



## **Children's Future International Child Protection Policy**

**Policy Area:** Child Protection Policy

**Policy Ref:** CFI-CCP

**Title of Policy:** Children's Future International Child Protection Policy

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**Approved By:** Patrice Davison, Executive Director

### **I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

Child abuse happens in all societies throughout the world. The child abusers can be anyone, including those who work with or care for children.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that:

- All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation.
- Everybody has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children.
- The duty bearers are accountable to eradicate child abuse.

Based on the above guiding context and principles, Children's Future is obliged and committed to ensuring that children involved with its programs are protected from any form of abuse. Children's Future aims to provide a safe and friendly environment where children can develop and grow in a healthy way. This Policy will help protect both the child from abuse and the adult from false accusation.

The policy aims to foster a community of Children's Future children, families, staff, volunteers, and visitors who have respectful, loving, and appropriate relationships with each other, based on clear expectations and commitments to the safety and well-being of everyone involved, especially children.

No policy can anticipate or plan for every circumstance that may arise, especially in the context of child protection in Cambodia. When circumstances arise that are not explicitly outlined here, Children's Future leadership and associates should make judgments about child protection based on Children's Future's core values:

- a. Love every child equally
- b. Treat every child and adult with respect and compassion

- c. Help others whenever you can
- d. Work hard and be a dependable part of the CFI family
- e. Take initiative and be accountable for your actions
- f. Communicate openly
- g. Be honest and have fun
- h. Learn and grow together

This policy should be read in conjunction with CFI's PSEA policy and Code of Conduct.

## II. KEY DEFINITIONS

**A child** means every human being below the age of eighteen years. In case the age is not clearly known, in the context of this Child Protection Policy a child means any child or young adult who is using Children's Future services.

**Child abuse** means physical, sexual or mental harm or neglect caused to a child.

**Child Protection Policy** is a statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to safeguard children from harm and makes clear to all what is required in relation to the protection of children. It helps to create a safe and positive environment for children and shows that the organization is taking its duty of care seriously. This policy is reviewed yearly by CPOs, directors and other staff. A child protection training will be provided to each new employee and current staff re-trained each year.

## III. CHILDREN'S FUTURE STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

As an organization working with children from very poor and challenging backgrounds, Children's Future's first priority is the safety and well-being of the children under its care. Children's Future is committed to a strict child protection policy to ensure children are not exposed to abuse, exploitation, violence or neglect. Children's Future is committed to:

- Respecting the rights and dignity of the children, families, and communities with whom we work by always acting according to the best interest of children.
- Actively preventing child abuse.
- Taking positive action to prevent child abusers from becoming involved with CFI in any way and take stringent measures against any CFI associate who commits child abuse.

The policy conforms to the general principles of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child as follows:

**Best Interests of the Child:** The best interests of the child will be CFI's primary consideration. All decisions and actions concerning a child will serve the best interests of the child. When weighing alternatives, CFI will seek to ensure that the final decision or action arrived at will be that in which the child receives the maximum benefit possible. CFI will at all times consider the impact a decision or action will have on the child and ensure the positive impacts outweigh any negative impacts.

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**Non-Discrimination:** Children's Future International will enforce a policy of non-discrimination at all times and all children will be treated with respect and love equally.

**Participation and Self-Determination:** CFI abides by the principle that a child has the right to have his or her views taken into account in accordance with their age and development in major decisions affecting their life. They will be given the opportunity to express their ideas and views and be heard on matters affecting them. CFI will in all cases give serious consideration to the child's wishes (and those of their legal guardians where appropriate) throughout the decision-making process. All children have the right to self-determination.

In general, in order to ensure the above commitment, CFI is committed to upholding:

- The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child
- Cambodian Constitution
- The Cambodian current and future laws and tools on child rights
- Positive traditional practice

#### **A. Policy Implementers and Implementation**

This policy applies to all associates of Children's Future International: employees, volunteers, interns, prospective employees, counterparts, consultants, contractors, partner organization members and visitors. Henceforth, the term "CFI associates" will be used to represent these groups, for which the Policy is relevant and applicable.

CFI will have a team of Child Protection Officers (CPOs), which is led by the Technical Director (or other designee, as assigned by the Executive Director). CPOs are responsible for ensuring that the Child Protection Policy is disseminated and understood by all CFI associates and that they each acknowledge their receipt of and responsibilities under the policy. CPOs will include both female and male representatives to ensure all children have a someone of their same gender to go to should they wish to raise an issue.

