



ACORD

Child Protection Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

ACORD recognises that abuse of the vulnerable, whether poor, women or children is a world-wide phenomenon. One of ACORD's aims is to reduce vulnerability and to this end recognises the importance of having a child protection policy and works to create a safe environment for Children who benefit from ACORD programmes.

Concern for the safety and well-being of children is an important part of ACORD's work, and it is essential as part of this concern, that everyone recognises that all children have a right to protection from abuse, violence and exploitation.

It is never acceptable for a child to be abused and ACORD must take steps to prevent abuse wherever it can, by:-

- ◆ Avoiding situations where abuse is possible
- ◆ Raising awareness in all programmes to ensure that abuse is not occurring
- ◆ Responding to the needs of all children it comes into contact with whenever it suspects they are being abused.

It is crucial, therefore, that everyone connected with ACORD understands the problem of child abuse and their own role and responsibilities in protecting children and preventing abuse. This document sets out ACORD's policy on working with children and managing issues of child abuse.

The policy and guidance provided in this document applies to all ACORD staff, internationally appointed and nationally appointed staff, as well as to volunteers and other representative of ACORD. Conduct towards children outside the work context is also covered by the policy, where it gives rise to concern.

2. DEFINITION AND TERMS

Child abuse is a general term, used about situations where the child may experience harm, usually as the result of failure on the part of the parent or carer to ensure a reasonable standard of care and protection. It may include both actions and omissions on the part of the parent or carer and is normally categorised into four main forms – physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and neglect. It is often the case that a child discovered to be suffering one form of abuse will also be experiencing others.

The following four categories of abuse are universally found. The definitions given, however, are those employed in the UK and are offered here as a starting point and guide for others in exploring the nature that these different forms of abuse take in a local setting:

Physical abuse

The actual or likely physical injury to a child, or a failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child.

Neglect

Neglect is defined as the persistent or severe neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in a significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive. (NB: Neglect may be wilful or otherwise.)

ACORD, Development House, 56-64 Leonard Street, London, EC2A 4LT, UK

t: +44 (0) 20 7065 0850 f: +44 (0) 20 7065 0851 e: info@acordinternational.org w: www.acordinternational.org

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Emotional abuse

Persistent or emotional ill treatment of a child that adversely affects their development. May involve conveying to a child that they are worthless, unloved, and inadequate, there only to meet the needs of another; or where inappropriate expectations are imposed upon them. In addition it includes children who are regularly frightened, exploited or corrupted.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is the actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or young person. Sexual abuse includes rape, incest, and all forms of sexual activity involving children, including pornography.

Child protection is the term used to describe the responsibilities and activities undertaken to prevent or to stop children being abused or ill-treated.

When deciding on whether a child has been or is being treated in an abusive or neglectful way, it can be helpful to consider if the child is, as a result, suffering significant harm. The concept of significant harm helps to focus on the likely consequences to the child, and to assess the seriousness of the concerns about the child's safety or welfare. Harm resulting from physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or from neglect, may take the form of impairment of the child's health and development.

The level at which harm to a child is regarded as significant is difficult to define but should nevertheless form the basis of discussions of any concerns. Consideration must be given to the nature of the abuse and the level of concerns that exist, as well as to the context within which the abuse or harm takes place. It is important to discuss all concerns with managers and relevant others in order to assess the levels of risk to children.

3. WHAT WILL ACORD DO?

ACORD will meet its commitment to safeguard children through the following means:

- Awareness* Ensuring that all staff and others are aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children
- Prevention* Ensuring, through awareness and good practice, that staff and others minimise the risks to children
- Reporting* Ensuring that staff and others are clear what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children.
- Responding* Ensuring that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse.

In order that the above standards of reporting and responding are met, ACORD will also ensure that it:

- ◆ Takes seriously any concerns raised.
- ◆ Takes positive steps to ensure the protection of children who are the subject of any concerns.
- ◆ Supports children, staff or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns.
- ◆ Acts appropriately and effectively in instigating or cooperating with any subsequent process of investigation.
- ◆ Is guided through the child protection process by the principle of 'best interests of the child'.
- ◆ Listens to and takes seriously the views and wishes of children.

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- ◆ Works in partnership with parents/carers and/or other professionals to ensure the protection of children.

