CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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1. Introduction

About Growing Up Together Centre

Growing Up Together Centre for Parenting Support is a non-governmental organization which developed *The Growing Up Together Programme of Workshops for the Parents of the Youngest Children* under the *Project on the Parenting Support in the Community* (2007-2009). It was implemented by N. Pećnik and B. Starc as part of the *Early Childhood Development and Positive Parenting Programme,* called *The First Three Years Are the Most Important*, run by the UNICEF Office for Croatia and in cooperation with the Education and Teacher Training Agency. As of 2010, the Centre took charge of educating new group (workshop) leaders of the Growing Up Together Programme and extended the availability of the programme to the kindergartens throughout Croatia.

The goals of the Centre are to develop, ensure quality and sustainability, and expand the availability of parenting support programs (primarily to parents of children of early and preschool age) in the Republic of Croatia. Considering that some of the programmes include and involve children it was important to develop these standards and ways of implementing them at the organization.

Why have we developed the Policy?

This Policy refers to common values, principles, beliefs, and practical rules of conduct that guide us in working with children and contains concrete steps to be taken in meeting our obligations in terms of child protection. By adopting this document, we wish to make sure that all the employees, associates and volunteers of the Centre are familiar with the values which we are guided in our work with children and that they protect the dignity of the children with their behaviour.

According to the guidelines and instructions of European Commission every organization who works directly for and with children is obliged to have child protection policy as well as implemented procedure for reporting concerns that the organization has about children's safety within the communities in which they work.

With this document, Growing Up Together Centre for Parenting Support is formally adopting and implementing Child Protection Policy. Standards described in this Policy are in line with a document "Keeping Children Safe: Child Safeguarding Standards and how to implement them" developed by the international not-for-profit organization Keeping Children Safe.

Aim of the Policy is:

- to give employees, volunteers, group workshop leaders and associates guidelines on how to work more efficiently and safely with children
- to declare accordance with UN Convention on Rights of the Child
- prevent child abuse
- define procedure in case of suspected child abuse

This Policy expresses the philosophy of our organisation, recognises the needs of all children to be safeguarded, identifies, and manages risk and integrates safeguarding measures into all areas of the organisation. The Policy is referred to the cooperation with group workshop leaders, volunteers, staff, associates, partners.

2. Policy values and statements

Our values and principles in working with children

- Health, safety, and wellbeing of children is a priority of our organization
- Throughout our programs we empower, educate parents to exchange ideas, get to know themselves better as parents, become aware of how they relate to their child and to learn about other possible ways of raising a child.
- We value, respect, and understand children within their own culture, religion and ethnicity.
- Diversity is approached as wealth and a prerequisite for building a humane and democratic society. Through interaction diversity we develop new forms of action based on equality dignity and rights for all members of society.
- Child abuse is not acceptable under any circumstances.
- Types of risk may vary according to the child and the means of addressing risks may also vary.
- Employees, associates, and volunteers are obliged to protect the children they work with.
- We approach work with beneficiaries responsibly and professionally, respecting ethical principles and standards of the profession and services provided. We base our work on high ethics and legal standards.
- Partners we work with as part of projects for children are required to meet legal standards of child protection in their programs.
- Building a humane society and nurturing the values on which it is based it is possible only through the cooperation of all those who strive for the same goal.

To act accordingly with these values, staff and associates who are in contact with children are obliged to:

- Treat children with respect at every opportunity and recognize them as individuals with their own rights;
- Respect and appreciate the views expressed by children;
- Work with children in a way that strengthens and develops their capacities and abilities their skills and potentials;
- Work with children in a spirit of cooperation with mutual trust and respect;
- Accept children within the context in which they live;
- Work in partnership with parents/guardians, foster parents and other professionals to ensure the protection of children;
- Design all programs and workshops in accordance with the best interests of children.
- Develop these Standards in a child-friendly language (in the next year)

3. Child abuse definitions

Child abuse is defined as harm to a child caused by a parent or other caregiver. The harm may be physical (violence), sexual (violation or exploitation), psychological (causing emotional distress), or neglect (failure to provide needed care) (https://dictionary.apa.org/child-abuse, March 28th, 2022).

