



SALESIAN LIFE CHOICES CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

1. Introduction

Life Choices is committed to the protection of all children from all forms of harm and abuse. In particular the safety and well-being of the children involved in Life Choices's programmes is a paramount concern.

The focus of the Child Protection Policy is to ensure that Life Choices takes all reasonable steps to safeguard the rights of children both as an organisation and in the conduct of all aspects of its day to day operations.

Life Choices also supports the rights and welfare of its entire staff. Through this policy, we seek to create a safe and respectful workplace that promotes the rights and safety of all that engage in it.

This policy intends to offer a comprehensive framework for the protection of children that come into contact with Life Choices staff and Life Choices programme interventions.

This policy is applicable to all Life Choices staff (full-time and part-time), as well as partner organisations, consultants, volunteers, and interns. This policy will be referred to in all contracts and agreements relating to the above personnel.

2. The Nature and Purpose of this Policy

This policy provides information relating to acceptable behaviours and appropriate boundaries when working with children. It also provides complaints procedures and systems for responding to complaints.

This comprehensive approach includes four key elements which Life Choices commits to implementing. These are:

Awareness and Information: we will ensure that all staff, partners and other representatives are aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children. Children and their families will be made aware of the standards of behaviour they can expect from our representatives and how they can raise any concerns.

Prevention: we will ensure, through awareness and good practice, that staff and others minimise the risks to children. All staff will create an environment where children's rights are respected.

Reporting: we will ensure that staff, parents/caregivers, children and others are clear about what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children.

Responding: we will ensure that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse. We will also undertake appropriate investigations while upholding the rights of staff members and others who may be under investigation.

3. Values and Principles of the Child Protection Policy

Life Choices commits to:

- Be guided through the child protection process by the principle of 'best interests of the child'.
- Listen to and take seriously the views and wishes of children.
- Work in partnership with parents/carers and/or other professionals to ensure the protection of children.
- Take seriously any concerns raised relating to the safety and well-being of children.
- Take positive steps to ensure the protection of children who are the subject of any concerns.
- Support children, staff or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns.
- Act appropriately and effectively in instigating or co-operating with any subsequent process of investigation.

4. Principles for Child Protection

It is important for all staff and related personnel 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.
- 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 their rights with them, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what they can do if there is a problem.

All Life Choices staff and related personnel have a responsibility to:

- To treat every child with dignity and respect regardless of differences of ethnicity, religion, age, ability, gender, sexual orientation and economic circumstances.
- Conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their position as a positive role model to children and as a representative of Life Choices.
- Immediately raise any concerns for the safety or wellbeing of a child in accordance with the reporting process described below.
- Listen to children, take their concerns seriously and allow them to have a say in the decisions that affect them.
- Take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are not placed at risk of abuse.

All Life Choices staff and related personnel should not:

- Engage in any behaviour that is intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children or perpetrate any form of emotional abuse.
- Use language, make suggestions or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.

- Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for him/herself, such as assistance with toileting or changing clothes.
- Smack, hit or physically assault children.
- Develop sexual relationships with children or relationships with children that in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- Place a child at risk of abuse by not taking all reasonable steps to protect children who are at risk of abuse.
- Behave physically in a manner that is inappropriate or sexually provocative towards a child.
- Condone, or participate in, behaviour of children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- Act in a way that shows unfair differential treatment, or favouring particular children to the exclusion of others.
- Photograph or film a child without the consent of the child and his/her parents or guardians.
- Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch a child in an inappropriate, unnecessary or culturally insensitive way. Touching should: only be in response to the need of the child; be only with the child's permission (except in an emergency situation).
- Have a child/children with whom they are working to stay overnight at their home unsupervised.
- Sleep in the same bed as a child with whom they are working, or in the same room (unless in the context of specific situations such as camps, in which case other adult chaperones need to also be present).

5. Key Child Protection Strategies

5.1. Awareness and Information

Life Choices will ensure that all staff and others to whom this policy is applicable are aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children. The following activities will be undertaken:

- Job contracts and other agreements of association with Life Choices (in the case of consultants, volunteers and interns) will refer to the Child Protection Policy, and commit the signatories to compliance with the Policy. All employees will be thoroughly screened and reference checks completed, inclusive of criminal checks as well as checks against the sexual offences register, to ensure suitability to work with children prior to the start of employment.
- Orientation processes relating to all of above will include (1) basic training in relation to the issue of children's rights and child protection, (2) an explanation of the Child Protection Policy, and (3) referral to the full text of the Child Protection Policy within the Staff Policy Manual, including the attending provisions in relation to the Disciplinary Code, Code of Conduct, and other related policies and procedures.
- All children, parents/caregivers (where applicable) and other relevant adults (e.g. educators in the context of schools) that come into contact with Life Choices will be provided with information on (1) how Life Choices staff members and others should interact with them, (2) how to raise complaints relating to the behaviour of Life Choices staff members and related personnel.

- Mandatory Induction and/or core training on child rights as well as child abuse prevention and management inclusive of receiving and responding to disclosure. Sensitivity to and understanding of local circumstances and culture will be incorporated in learning and training without condoning acts that are harmful to children.

