

# Child Protection Policy of The Touching Lives Trust



The Touching Lives Trust (Mutare, Zimbabwe) is committed to creating and maintaining a caring and protective environment which promotes its core values, and prevents and addresses child abuse and exploitation. We strongly condemn all forms of child abuse and exploitation, whether from within or outside of our organization, and always respond to any case of proven, alleged or attempted abuse. Efforts ensure that methods are in place to raise awareness, aid prevention, encourage reporting and facilitate response. They range from actions such as training and counseling to measures such as disciplinary actions of all people concerned.

***This policy is based vision, mission and values.***

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Children's Act of Zimbabwe

The Touching Lives Trust works in accordance with the UNCRC and Child Protection Society (CPS). The best interest of the child is our primary consideration. Every child has the right to develop to his or her full potential, to quality education, participation and non-discrimination. Everybody has the responsibility to protect children from all forms of abuse, abandonment, exploitation, violence and discrimination. In this policy, specific attention is focused on internal mechanisms to prevent and respond to child abuse within the The Touching Lives Trust.

## Introduction

***This policy document is binding for all voluntary and employed staff of The The Touching Lives Trust.***

Every child is potentially at risk of abuse and exploitation. Some girls or boys may be more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, due to various forms of discrimination and marginalization relating to their socio-economic status, gender, disability, ethnicity or living situation. Therefore it is crucial that every person connected with The Touching Lives Trust understands child abuse, as well as his or her own role and responsibilities in protecting children.

Any definition of child abuse first requires a definition of the child. According to Zimbabwean law a child is "a person below the age of 18 years."

We recognize that child abuse and exploitation takes place throughout the country. In order to prevent and respond to child abuse, it is crucial that we as an organization reach a common understanding as to what child abuse is and in which circumstances our policies and procedures apply.

It is often the case that the abuser is a person close to the child and whom the child trusts. Through this policy we want to positively influence the practices of children and staff within The Touching Lives Trust as well anyone who may come in regular contact with The Touching Lives Trust further recognizes the importance of children's participation, empowering girls and boys to speak up against all forms of abuse, acting as agents of self-protection and the protection of their peers.

## Goals of the Child Protection Policy

This policy aims to:

1. Prevent cases of child abuse and reduce the number of incidents (child-to-child, adult-to-child)
2. Make children aware of their rights and their active role in child protection
3. Inform children, staff, board members, family and community members, volunteers and partners (sponsors, donors, journalists, governmental authorities, etc) about the Child Protection Act and related procedures (awareness, prevention, reporting, responding)
4. Encourage staff directly involved with children to apply the skills needed to contribute to each child's development and protection
5. Ensure that all staff have the working conditions needed to contribute to each child's development and protection
6. Foster open and honest discussions on child abuse in meetings and workshops among all stakeholders (children, young adults, administration, staff, board members, teachers, maintenance and security staff, etc)
7. Put in place fair, secure and transparent reporting channels in all types of programs that guarantee the right of the children and staff to be heard
8. Form an active network of protection so that all children and adults in our organization are safe and protected

## Definition of Child Abuse

The Touching Lives Trust classifies abuse into four main categories which are:

1. Physical Abuse
2. Sexual Abuse
3. Neglect and Negligent Treatment
4. Emotional Abuse

**Physical abuse** is the actual or potential physical harm caused by an action or lack of action, which is reasonably within the control of the person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. Physical abuse may involve hitting, spanking, shaming, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning and suffocating. It can also mean causing physical harm to a child by fabricating the symptoms of, or deliberately causing, ill health to a child. The incidents may be single or repeated.

**Sexual abuse** is evidenced by an activity between a child and an adult or another child who, by age or development, is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. The activity is intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. Child sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact and penetrative or non-penetrative acts. This may also include involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

**Neglect and negligent treatment** is the inattention or omission on the part of the caregiver to provide for the development of the child in: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions, in the context of resources reasonably available to the caretakers and which causes, or as a high probability of causing, harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is feasible.

**Emotional abuse** is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child that adversely affects his or her self-perception and development. It may involve conveying to the child that he or she is worthless, unloved, and inadequate, or there only to meet the needs of another person. It may also take the form of imposing inappropriate expectations upon the child. Acts include restricting movement, threatening, scaring, discriminating, scape-goating, corrupting, ridiculing, degrading, bullying, humiliating, or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

### **Specific Considerations:**

#### **Child-to-Child Abuse**

Allegations or concerns regarding the abuse of a child by another child need to be responded to with particular sensitivity; nevertheless, they have to be dealt with through the child protection procedures. All work with young people who have committed abuse requires an effective approach which ensures the protection of all affected, while at the same time supporting the young person in challenging and changing their behavior. Any such approach requires:

The recognition that a child who has abused another child differs significantly from adults who have committed similar offences, as the child is not fully aware of why he or she has committed abuse and what the consequences are.

