

Reporting Child Abuse:

The guiding principles concerning reporting children abuse are summarized as follows:

1. The first priority is always for the safety and welfare of the child and that he or she is never left in an unsafe situation. Parents/guardians of the child will be informed of the allegation, concern or disclosure unless doing so is likely to endanger the child.
2. The safety and well-being of the child or young person must take priority
3. Reports using the special form

The reporting procedure for dealing with disclosures, concerns or allegations of child abuse is outlined in the following steps:

1. The staff member who has received a disclosure of child abuse or who has concerns of abuse should bring it to the attention of the CPO.
2. The CPO will assess and review the information that has been provided. The CPO will inform Wi'am administration and the director.
3. The CPO will report serious credible abuse allegations to the Child and Protection unit at the Palestinian Authority where their responsibilities are as follow:
 - a. The unit receives the case.
 - b. Hearing the testimony of the victims.
 - c. Investigating the perpetrators so that the case might go to the court.
 - d. Taking the appropriate actions depending on the case either treatment, psychological sessions, safe shelters and etc.

All the above procedures will be under the presence of the family, unless the family is the offending party.

4. If the subject of an allegation of child abuse is an employee or volunteer, they will be asked to take leave from duties until an investigation has been completed. Such suspension does not imply guilt but protects all parties.
5. Exploitation and abuse constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
6. Confidentiality. The information should only be shared on a "need to know" basis and the number of people that need to be informed should be kept to a minimum.

Implementing and Monitoring of the Standards by the staff:

- The head of departments at Wi'am have particular responsibilities around child protection.
- To ensure employees who are recruited by Wi'am to complete an induction event.

Staff Obligations:

- Immediately report any concerns or allegations of child exploitation and abuse in accordance with the reporting guidelines above.
- Complete child protection training and sign the policy.

PROCEDURES

Creating and maintaining safe environments for children who are involved in our activities.

1. Publish the policy on the website and social media.
2. Publicize the policy within communities and with programme beneficiaries in the form of brochures, leaflets and flyers.
3. Provide role-specific training and support to the staff in child safeguarding and protection.
4. Developing materials to assist Wi'am and its staff in creating safe environments which will be discussed in a training on CP for children such as creating flyers, leaflet, stickers and brochures to be distributed and discussed in workshops.
5. Capacity building: a range of capacity building initiatives will be required to inform and educate staff and associates about their responsibilities and obligations to safeguard children.
6. To ensure that a third party is present when the CPO is meeting with the child in privacy. To ensure neutrality and safety.

Monitoring and Review:

Child Safeguarding is incorporated into the organization's risk register and quarterly and annual reporting processes. Senior management and the Board of Trustees will regularly review the risk register and organization reports to ensure that child safeguarding measures are in place and effective.

- Active monitoring before things go wrong involves regular checking to ensure that standards are being implemented and safeguards are working. This can be done in a number of ways including surveys with staff and associates on how the standards are being met, how effective they are and what needs improving.
- Reactive monitoring after near misses, or when things go wrong, involves learning from mistakes. Good case management can provide a valuable insight into why the abuse took place and whether the organization could have done anything to prevent it.
- Progress, performance and lessons learnt are reported to key stakeholders.
- Learning from practical case experience informs policy review and changes to child safeguarding measures.
- Policies and practices are reviewed yearly and formally evaluated by an external evaluator/auditor every three year.
- Reports should not focus only on the number of cases that we dealt with. It should include how Wi'am's systems and processes are working to prevent the risk of abuse. Reporting between partner organizations should include how safeguarding measures are being implemented, and whether they are effective in the respective organizations.
- Transparency with information is needed on child safeguarding. Wi'am's credibility rests on being transparent and responding appropriately to concerns.
- Wi'am is being accountable is ensuring that policy is being implemented through a range of child safeguarding measures.

Contractual Agreement to abide by the Organization:

All staff members sign a contract

Declaration Letter

I -----, acknowledge that I have read and understood Wi'am's Center Child Protection Policy.

I have carefully read the Child Protection Code of Conduct and Reporting Procedure and discussed its contents with my colleagues in order to understand it clearly. I must comply with the values of Wi'am Center and I am aware that Wi'am expect me to uphold at all times the standards of behavior described in the Code of Conduct. I also understand that disciplinary measures and legal steps will be taken in case of non-compliance.

Employee Name

Signature

Date ____ / ____ / ____

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ⁱ http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/principles/IFRC-Child-Protection-Action-Plan_2015-2020.pdf