

UNITED WAY MUMBAI: CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

May 2018

The UN Convention on Rights of the Child (1989) defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body for the Convention, has encouraged States to review the age of majority if it is set below 18 and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18. In keeping with the UN CRC, United Way Mumbai also recognizes any person below the age of 18 years as a child. This includes school and college volunteers who may be assisting on implementation of our projects.

United Way Mumbai is committed to protecting children and their best interests. We acknowledge our duty to protect children from any harm or risk as a result of misconduct by our staff or volunteers, poor design and delivery of our programmes and operations and/or poor representation of children in our communication material. This requires all United Way Mumbai staff and volunteers to adhere to a code of conduct in any interactions with children and their caregivers or while representing children in any manner through our work or communication material.

As part of our responsibility to children and their protection, we commit to the following **guidelines**–

- All staff and volunteers will be aware of situations which may present risks and manage and mitigate these in designing or implementing any programme for children.
- All staff interacting with children will be adequately trained and educated on appropriate behavior and risks.
- Any concerns of abuse or threat to safety raised by a child or his/her caregiver will be taken seriously, attended to promptly and reported to the CEO for determining further action.
- United Way Mumbai will have a zero tolerance policy for abusive behavior of any kind and any person found engaging in such behavior will be reported to relevant authorities.
- Our programmes will not discriminate against any child.
- Our communication material, proposals, reports or any other literature will ensure safety and dignity of children is not compromised in any manner.
- All children will be treated with respect, their voices will be heard and their best interests will be given paramount importance.

While this is not an exhaustive list of guidelines, all staff and volunteers are expected to adhere to these and the basic principles of respect, safety and dignity of all persons.

To translate these guidelines into actions, the following processes are to be followed:

I. RECRUITMENT

i. Reference checks

All candidates selected for placement at United Way Mumbai will have to provide two professional references. In the case of freshers, the candidate may share references of professors or internship supervisors. The Department Head responsible for hiring of this position will ensure a telephonic reference check is done prior to confirmation of appointment. For all positions, the department head will inquire on the following:

Did the candidate have any direct or indirect engagement with children as part of their work?

What were your observations of the candidate's approach and behavior towards children?

Do you have any reason for concern towards this candidate potentially associating with / being responsible for children as part of their work?

In case of positions being filled by recruitment agencies or HR specialists, these questions may be shared with the recruiter by the Admin Supervisor and reference check may be completed by them.

In the event of any negative responses to the reference check, the candidature will be reevaluated in consultation with the CEO.

ii. Interviews for positions engaging directly with children

Any candidates being considered for positions with potential for direct engagement with children will be evaluated on fitment and willingness to adhere to child protection guidelines. Some sample questions which the interviewer may consider are:

What is your prior experience, if any, in working with children?

What are some of the laws governing child protection in India?

Can you give an example of a situation concerning a child beneficiary which was difficult for you to handle? How did you address it?

What are your views on confidentiality when handling information about children? What information is it ok to disclose?

If you have to take a group of children out on a field trip, can you explain some of the child protection measures you would undertake?

If a candidate does not have prior work experience with children, similar questions may be posed with hypothetical scenarios to gauge the candidate's response.

The questions listed above are indicative and not exhaustive. The interviewer may elaborate on these until they are convinced that the candidate's approach and responses do not indicate an adverse attitude towards children and their protection.

iii. Induction

The Child Protection Policy would be shared by the Admin Supervisor with all new recruits within the first week of joining. The guidelines and self-declaration (Annexure 1) would be explained to them by their employee "buddy" within the first week of joining. Any questions concerns they may have would be clarified / addressed by the "buddy" and escalated to the Department Head as required. On completion of this exercise, the new recruit would be asked to sign the self-declaration (Annexure 1) and submit the same to the Admin Supervisor. The Admin Supervisor must ensure that a copy of each employee's self-declaration is maintained. This includes existing employees as well. An update of this self-declaration must be done on an annual basis similar to the UW Code of Ethics.

II. Training

a. Annual training

A training programme on child protection will be organized on an annual basis within the first quarter of each financial year. This will be conducted by an external expert from an agency such as UNICEF or any other reputed child protection agency. This training may cover laws, reporting mechanisms, ways of identifying red flags, etc. This training will be mandatory for all staff members.

