



CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

Protecting children from the inside out: Understanding child safeguarding through the lens of 'duty of care'

SUMMARY

While child protection remains a hot button issue on all development agendas worldwide, child safeguarding has equally gained prominence, challenging organizations, the frontline guardians, ironically, to do more internally to ensure the entity, its staff, partners and programmes are equally protecting children.

Keywords: Duty of care, child safeguarding, standards, grooming, child-safe organizations

An overview of child safeguarding

Globally, child protection is well-understood as the individual and collective interventions and programmes designed to protect children; on the other hand, child safeguarding refers to internal policies and measures organizations employ to ensure employees, representatives and programming 'do no harm' and prioritize the safety of children.

Although the first safeguarding standards were launched more than a decade ago by a coalition of non-profits (*Keeping Children Safe*), the increasing incidences of child abuse by nonprofits, aid agencies and poorly designed programmes that harm rather than promote the well-being of the child, have escalated child safeguarding to the global agenda. This requires deliberate and proactive efforts around creating child-safe organizations.

Children, by nature are vulnerable due to their physical stature, limited agency in affairs that concern them, subject to authority, cultural beliefs, dependency on adults, easily trusting and possessing only partial understanding and knowledge of the world in which they live, all of which make them susceptible to abuse, violence, exploitation and denial of even the most basic rights.

Charity begins at home: Key tenets of child safeguarding

There is now consensus that before organizations look outward to protect children, the duty of care lies with them to start inward to mitigate any risks they may be posing to children through their own employees or their activities. Organizational responsibility is at the core of any child safeguarding plan requiring commitment from all staff and awareness of key risk factors to children.

Box 1: 5Ws and H to child safeguarding in your organization

1. **Where** is harm more likely to occur? Closed, private spaces within an organization? Do we have a two adults rule?
2. **When?** Community events where there are no provisions for children so children are left alone? What time of day do we interact with children?
3. **Who?** Staff trusted by the children who 'groom' and take advantage of the child?
4. **What** do we do that poses risk? Gifts, emotional support, scholastic materials so the child feels indebted to project staff? How do we ensure transparency and avoid misinterpretation when giving?
5. **Why?** Can we justify why we do things the way we do them even though they are risky and not necessarily better?
6. **How** can we change to manage risk? Code of conduct, staff training, background checks during recruitment

Before you launch a programme, intervention, or activity use a risk checklist

- Identify potential sources of harm. Will your programmes have an unintended consequence that puts children in danger even though they may not be the direct beneficiaries of your interventions?
- Are the activities you are engaging children in acceptable to the community?
- How do you plan to capture and use media that includes children, for example photographs, video, audio? How do you provide for informed consent?
- How do you minimise or reduce harm from staff, volunteers and others who interact with children? What policies do you have in place?
- How do you ensure that the partners you work with are mindful of child safeguarding and are taking measures to enforce it?
- Do you have mechanisms for reporting and punishing child abuse? Are internal stakeholders aware of them?

Benefits of having child safeguarding standards

- Standards minimize risk to children and lead to greater levels of protection. It also means that there is greater employee and partner awareness around safeguarding which reduces the likelihood of inappropriate behaviour.
- Standards provide clear guidelines which allows for more conscientiousness during programme design to create more child-friendly interventions.
- Building and preserving organizational reputation requires implementing industry standards that become organizational culture which is observed by external stakeholders.
- For nonprofits looking to expand their funding base, join consortiums or partner with larger organizations, having child safeguarding standards is evidence of your level of competence, credibility and concern for children, positioning you above those organizations that do not have those standards.

Box 2: Sources of information on child safeguarding standards

- *The Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS), 2012, CPWG;*
- *The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, 2010, HAP International*
- *The Sphere Handbook - Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, 2011, Sphere Project*
- *Code of Good Practice in the management and support of aid personnel, 2003, People in Aid*

Further Reading

Child Safeguarding Standards and how to implement them (www.keepingchildrensafe.org)
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/standards_child_protection_kcsc_en_1.pdf

Trocaire's Child Safeguarding Policy- International Programmes
https://dochas.ie/sites/default/files/Trocaire_Child_Safeguarding_Policy_International_Programmes_0.pdf

Understanding Child Safeguarding: A facilitators guide: Keeping Children Safe, 2014
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/understanding-child-safeguarding-facilitators-guide>

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