4. CODE OF CONDUCT

It is important for all staff and others in contact with children to:

- ◆ Be aware of situations which may present risks and manage these.
- ◆ Plan and organise the work and the workplace so as to minimise risks.
- ◆ As far as possible, be visible in working with children.
- ◆ Ensure that a culture of openness exists to enable any issues or concerns to be raised and discussed.
- ◆ Ensure that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour does not go unchallenged.
- ◆ Talk to children about their contact with staff or others and encourage them to raise any concerns.
- ◆ Empower children – discuss with them their rights, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what they can do if there is a problem.

In general it is inappropriate to:

- ◆ Spend excessive time alone with children away from others.
- ◆ Take children to your home, especially when they will be alone with you.

Staff and others must never:

- ◆ Hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children.
- ◆ Develop physical/sexual relationship with children.
- ◆ Develop relationships with children which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- ◆ Act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse.

Staff and others *must* avoid actions or behaviour that could be construed as poor practice or potentially abusive. For example, they should never:

- ◆ Use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
- ◆ Behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative.
- ◆ Have a child/children with whom they are working to stay overnight at their home unsupervised.
- ◆ Sleep in the same room or bed as a child with whom they are working.
- ◆ Do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves.
- ◆ Condone, or participate in, behaviour of children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- ◆ Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse.
- ◆ Discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favour particular children to the exclusion of others.

5. RAISING AND REPORTING CONCERNS IN ACORD

THE IMPORTANCE OF RAISING CONCERNS

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Child abuse is distressing for all concerned and it is often difficult to accept that it may have occurred, to the point that there is denial or that warning signs are dismissed. The danger is that under-reaction resulting from this lack of acceptance may mean children remain unprotected and exposed to further abuse. If this policy is to achieve its intentions of preventing abuse and protecting children, it is essential that staff and others understand their responsibility to raise any concerns they may have regarding the safety of children.

There are many reasons why staff and others may be reluctant to voice concerns. This reluctance usually stems from anxieties associated with some of the following factors:

- ◆ The person is worried they are mistaken.
- ◆ The person is worried they will not be believed.
- ◆ Even if believed, they may feel there is no specific 'evidence' of abuse.
- ◆ Raising a concern will have serious consequences which will affect the work in general/other colleagues/ACORD.
- ◆ The impact on the child/children may be a negative/damaging one.
- ◆ The suspected abuser is the child's parent/carer or member of the community for whom there may be serious consequences if abuse is alleged/confirmed.
- ◆ The suspected abuser is the person's line manager/a senior person.
- ◆ The person does not know what the sequence of events might be.
- ◆ A process may be triggered which the person cannot predict or control.
- ◆ The person may fear reprisals or possible victimisation.
- ◆ Reluctance to be involved in the matter beyond raising the concern, e.g. where a prosecution may ensue.
- ◆ A sense of loyalty to a colleague/work friend who may be suspected of abuse.

Concern about 'getting it wrong' is possibly the factor which most inhibits reporting of suspected abuse. However, it is essential where concerns or suspicions do exist, to focus on the welfare of the child or children involved and to ask 'what if I am right?'. In most incidents of child abuse, it is usually the case that someone other than 'the abused' and 'the abuser' is aware of the situation or at least suspects there is abuse. However, those who know or suspect abuse often do not act, or delay taking action, because of the kind of factors described above. It is also often the case that children who are abused try at some point to tell someone about it.

It is essential that anyone connected to ACORD who suspects or knows of abuse raises their concerns in line with the process described in this document.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

In all matters dealt with as part of this policy, it is essential to respect the need for confidentiality. In certain circumstances, any lack of confidentiality may have devastating effects for the lives of children and may also result in serious consequences for adults involved in the process.

In responding to issues and concerns regarding possible abuse, staff and others must exercise extreme vigilance in protecting information and must pass on this information via the reporting process described in this policy, only to those people who need to be aware of it.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THIS POLICY

It is the responsibility of all managers to ensure that staff and other for whom they have line-management responsibility are made aware of the policy and that the systems and procedures required to operate the policy effectively are in place. It is the responsibility of all staff to fulfil their part in implementing this policy, particularly by raising awareness if they suspect abuse is taking place.

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8. A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION / HOW TO RAISE CONCERN

