CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Background

The aim of this Child Protection Policy (“Policy”) is to keep the children we interact with, safe from the risk of harm caused by neglect and/or abuse (mental/emotional, physical, or sexual abuse). It aims to reduce children's vulnerability and protect their innocence by providing them with the necessary care, protection and support required for them to survive, develop and thrive in all environments. Child protection is integral to the rights of a child.

What is Child Abuse?

The term “child/children” refers to any person/s under 18 years of age. ‘Child abuse’ or ‘maltreatment’ constitutes ‘all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.’(WHO, 1999)

All children, without exception, have the right to protection from abuse in any form, including infanticide, child labour, trafficking, sexual abuse, as well as hurtful or discriminatory behaviour, whether on the basis of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs or otherwise.

Scope of the Policy

This Policy applies to everyone associated with the Centre for Wildlife Studies, India (CWS), including employees (which includes any employee of Centre for Wildlife Studies, consultants, donors, NGO partners, interns, volunteers during volunteering work, vendors, trustees and board members) - hereinafter and collectively called Personnel. This policy takes effect from 1st July, 2021.

Guiding Principles

This Policy shall be guided by and interpreted with the aid of the following foundational principles upon which it is built:

- Respect for the dignity, liberty, and freedom of children
- The best interests of children must take precedence and remain in focus in all matters that affect or concern them
Children have the right to freedom of expression

Children have the right to participate in decisions concerning them

Respect for children’s right to privacy

Zero tolerance of any form of abuse of any child whether direct or indirect

Belief that child protection is the responsibility and duty of all CWS Personnel

The provisions of all national child protection laws must be considered and reviewed from time to time to ensure that they are embodied within this Policy

Objectives

The primary objectives sought to be achieved by this Policy are as follows:

- To ensure that the highest levels of child protection standards are espoused and practised at CWS and
- To create a well-defined and effective reporting mechanism for violations of this Policy and institute a time-bound redressal mechanism for such violations.

Code of Conduct

In recognition of the need for honesty, integrity, and respect for the child, to reflect both in decisions of the organization as well as in the conduct of its personnel, this code of conduct has been laid down for all CWS Personnel.

CWS Personnel must observe and comply with the following at all times:

- Be conscious of, and respect the privacy and dignity of each and every child.
- Be visible and not in a secluded place while in contact with children at the workplace¹.

¹The term “workplace” refers to CWS’ premises, offsite locations where CWS projects are being implemented, events, and any place where any of the Staff / Personnel are representing CWS, including schools.
● Ensure that a culture of openness exists that facilitates interaction between children and Staff and further allows children to express their issues and concerns without fear or threat of retribution or other negative consequences,

● Foster an environment of mutual respect and encourage children to feel comfortable expressing their views,

● Protect the child by not disclosing the identity of the child outside the team assigned to their care / education / protection during any proceedings under this Act.

● Protect the privacy of the child by not disclosing the identity of the child to persons outside CWS who do not require such knowledge for the benefit of the child during any proceedings under this Act.

● Be conscious of the possible need to support or adopt a different response when dealing with children who may suffer from trauma or a challenge to ability, making them more vulnerable than other children in the same situation. Ensure that the child’s traumatic experience is not publicised before visitors / funders / the public during any proceedings under this Act.

CWS Personnel should not:

● Make sexually suggestive gestures or show sexually explicit photos/videos/material or touch any child in an inappropriate manner or in any area that would make the child uncomfortable

● Stay in a room alone with a child for an extended period

● Engage children in personal work or employ children at work or at home

● Use language or expressions that are inappropriate for a child, including stigmatizing or humiliating a child

● Use corporal punishment or tolerate any corporal punishment meted out by the staff

● Develop any relationship with any child that is or could be assumed to be exploitative or abusive

● Discriminate against children on any grounds whatsoever, including community, colour, language, disability or physical features, race, religion, caste, background or anything else
Awareness of actual or likely occurrence of abuse

There are a number of ways in which abuse becomes apparent:

- A child discloses abuse.
- Someone else discloses that a child has told him/her or that he/she strongly believes a child has been or is being abused.
- A child may show signs of physical injury for which there appears to be no satisfactory explanation.
- A child’s behaviour may indicate that it is likely that he/she is being abused.
- A member of Personnel’s behaviour or in the way in which he/she relates to a child causes concern.
- Denial or disciplining of a child without the consent of parents especially with teaching & playgroup.

Whistle-blower Policy

The Policy shall ensure that there is an appropriate mechanism in place to ensure prompt and fair action in the case of a child protection violation while protecting the identity of the whistle-blower i.e. person making the complaint.