All CFI associates will monitor risks to children. CFI management and CPOs will advise and assist all CFI associates in the implementation of the policy and help make suggestions to change the Child Protection Policy. The Technical Director and/or Executive Director will ultimately be responsible for the effective implementation of the Child Protection Policy.

Education and dissemination of the Child Protection policy is a large part of its implementation. This includes reaching staff, community members, and children themselves. CFI will initiate an open culture, encouraging opportunities for staff, children or community members to raise concerns, question, discuss, provide feedback, and learn about child protection issues. CFI has both internal and external feedback boxes available for anonymous concerns, suggestions, or positive feedback to be raised; these boxes are checked monthly.

All CFI associates and local communities should be provided with opportunities to learn about how to safeguard children, to recognize and respond to concerns about child abuse. Appropriate literature regarding how to report an incident and child-safe information will be made available to Children's Future International Child Protection Policy - Updated December 2022

CFI children, community members and staff. CFI will provide regular training and awareness raising regarding child protection to children. When possible, children will be educated in self-protection from physical and sexual abuse. Children will be taught that they have a right to do something if an adult or another young person behaves or talks to them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable or in danger, and to trust and act on their instincts, and how to report any issues to get help should they arise.

#### ***B. Personnel, Recruitment, Hiring, and Human Resources Responsibilities***

During recruitment and onboarding, CFI will ensure that candidates are aware of Child Protection issues and screen for people who are unsuitable to work at CFI. To do so, CFI will implement the following:

1. All vacancy announcements will make clear that CFI is committed to child protection and that the prospective employees' commitment to child protection is a condition of employment.
2. All prospective CFI associates will be informed of CFI's Child Protection Policy at the start of the recruiting process.
3. Screening of applicants will include: a written application, personal interviews ( including behavior based interview questions specific to child protection), a copy of a passport/ID card, police checks and two verbal reference checks (one must be current employer). Applicants will be asked about previous work experience with children.
4. Where possible and permissible according to local law, applicants for all positions are requested to give permission for a criminal record or police check, to identify any convictions or charges related to child abuse or other relevant offences. Expatriates will be subject to the same background checks, as possible and permissible by law in their home countries. (Currently, police checks are not feasible for Khmer staff in Cambodia; however, whenever it is practical, CFI will follow it.) All Khmer staff will be required to submit a Behaviour Certificate prior to starting employment. Any concern for Child Protection raised during a background check will make the candidate ineligible to employment at CFI.
5. During a new CFI associate's onboarding/orientation, a CPO will walk through the Child Protection Policy with them, answer any questions, and ensure they understand the policy prior to signing the Code of Conduct in another document. Signed copies of their acknowledgement are kept in the personnel file.

#### ***C. Short-term Visitors to Children's Future Premises***

All visitors must follow CFI's Child Protection Policy and Visitor Policy (See visitor policy for full explanation)

### **IV. CHILD PROTECTION CODE OF CONDUCT**

All CFI associates must sign the Code of Conduct, which summarizes all CFI policies that an employee is expected to follow, including the Child Protection Policy.

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Specifically, CFI employees must follow the following behaviors while interacting with children. This code is primarily designed to protect children, but will also protect personnel from false accusations of inappropriate behavior or abuse of said children.