Types of violence against children (https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children, March 28th, 2022):

- Maltreatment (including violent punishment) involves physical, sexual and psychological/emotional violence; and neglect of infants, children and adolescents by parents, caregivers and other authority figures, most often in the home but also in settings such as schools and orphanages.
- Bullying (including cyber-bullying) is unwanted aggressive behaviour by another child or group of children who are neither siblings nor in a romantic relationship with the victim. It involves repeated physical, psychological, or social harm, and often takes place in schools and other settings where children gather, and online.
- Youth violence is concentrated among children and young adults aged 10–29 years, occurs most often in community settings between acquaintances and strangers, includes bullying and physical assault with or without weapons (such as guns and knives), and may involve gang violence.
- Intimate partner violence (or domestic violence) involves physical, sexual and emotional violence by an intimate partner or ex-partner. Although males can also be victims, intimate partner violence disproportionately affects females. It commonly occurs against girls within child marriages and early/forced marriages. Among romantically involved but unmarried adolescents it is sometimes called “dating violence”.
- Sexual violence includes non-consensual completed or attempted sexual contact and acts of a sexual nature not involving contact (such as voyeurism or sexual harassment); acts of sexual trafficking committed against someone who is unable to consent or refuse; and online exploitation.

- Emotional or psychological violence includes restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection, and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment.

4. Implementing the Policy

Employees, associates, and volunteers of the Centre are obliged to assure the following to the children they work with:

- protection of rights prescribed by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, conventions, laws, implementing regulations;
- implementation of programs that promote the protection of their rights, security and health;
- safe and reliable way of recording violations of the standards from this document, ensuring mechanisms for collecting complaints in a confidential and secure manner, and providing support to victims and informing institutions responsible for violation of the rights of the child.

Employees, associates, and volunteers of the Centre who are in direct or indirect contact with children in their work should:

- Be aware of situations that may pose a risk to children and know properly react in such situations.
- Plan and organize work and workplace so that all potential risks are reduced at a minimum
- Allow children to talk openly about any problem.
- Report any ill-treatment of children to the competent institutions reasonable suspicion of abuse and/or neglect.
- Talk to children about their contact with staff, volunteers and associates and encourage them to express themselves freely if they are worried about something (create an environment in which children will feel safe and respected).
- Educate children about their rights and how to act in case their rights are violated.
- Serve your behaviour as a good model for children - behave responsibly and carefully.
- Treat all children equally regardless of gender, sexuality orientation, national, ethnic and religious affiliation, political beliefs, physical or mental limitations and/or cognitive impairments and life circumstances (e.g. teenage pregnancy).
- Be aware of the difference in power between adults and children and avoid any abuse that may arise from such a situation.
- Avoid situations that could put them in a sensitive and compromising position: strive to be in the company of at least one other adult when working with children or being visible to others when with children, unless it is an intervention that requires privacy (e.g. psychotherapy).
- Pay attention to the appropriateness of physical contact with the child and when it is considered acceptable, such as holding hands, hugging, or kissing. It is important to make sure that the child is feeling comfortable in these circumstances.

- Immediately report to coordinators any situation that could be object of misinterpretation by others; avoid behaving in a way that could be misinterpreted by third parties.
- Be aware that child abuse can also be perpetrated by peers; try to avoid putting children in risky situations with their peers, such as mixing older and younger individuals or vulnerable children without supervision.
- Ask permission from the children and their caregivers before taking photographs of them and using their image; be very clear and transparent about the use of those images; make sure the faces or other characteristics aren't visible.

Employees, associates and volunteers of the Centre who work with children should never:

- Hit or otherwise physically injure or physically abuse children.
- Develop unnecessary physical contact with children.
- Develop sexual contact with children.
- Behave in an inappropriate or sexually provocative manner.
- Develop such a relationship with children, which could be considered in any way exploitative or abusive.
- Act in a way that could put the child at risk of abuse.
- Use language expressions, make suggestions or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or in any way degrading.
- Fail to respond adequately to illegal, dangerous or violent behaviour children.
- Fail to respond adequately to illegal, dangerous or violent behaviour of parents/guardians towards children.
- Behave in a way that embarrasses, humiliates, belittles or degrades children, or otherwise engage in any form of emotional abuse.
- Discriminate, treat or favour certain children differently, excluding another.
- Publish photos or videos of children attending workshops for promoting the activities of the Centre without the informed consent of their parents.
- Expose children to inappropriate content that may cause emotional distress harm, such as violence or pornography.
- Exhibit and instruct children on the exploitation of child labour.
- Neglect children by depriving them of appropriate care and disrespect their needs.
- Participate in any dangerous, illegal or abusive behaviour towards children.
- Do things for children when it comes to children being able to do things on their own (e.g. dressing, homework writing).
- Ignore the child's expressive concern about harm being caused to them.
- Be alone with the children and invisible from others for an excessive amount of time, including in a car, in your home/or the home of a child; make contact with children that is not under supervision/seen by another staff member.

