



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 staff (which includes any staff of Centre for Wildlife Studies, consultants, donors, NGO partners, interns, volunteers during volunteer work, vendors, trustees and board members)- hereinafter and collectively called Personnel. This policy takes effect from **1st June, 2022**.

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 Staff.
- 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
- 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 organisation 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 workplace.

(The 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 stigmatising 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.

Response Mechanism in case of a child protection violation:

CWS shall constitute a panel to deal with complaints made under this policy.

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 the 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 victimised or stigmatised 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 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/Organisation 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.

Child Protection Committee:

1. Ms. Pratibha Karanth (Chair & External Member)
2. Ms. Ishika Ramakrishna
3. Mr. Ganesh Honwad
4. Mr. Sahil Pimpale
5. Ms. Soma Bhattacharya

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