Response Mechanism in case of a child protection violation:

CWS shall constitute a panel to deal with complaints made under this policy; such panel shall comprise the following (“Panel’ai):

1. Alok Prasanna - alok.prasanna@vidhilegalpolicy.in - Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy
2. Dr.Bindu Raghavan - bindugnape@gmail.com - Centre for Wildlife Studies
3. Mamatha Prasad - mamatha.prasad@cwsindia.org - Centre for Wildlife Studies

It is the duty of all CWS Personnel to report any alleged, witnessed, or suspected child protection violation as follows:

- Keep written records of concerns about children, even where there is no need to escalate the matter immediately (see Annexure A)
• In the record, detail in writing the nature of the offence and the details of the offender, directly to the Panel.

• Upon receipt of such a report, the Panel together with the person(s) in charge of the relevant program i.e. Program Coordinator(s) and/or Manager will investigate the matter and take appropriate action in accordance with the guidelines for disciplinary action as has been followed in the past or outlined pursuant to this Policy.

• Both the Panel and the complainant(s) must ensure confidentiality in the matter at all times. All records are to be stored in secure locations.

• As part of the investigation both parties, i.e. the child and the alleged offender must be given adequate opportunity to give their own, separate accounts of the incident/s, and the Panel should endeavour to create an environment that is conducive to eliciting an accurate account of events.

• The Panel shall take every precaution to ensure that the identity of the complainant and alleged accused, as well as the details of the incident are protected during the course of the investigation, and that the complainant is not victimized or stigmatized pursuant to any such complaint / investigation.

• While the matter is under investigation, the individual who is suspected of having committed a violation of this Policy must be removed from direct contact with children, and may, at the discretion of the Panel, be suspended until such time as the matter is decided upon.

• The Panel shall be responsible for ensuring that the matter is addressed and resolved within a month of having been reported.

• Any alarming or inappropriate behaviour of the concerned Personnel Staff member and any action taken against the person must be noted in his / her personal record

• In the event that a complaint is sought to be made against the Program Manager or a member of the Panel, it shall be made in writing and addressed to the remaining members of the Panel. The remaining members of the Panel shall be jointly responsible for investigating any and all claims made against the concerned personnel. If required, the remaining members of the Panel may choose to invite an additional member to temporarily participate in an ongoing enquiry. Once a complaint is reported, the Panel may, by way of a unanimous decision, temporarily curtail the powers of the accused to
the extent that they consider necessary to preserve the independence and integrity of
the investigation and the reporting and redressal mechanism.

- The panel shall also take all possible precautions, during the course of the enquiry
  proceedings, to ensure that the said complaint filed either by the child, its parents or any
  other person, is not vindictive in nature or is filed to settle personal scores or to malign
  the concerned Personnel/Organization for selfish motives.

**Representation of Children in the Media**

- CWS Personnel must protect the dignity, identity and privacy of children when and if there
  is contact with the media.

- All documents and records capable of identifying children or hinting towards their identity
  need to be kept confidential except in cases where their disclosure is required under law.

**Dissemination of the Policy**

The Policy will be shared with all those listed under ‘Scope of the Policy’ including new recruits.
The Policy will be displayed on the website, copies will be readily available at all workplaces.

KRITHI K. KARANTH  Ph.D

Executive Director
Statement of Declaration

Declaration

I (Name)..........................................................................................................., have received a copy of the CWS Child Protection Policy and have read and understood the guidelines, standards, and code of conduct as stated in the Child Protection Policy. I agree to adhere unconditionally to the said policy and will ensure that my conduct at all times ensures the protection of children as laid down in the Policy.

Title/Position: .........................................................................................

Relationship with CWS (Tick one):

Employee/Teacher/Volunteer/Consultant/volunteer/ Other ......................... (please specify)

Date                                 Signature.
Annexure A: Reporting Format

This is a confidential document and should be handled only by designated persons

Name of Reporting Authority ...........................................................

1. The incident has been disclosed/observed by child/staff/others/reporting authority (tick one; use the space below for additional details)

2. The incident that was observed/suspected (tick one; use the space below for additional details)

3. Child’s Name: Father’s name:

4. Sex: ________ Age ______

5. Name of field site/centre:

6. Details of the incident:
   a. Date, time and place of the incident:
   b. Date when the incident came to the knowledge of the staff:
   c. Name of the alleged person:

7. Details of the person: Staff/consultant/intern/volunteer/donor/trustee/other (Tick one)

8. Nature of allegation:

9. Observation of the reporting staff (confession, visible injuries, child’s emotional state etc.)

10. Immediate action taken by the reporting staff:

11. Were there any other people or children involved in the incident:

12. Remarks (If any):

13. Action taken by Reporting Authority:

Date