Recruitment process for volunteers, group workshop leaders and staff

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Volunteers, group leaders and staff who intend to work with children are checked for their criminal background. They are obliged to deliver a proof of not being criminally prosecuted. On top of that, they are being interviewed to check if they have the necessary competencies and knowledge to work with children. Background check of each volunteer, group workshop leader or employee is made.

Group workshop leaders are educated to work with parents and children through different programs of the Centre for which they receive a certificate.

Following number of staff or volunteers is recommended depending on the number of children:

For a group of 7 children aged 2 to 7 it is recommended to have 2 group leaders/2 volunteers/1 group leader and 1 volunteer. This number can vary depending on the situation and the activity. Therefore, it is important to assess the situation, activity and risk management to decide on the final number of group leaders/volunteers.

Partner organization

The Centre asks of any partner organization the get acquainted with the Policy as well to oblige to act accordingly to the values of the Policy. Partners have a possibility to download the Policy and to get possible guidance and support in implementing it.

Procedure for dealing with an abuse charge

When there is an allegation of abuse, the volunteer/associate/group leader, or the person in charge of the program/project has a duty to investigate.

If the allegation is found to be substantiated by evidence, several options are available. These include:

- Talk to the volunteer/associate/group leader concerned with a warning about future behaviour
- Remove this volunteer/associate/group leader from the program.

The person working with children, i.e. the person in charge of carrying out the activities, will have to make a decision on informing the parents or guardians depending on the nature of the behaviour.

A complete record of allegations and investigations should be recorded, reported to a superior, and kept in a safe place.

Sanctions

Failure to comply with the Centre's policies and procedures may result in the following sanctions:

- Disciplinary proceedings against employees of the Centre. Disciplinary proceedings should be in force and included in accordance with the applicable Labour Law.
- Contracts will be terminated with partner organizations as well as persons employed as external associates or advisors who do not respect the standard and principles of work of the Centre.

- Opportunities for volunteering will be withdrawn for volunteers who do not adhere to the policies and procedures of the Centre.

To ensure the implementation of the child protection standards, it is necessary that:

- Employees, associates and volunteers of the Centre are introduced to the Child Protection Policy at the organization level.
- Employees, associates and volunteers, by signing the contract (contract of employment, service contract, copyright and/or voluntary agreement), have the obligation to comply with the Standards of Treatment of Children with which they are acquainted when signing the Contract.
- The recruitment process, both for employees and volunteers of the Centre, include the suitability check.
- We work in partnership with parents/guardians and/or other specialists to ensure the protection of children.
- In cases of suspected violation of children's rights, physical and emotional violence, sexual abuse, neglect, neglected behaviour, abuse or exploitation of the child, Centre's employees are obliged to initiate proceedings to protect the rights of the child.
- The procedure for the protection of the child's rights involves reporting the suspicion to the head of the office and to the program leaders, who then act under the law and report the case to the legal institutions. If the suspect concerns an employee, associate or volunteer of the Centre, the head of the office and the program leader will investigate, take disciplinary measures and report the case to the legal institutions in accordance with the legal provisions. Until the completion of the internal investigation and/or investigation of the legal authorities, the suspect will not be able to work with the children. Upon completion of the proceedings, if the suspect is not released from suspicion, disciplinary measures will be imposed in accordance with the severity of the offense: the warning or dissolution of the contract with the Centre. In the case of confirmed violation of children's rights of co-operating or partner organizations, the Centre will terminate that co-operation or partnership.
- Employees of the Centre are obliged to provide documentation to the police and provide information on the violation of the child's rights.

Important resources on child protection arrangements

Legal framework:

This Policy has been developed in accordance with the legal guidelines and documents for the protection of children's rights:

- UN Convention on Rights of the Child

- Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, 2012
- Law of personal data protection, 2003 (NN 103/03, 118/06, 41/08, 130/11, 106/12)
- Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, 1990 (NN 56/90, 135/97, 8/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10, 05/14)
- Ethical code of research with children, 2003
- Code of ethics of psychological activity, 2005
- The Law on Protection from Domestic Violence (NN 137/09, 14/10, 60/10)
- Protocol on the Treatment of Sexual Violence, 2014
- Protocol on Treatment of Domestic Violence, 2004
- Protocol on the Treatment of Violence between Children and Youth, 2004
- Protocol on the Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014