1. No child is to be taken on a bicycle, motorbike, tuk-tuk or car by CFI associates without prior approval from the Technical Director/CPO. If it is necessary for a staff member to transport a child (e.g. for medical treatment), they must get explicit and prior permission from the Technical Director/CPOs or senior management and may travel nowhere other than the agreed upon location.
2. No child is to be taken to any CFI associate's home, guesthouse, hotel or accommodation, except in extraordinary circumstances with prior approval from the CPO or Executive Director. Exceptions may be made for CFI associates who serve as foster parents.
3. No CFI associate is permitted to socialize/communicate with children outside of the CFI premises, except a friendly hello. Prior permission must be sought from the Technical Director/CPO for any contact with the children outside of the CFI center or outside of agreed-upon working hours and days. Communication which is not permitted includes but is not limited to: phone calls, visits, letters, emails, chat on social media, gifts. If a child initiates communication with a CFI associate, the Technical Director/CPO should be informed immediately. Drawings or emergency calls/messages sent to their case worker are permitted.
4. No CFI associate is permitted to take any child to a café, restaurant or buy them food, unless permission has expressly been given by the CFI Executive Director or CPO. If a child is obviously hungry, then the Technical Director/CPO, or a senior staff member are to be informed immediately.
5. CFI associates may not act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children or perpetrate any form of emotional abuse.
6. CFI associates must use appropriate language, actions and behavior with children at all times. Extra care should be given to protecting the reputation of both female children and female staff by ensuring that language and behavior at all times reflect appropriate male-female relationships, which are respectful of and in line with Cambodian culture and customs.
7. CFI associates may not hire any of the CFI children to do domestic work or to perform other work as per Cambodian labor laws.
8. CFI associates must take extreme care when interacting physically with children. It is strictly prohibited to fondle, hold, kiss, intimately hug or touch minors in an inappropriate or culturally insensitive way. Under no circumstances should any physical contact be or have the appearance of being sexual in any way. Male staff should be particularly attentive to the risks of physically interacting with female students, and should avoid physical touch with older female students. CFI associates may use physical touch thoughtfully to build trust or comfort a student, such as with a pat on the back or a brief hug, however verbal consent should always be sought first. Should any touch be required (medical purpose, safety, etc), adults should first seek the verbal consent of the child and never touch the child in a way that might make them uncomfortable.
9. CFI does not tolerate inappropriate physical force when associates are dealing with children or among children. This includes, but is not limited to: pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping, pinching or any other action that could cause fear, intimidation or distress.

10. CFI associates are responsible for their actions and reactions to children at all times. They should be aware that they might work with children who may, because of the circumstances and abuse they have experienced, use a relationship with an adult to obtain special attention. The adult is always considered responsible for his or her actions regardless of how a child behaves towards them. Staff should be alert to such behavior and avoid being placed in a compromising or vulnerable position. Any advances of this nature, whether emotional or sexual, should be reported immediately to the Technical Director/CPO.
11. Wherever possible and practical, staff should implement the “two-adult” rule, whereby two or more adults supervise all activities with children. If for any reason a private conversation or counseling session is warranted with a child, another adult must be within visual contact.
12. If it is necessary to have a personal conversation or to conduct a counseling session with one or several girls, it is always preferred that this be done by a female staff. If it is necessary for one or more male staff to do so, there must be at least one female staff member present at all times.
13. Conversations between children and staff about children’s personal issues (excluding issues related to violence and/or lack of safety) should be briefly recorded on forms approved by the CPO. These conversations are not confidential (they may always be shared at the request of the CPO and/or social work staff) and should never be presented to children as such. These staff members may not provide counseling, but can listen to and encourage children. Any conversation that references violence, abuse, or makes a staff member concerned for a child’s safety must be immediately reported to the CPO. At the discretion of the CPO, information about children’s home lives or backgrounds may be shared with other staff at Children’s Future International, if the CPO believes that such information will enable staff to provide or advocate for better care for a particular child.
14. If a CFI associate comes across any CFI child that is visibly distressed, afraid, upset, crying, etc., she/he must report it to the health care coordinator, child’s Social Worker or CPO immediately, so that appropriate support can be given to the child. Such circumstances might include, but is not limited to:
  - a. A caretaker or close relative (parent, sibling, etc.) being convicted of an offense
  - b. A sibling being sent/taken away (by parent/ caretaker or third party)
  - c. The child engaging in potentially dangerous activities
  - d. The child dressing inappropriately or displaying dangerous or inappropriate behavior
  - e. The child being hurt in any manner
  - f. Abandonment by caretaker
  - g. Death or serious illness of a parent, caretaker or close relative
15. A CFI staff member must accompany a visitor or non-staff member the entire time the visitor is on CFI premises.
16. As stated in the PSEA policy, CFI associates must never engage children in any form of sexual intercourse or sexual activity, including paying for sexual services. Any violation of the PSEA policy, including concerns or allegations of child exploitation and abuse must be reported immediately in accordance with PSEA policy.
17. Immediately disclose all charges, convictions and other outcomes of an offense that relates to child exploitation and abuse, including those under traditional law, at any time.
18. Inappropriate conduct towards children, including failure to follow the behavior standards stated above, is grounds for discipline, up to and including dismissal from employment,

termination of the Volunteer Terms of Agreement, and/or police notification and legal action.

19. Any circumstance or situation relating to child safety that is not explicitly addressed in this policy should be immediately referred to a CPO.

*Code of Conduct Relating to Media and Communications (See IT policy)*

20. All communications regarding CFI children must ensure that the protection, privacy, dignity and best interests of the child are paramount.