#### **Violation of Children's Privacy**

The protection of a child's privacy refers to private data of the child as well as pictures, texts, films etc. about children which are produced for publicity purposes. Any information about a child's history, medical condition and family background has to be stored carefully in the offices of The Touching Lives Trust administration. These files are to be handled confidentially and with discretion.

Children and even their caregivers might not always be aware of a specific form of emotional abuse which might occur in fundraising, public relations or communication. A child's privacy is, for instance, violated by the production of unauthorized publicity material (pictures, films, text etc) featuring the boy or girl, or by presenting sensitive information within a context that reveals the child's identity.

The Touching Lives Trust respects the children's right to privacy. All staff and external partners (volunteers and donors) involved in spreading information on children and in creating and distributing publicity material act according to the following guidelines:

1. We do not actively ask children to do or say anything that might make them feel displaced as “objects of pity”
2. We handle children’s names carefully, especially in connection with sensitive information (family background, their medical condition, disability or negative behavior).
3. We act with caution when it comes to combining textual and visual information whenever a text includes sensitive information about a child and whenever a photo or video shows sensitive aspects of a child’s life and reveals his/her identity.

## **Key Parts of This Policy**

1. Awareness - raise awareness of child abuse and its risks
2. Prevention - provide guidance on how to safeguard children from abuse
3. Reporting - set up and adhere to a clear and simple reporting procedure
4. Responding - ensure clear action is taken when child abuse is suspected or reported

### **Awareness:**

The development of an open and responsive culture at The Touching Lives Trust and within the community is essential for safeguarding children. We as an organization and as individual co-workers need the courage to break the silence and taboo of discussing child abuse. Through protected, clear and honest communication we give and receive both positive and critical feedback.

### **Prevention:**

To prevent child abuse we need to create and maintain an environment which promotes the core values of The Touching Lives Trust. The main focus is on implementing suitable recruitment approaches. Combined with this, it is essential that we listen carefully to children, take their views seriously, encourage them to participate in discussions on child protection issues, and offer them the opportunity to build trusting relationships.

1. All (voluntary) staff members receive adequate training and sign a letter confirming their understanding of, and commitment to, our child protection policy.
2. Child protection is a regular topic in all training programs.
3. Through training and the sharing of experiences, we learn the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.
4. Children are enabled to assume roles in their own development and protection. They are encouraged to participate in all matters affecting their lives and are involved in discussions on their rights. Children discuss what acceptable and unacceptable behavior is and what they can do if they feel something is not right.
5. Each child is offered individual development opportunities tailored to his or her needs and potential. Staff members receive training and support to put child development activities into action.
6. All (voluntary) staff members have access to counseling services when needed.

**Reporting:**

We take all concerns raised seriously and take appropriate action. Quick and transparent measures that take legal responsibilities into account should be undertaken.

1. A child protection team (2 to 3 persons) is elected.
2. Confidentiality is of utmost importance when dealing with cases of abuse; information is to be handled with sensitivity. The child or any other person who gives information regarding child abuse must be made aware that if he or she reports the case, information about the alleged abuse will be shared only with those authorized to have access to this information, which will be the child protection team.
3. Every staff member is obliged to immediately provide any information he or she has regarding a possible case of child abuse to a member of the child protection team.
4. Children, staff and other adults who make reports are supported and protected. A person accused of child abuse is given a fair hearing.

**Responding:**

All forms of child abuse are taken seriously, without exception at The Touching Lives Trust are responded to according to the gravity of the offense. We ensure that there is always a response, regardless of whether the abuse committed is considered large or small. By responding we guarantee that a transparent and fair procedure is followed, so that nobody is falsely convicted and the rights of everyone involved are protected.

1. In all cases of suspected or proven child abuse or neglect, the focus is placed on safeguarding and protecting the child. At the same time, healing measures are provided and the protection of all persons involved is guaranteed. The affected persons receive the necessary counseling and support.
2. In the investigation of a child abuse incident an external expert and a representative from the Child Protection Society must be involved.
3. In all abuse cases, an internal investigation is carried out by a neutral person who is not involved in the case. This person presents the findings of the investigation to the child protection team, which makes a decision on further steps.
4. The response to child-to-child abuse focuses on what is best for the development and protection of all children involved in such a case.
5. If abuse is committed by an adult, depending on the level of abuse, legal steps are taken in accordance with the reporting and responding system that defines the levels of responding in each individual case. Where necessary, legal assistance is provided.
6. There is clear leadership, with one person responsible for handling information and internal and external communication regarding child abuse incidents at The Touching Lives Trust. This person is supported by the child protection team.
7. Cases are reported to child welfare authorities.
8. Written records of all reported abuse cases and their conclusions are kept at the office in the child's individual file.