Permission will be sought from the external expert to maintain a video recording of the session. This session will be screened for new employees as part of their induction in case of employees joining in the later part of the year.

b. On the job training

All employees engaging directly with children will be trained on the job by their supervisors. In case of new employees, any direct contact with children will be supervised for a period of 2 weeks by a senior colleague / supervisor.

III. Photography, Reports & Communication

a. Consent

Written consent of children and / or consent on behalf of the children given by the agency representing him/her will be sought prior to any photographs being taken. In the event that consent is not received, no photographs will be taken or used. The consent must mention the purpose and where the photographs may potentially be used (including United Way Mumbai's website, reports and social media).

b. Appearance of children in photographs

Photographs of children must in no way demean them, invade their privacy, show them in inappropriate state of dress or posture. They must also not create an impression of 'victimhood'. Our endeavor will be to showcase a balanced view of a child's circumstances without capitalizing on or emphasizing their challenging circumstance as a means of 'defining' them.

All employees and volunteers must acknowledge that while their intent of photographing and showcasing the children may be non-threatening and positive, any photograph in the public domain is open to misuse. It is therefore our responsibility to err on the side of caution and ensure respect and dignity of children is not compromised in any way by our actions.

c. Protection of identity

Our reports and communication must make every effort to protect the identity of the children and other beneficiaries and disclose the same only on a need to know basis. Names of children may be changed in reports that are in the public domain. Donor specific reports that require correct names, ages, schools or other identifying details of children to be shared, must be shared with a caution to the donor / recipient on maintaining confidentiality. Any information that may put the child at risk (such as identities of children in conflict with the law / child survivors of abuse / reports of counselling sessions, etc) must not be disclosed.

Staff members must not exchange personal information about themselves or seek personal information of the children beyond what is mandated by the project agreements or directions by the department heads.

d. Language and tone

Our reports and communication on children must maintain positive language, ensure non dramatization of a child's circumstances and be factually correct.

IV. Partnerships

All NGO partners / vendors interacting directly with children on behalf of UWM will be required to share their child protection policy with us or sign off indicating acceptance of our guidelines. This process must be repeated annually.

In the case of donors / corporate employees / visitors / board members / advisors interacting directly with children for a one time activity, an induction on our guidelines and expected conduct must be shared before each activity.

V. Reporting

a. Process for reporting any violation

All employees are obliged and mandated to report any observed risk to or violation of child protection measures and guidelines by any staff member / volunteer / board member / donor / partner / visitor to the CEO. This may be done in person or in writing. Based on the severity of the violation / risk, the CEO may decide to document the same and refer to the Child Protection Committee for further action or s/he may choose to address and rectify the situation directly.

b. Child Protection Committee

A three person Child Protection Committee will be set up and invited to intervene in the case of any violation. This Committee will comprise of the CEO/COO + an external child development / protection expert or practitioner + 1 Director (or higher) level employee of United Way Mumbai. In the case of violations reported against staff or volunteers, the Director should be of the same department as the staff / volunteer in question.

The committee will be expected to review the reported violation, interview concerned persons and propose a course of action to rectify / address the situation. They may recommend dismissal of employees in the case of severe violations. The committee would be advised to complete their investigation and report within one month. Pending their investigation, the staff member / volunteer in question must not be allowed to engage directly with children.

c. Zero tolerance policy for abuse of any kind

United Way Mumbai will have a zero tolerance policy for abusive behavior of any kind and any person found engaging in such behavior will be reported to relevant authorities

United Way Mumbai implements projects that involve direct work with children. In such cases, guidelines and SOPs are developed specific to those projects which each team member will have to adhere to. Such guidelines will need to be developed (if not already in place) by the department head along with the relevant team members with concurrence of the CEO.

Annexure 1:

Acceptance of United Way Mumbai's Child Protection Policy

I, _____(name of employee), have read and understood United Way Mumbai's Child Protection Policy. I commit to ensuring that my actions are in alignment with this policy and guidelines. I acknowledge that any violation of the policy may lead to disciplinary action, including termination of my appointment with United Way Mumbai with immediate effect.

Signed

Date