21. CFI associates must obtain receipt of informed consent of the child and his/her caretaker before a recording, photograph or image is taken and its intended use(s) explained. Consent may be withdrawn at any time. Consent forms will be maintained by the case worker and/or Communications Officer.

22. CFI staff may only photograph/video children if they are participating in an activity and photos/videos must always be appropriate (fully clothed, appropriate poses, appropriate consent from the children). Staff should not take photos/videos of children alone (must photograph with their peers, parents, siblings, etc.). Any photographs/videos may not be shared externally (never posted on social media, never shared through messages) but may be shared internally (to director's team for donor reporting, to Communications Officer). Once the photo/video has been shared internally, it should be deleted from the staff member's phone.

23. CFI associates must ensure that children are adequately clothed in photographs or images taken of them and not in poses that could be interpreted as sexually suggestive. CFI should never publish sexually explicit photographs or videos.

CFI associates should not publish photos/videos of CFI children on their social media without explicit permission from CPO/TD/ED and should never publish identifiable photos/videos of CFI children on their personal social media.

24. CFI associates must never use the real names of vulnerable children in stories or in photo captions and it should be indicated that the children's names have been changed. Case study photos of vulnerable children should be unidentifiable (faces blurred or backs of heads, only case worker, etc).

## **V. CHILD ABUSE OR SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE**

### **A. *Identifying and Investigating Abuse or Suspected Abuse***

As outlined in the PSEA policy, CFI takes child abuse very seriously. Many children have experienced abuse of some form in their home environment and CFI aims to provide a safe and protected place for children to call their own. Child abuse in any form, including physical, emotional or sexual abuse is a serious offense threatens the well-being and reputation of the child, the accused perpetrator , and if it is a CFI associate, CFI itself. Any violations of this type will be prosecuted to the full extent of law. All CFI staff will be trained to identify and report any suspicious behavior, including of exploitation or abuse, to ensure child abusers are not at CFI.

As per PSEA policy, any person who has knowledge of, suspects, or has witnessed a potential child protection issue involving CFI associates should immediately (within 12 hours) contact the Technical Director/CPO and verbally report the incident or suspicion in order to allow for early Children's Future International Child Protection Policy - Updated December 2022

intervention and a prompt investigation. This verbal report should be followed by a written statement, within the next 12 hours using the form in the PSEA policy. A CFI associate's failure to report suspected child abuse or misconduct may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. A staff who, in good faith, reports a potential violation of the Child Protection or PSEA policy, will be protected from retaliation by CFI's Whistleblower policy. This is to ensure that CFI creates a culture of reporting where staff feel safe and supported.

The investigation and response by CFI is explained at detail in the PSEA policy and includes reporting to the relevant authorities, an internal and/or external investigation as required, and opportunity for the accused to respond.

The rights and welfare of the child is of prime importance to CFI and therefore any investigation will aim to respect the privacy and safety of the child and to make the investigation as child friendly as possible. Special consideration will be made to the trauma a child may have experienced and CFI will make every effort to ensure the child must only recount the incident as few times as possible.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the associate, the child and/or his/her family, as appropriate, should be informed of concerns or allegations, the results of the investigation and what corrective action, if any, will be taken.

If abuse is proven by the investigation, every effort will be made to assist the child in coping with any physical or emotional trauma he/she may be experiencing. This may include medical treatment, psychological counseling or any other form of assistance deemed necessary and appropriate.

If the investigation concludes that child abuse has occurred which is not subject to criminal prosecution, staff will be subject to disciplinary action within CFI, up to and including dismissal. If the investigation concludes that abuse has occurred which is the subject to criminal prosecution according to national laws, all findings will be reported to the relevant national police authorities and full cooperation afforded them during an external investigation. If the accused is an expatriate, the relevant law enforcement authorities will also be informed with due regard given to the potential for extraterritorial proceedings by the expatriate's country of origin.

In the event an allegation is proven to be untrue, or even fabricated, appropriate steps will be taken for follow-up with the person who has been accused, the child, and the person who reported the incident. Efforts will be made to provide assistance to an associate accused of abuse with children, including counseling and other appropriate forms of support. Also, CFI will disclose such information as requested by police, a prospective employer, etc. Such disclosures will be made in accordance with applicable law and / or customs.

The media may become involved when a concern or allegation is raised within CFI. Only the Executive Director or President of the Board of Directors will liaise with the media. The Executive Director or President of the Board of Directors will report the incident to relevant donors/stakeholders once the investigation has been concluded.