5.2. Prevention

We will ensure, through awareness, good practice, and human resources systems that staff and others minimise the risks to children. This will be done through:

- Recruitment and selection processes will seek to recruit staff members that have an aptitude for working with children and ensuring checks and procedures are in place to screen out anyone who may be unsuitable to work with children.
- Establishing systems and procedures that define or determine how staff and other representatives carry out their work, including but not limited to job descriptions, terms of reference, codes of conduct, performance management and disciplinary procedures.
- All activities within Life Choices (whether humanitarian responses, programmatic / policy / campaigning work, or other work involving child participation) will be assessed to ensure that any child safeguarding risks are identified and adequate controls developed.
- Engagements with children and their carers for the purposes of marketing, media/communications and advocacy will be through informed consent and will not exploit the child or carer or place them at risk.

5.3. Reporting

We will ensure that staff and related personnel, as well as children, parents/caregivers and other relevant adults are clear what steps to take where there are incidents to report or concerns to raise regarding the safety of children. This will be done through:

- Establishing systems to ensure that staff members and related personnel report all incidents of abuse that come to their attention. This may relate both to Life Choices staff as well as other personnel.
- Establishing complaints systems for children, parents/caregivers and other relevant adults in relation to all direct services where children are beneficiaries.

5.4. Responding

We will ensure that action is taken to investigate complaints relating to the safety of children in the context of Life Choices's programmes, and to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse. This will be done through:

- Establishing systems and procedures to investigate complaints, and act against staff members and related personnel found to be guilty of abusive behaviour towards children. This will operate within the framework provided by South African labour relations legislation.
- Taking actions to protect and support the children, parents/caregivers and other relevant adults who make complaints.

- Ensure that remedial services are provided to complainants
- Providing feedback to complainants on the outcomes of complaints

6. Protective Systems relating to Life Choices's Services

This section provides more detail relating to the protective systems that will be established relating to the direct services.

6.1. Direct services to children at an individual level

- Information should be provided to children in the presence of their caregivers, both verbally and in written form in the language of the child as to their rights not to be harmed or abused by the people/person providing services.
- Information should be provided to children in the presence of their caregivers, both verbally and in written form in the language of the child as to how they may complain should they believe that they have been harmed or abused by the people/person providing services.
- In relation to both of the above, both children and their caregivers should be assured that it is their right to complain, and that they will be supported and protected by Life Choices should they wish to make a complaint.
- Systems for children and caregivers or other relevant adults to complain:
 - Complaints may be made verbally, in writing or telephonically to the Manager of that programme, the Managing Director or any other Life Choices staff member. Names and contact information of above will be provided in writing to the children and caregivers.

6.2. Direct services to children in groups

- Information should be provided to children, where possible in the presence of other adults responsible for their care (e.g. educators in the context of school programmes), both verbally and in written form in a language understood by the child, as to their rights not to be harmed or abused by the people/person providing services.
- Information should be provided to children, where possible in the presence of other adults responsible for their care (e.g. educators in the context of school programmes), both verbally and in written form in a language understood by the child as to how they may complain should they believe that they have been harmed or abused by the people/person providing services.
- In relation to both of the above, both children and related adults should be assured that it is their right to complain, and that they will be supported and protected by Life Choices should they wish to make a complaint.
- Systems for children, caregivers or other relevant adults to complain:
 - Complaints may be made verbally, in writing or telephonically to the Manager of that programme, the Managing Director or any other Life Choices staff member. Names and contact

information of above will be provided in writing to the children and caregivers. In addition, complaints may be made via educators or other adults that the child may have contact with.

6.3. Staff and related personnel that become aware of the abuse of children by Life Choices or other personnel

- Life Choices staff members and related personnel are obligated to report the abuse of children by Life Choices staff or other personnel that comes to their attention.
- They are required to report such events as soon as possible to their direct manager, either telephonically or in writing, and not later than 24 hours after the event where the situation is not perceived to be life-threatening.
- Life Choices staff members are obligated to act to secure the safety of children who they may observe in the process of being harmed.
- They are required to provide full details of the event in writing as soon after the report as possible, and not later than 48 hours after the event.

7. Investigating and Responding to Complaints

- All complaints and reports of abuse should be provided to the Managing Director as soon as possible, and not later than 1 week after the receipt of these.
- Life Choices Managers that received reports or complaints have a duty to act immediately if the life or safety of a child is deemed to be at risk.
- Life Choices's Managing Director and Managers are required to assess complaints received as soon as they are received and to instigate procedures for investigating and responding to these complaints.
- Complaints received should be reviewed by a forum including the Life Choices Managing Director and senior managers, which may be constituted on an *ad hoc* basis for this purpose, or an existing forum (such as the Monthly Management Meeting) may be utilised.
- Complaints and reports received should be assessed in terms of the Child Protection Policy, the Code of Conduct and Life Choices's documented Disciplinary Procedure.
- The following kinds of decisions may be taken in relation to a report or complaint:
 - An investigation may be instituted, in terms of the above policies and procedures,
 - A decision may be taken not to act, if the complaint is deemed to be spurious or without foundation,
 - A decision may be taken to gather further information before making a decision to act,
 - Where the report or complaint relates to personnel other than Life Choices staff members, a decision may be taken to report the matter in writing to the relevant authorities.
- All complaints and reports must be kept on record, and all outcomes must be recorded.
- All reports or complaints referred to other authorities for resolution must be followed up, and records should be kept of all official communication in this regard.