

Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid

Child Protection Policy

Who is this document for?

This document sets out MERCY HANDS Child Protection Policy and Procedures. It is for all staff and volunteers.

Who does the policy apply to?

The Policy applies to all staff who work with the children at MERCY HANDS and it is part of their contractual obligations. It is also a condition of placement for all volunteers who work for MERCY HANDS or in our name.

Why does MERCY HANDS FOR HUMANITARIAN AID need a Child Protection Policy?

The answer is simple, children are vulnerable to abuse. For this reason, MERCY HANDS wants to make explicit our commitment to promote the safety and security of the children in our care; as well as the vulnerable adults we work with.

MERCY HANDS FOR HUMANITARIAN AID's Child Protection Policy:

Core Statements

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 the children, seeing these interests as paramount.

We will do this by:

- Setting in place, implementing and regularly monitoring and reviewing procedures to protect children. These procedures cover MERCY HANDS recruitment practice, staff induction and training, and management responsibilities.
- Adopting a code of behavior for all staff and volunteers.
- Ensuring that any allegations of abuse are promptly and properly dealt with, victims supported and perpetrators held to account.

- Aiming to be an example of best practice in the prevention of child abuse and in responding to it in Iraq.

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 gender, religion or ethnicity.

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's 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 affects on the behavior and emotional development of a child.
- **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 pressurized 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's Child Protection Procedures

1. Recruitment of Staff and Volunteers

- MERCY HANDS Administration will strive to conduct background check for all candidates, especially for those who would be working with children.
- If 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 Managers have the responsibility for ensuring that all staff and volunteers are aware of the Policy, and for reminding them of its provisions when the need arises.
- Any events 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, where possible, with the consent of the child or children.
- 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 Manager 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 the 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 outwith the organization 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. 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 whilst 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 or anyone closely associated with MERCY HANDS work in some recognizable capacity is found to have committed acts in relation to children which are criminal or which contravene in a serious way the principles and standards set out in this policy, MERCY HANDS will take disciplinary action and/or any other action which may be appropriate to the circumstances. If volunteers are found to have committed such acts, the volunteer relationship will be ended.

6. Photos and Videos

We realize the danger of the taking and using inappropriate photographs of the children. We are aware of the risks of these photos being distributed or used online for inappropriate and damaging purposes.

However, we also know that Social Media is a very powerful fundraising tool (but one which is difficult to monitor) and for this reason, do not want to ban photos altogether.

Due to this, 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

We would encourage all usage of photos/video be accompanied by a link to MERCY HANDS web site with a message encouraging donations / support.

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. Code of Behavior

There are some simple 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.

- Treat everyone with respect, recognizing their right to personal privacy.
- Be aware of situations that may present risks and manage these.
- Plan and organize events so that risks are minimized.
- Recognize that caution is required in all one-to-one situations.
- Provide access for children to talk to others about any concerns they have.
- Encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable enough to point out attitudes and behavior they do not like.
- Remember that someone else may misinterpret your actions, no matter how well intentioned.

- Do not spend time alone in a closed room / room with no windows with children – plan activities so that more than one adult is present or, at least, other people are within sight and hearing.
- Avoid showing favoritism to any child.
- Never make suggestive remarks or gestures, even in fun.
- Do not rely on just your good name to protect you.
- Do not believe “It could never happen to me”.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'A' followed by several loops and a final flourish.

Chairman Board of Directors

updated: January 2016