



Children Relief Service (CRS)

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Children Relief Service (CRS) Child Safeguarding Policy

Established: 11 May 2017

Organization: Children Relief Service (CRS)

Location: Dzaleka-Lilambwe, Dowa District, Malawi

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1. OVERVIEW OF CRS

Children Relief Service (CRS) is a refugee-led nonprofit organization committed to protecting vulnerable children, empowering youth and girls, fighting hunger, strengthening food security, and building resilient refugee and host communities through sustainable, community-led development.

CRS works with children, youth, families, and communities, including people affected by displacement, poverty, food insecurity, violence, and other vulnerabilities.

Because CRS works directly with children and other vulnerable people, safeguarding is a fundamental responsibility across all programmes, activities, partnerships, and operations.

CRS is committed to creating environments where children are safe, respected, heard, and protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence, and other forms of harm.

2. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this Child Safeguarding Policy is to establish clear standards for protecting children who come into contact with CRS.

The policy aims to:

- Protect children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence, and other forms of harm.

- Establish clear safeguarding responsibilities for CRS personnel and representatives.
- Prevent inappropriate or harmful behavior toward children.
- Promote safe and child-friendly programme environments.
- Establish safe and accessible reporting mechanisms.
- Ensure appropriate and timely responses to safeguarding concerns.
- Promote children's rights, dignity, participation, and well-being.
- Strengthen accountability throughout CRS programmes and operations.

3. DEFINITIONS

Child:

Any person under the age of 18 years.

Child Safeguarding:

The policies, procedures, actions, and practices used to prevent and respond to harm, abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence, and other risks affecting children.

Child Abuse:

Any act or failure to act that causes or may cause physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological harm to a child.

Child Neglect:

Failure to provide appropriate care, protection, supervision, or support necessary for a child's safety and well-being.

Child Exploitation:

Using a child for another person's benefit in a way that causes or may cause harm, including sexual, economic, social, or other exploitation.

Safeguarding Concern:

Any suspicion, allegation, disclosure, observation, or information indicating that a child may be at risk of harm or has experienced harm.

4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

CRS's child safeguarding work is guided by the following principles:

Best Interests of the Child

The safety, protection, dignity, and well-being of the child shall be a primary consideration in decisions affecting children.

Zero Tolerance for Abuse

CRS does not tolerate any form of child abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence, or harmful conduct.

Do No Harm

CRS programmes and activities shall be planned and implemented in ways that reduce risks and prevent avoidable harm to children.

Dignity and Respect

Every child shall be treated with dignity, kindness, respect, and compassion.

Non-Discrimination

Every child has the right to protection regardless of gender, age, disability, nationality, social background, family circumstances, religion, or other status.

Child Participation

Children have the right to express their views and participate in matters affecting them in ways appropriate to their age, maturity, and safety.

Confidentiality

Information concerning children and safeguarding concerns shall be handled carefully and shared only when necessary for protection, support, accountability, or legal obligations.

Accountability

Everyone working with or representing CRS is responsible for upholding this policy and reporting safeguarding concerns.

5. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

This policy applies to:

- CRS staff, whether permanent, temporary, part-time, or contractual.
- Volunteers and interns.
- Board members and organizational leaders.
- Consultants and technical advisors.
- Contractors and service providers.

- Partner organizations and their representatives.
- Persons working on behalf of CRS.
- Visitors participating in CRS activities where applicable.

The policy applies to conduct in CRS offices, programme locations, community activities, training sessions, events, field activities, transportation connected to CRS programmes, online environments, and other activities associated with CRS.

6. CHILD SAFEGUARDING RESPONSIBILITIES

All CRS representatives have a responsibility to protect children.

They must:

- Treat children with dignity and respect.
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
- Act in the best interests of children.
- Follow CRS safeguarding procedures and the Code of Conduct.
- Report safeguarding concerns promptly.
- Participate in required safeguarding training.
- Protect confidential information concerning children.
- Use appropriate language and behavior when interacting with children.
- Promote safe and inclusive environments.
- Take reasonable action to prevent foreseeable harm.

7. PROHIBITED CONDUCT

CRS representatives must never:

- Physically, sexually, emotionally, or psychologically abuse a child.
- Neglect a child's protection or safety needs.
- Exploit or manipulate a child.
- Engage in sexual activity with anyone under 18 years of age.
- Use threats, intimidation, humiliation, or degrading treatment.
- Engage in inappropriate physical contact with children.
- Use children for personal, financial, political, or other improper benefit.
- Exchange money, goods, services, assistance, or favors for sexual activity.
- Engage in conduct that places a child at unnecessary risk.
- Retaliate against a child or person who reports a safeguarding concern.
- Conceal or deliberately ignore a safeguarding concern.

8. PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

CRS personnel must maintain appropriate professional relationships with children.

Where reasonably possible:

- Avoid being alone with a child in isolated or private locations.
- Use visible and appropriate programme spaces when interacting with children.
- Avoid unnecessary physical contact.
- Never sleep in the same bed as a child participating in a CRS programme.
- Never invite programme children to private residences unless specifically authorized and necessary for protection or programme purposes.
- Never use personal relationships with children for personal advantage.
- Maintain appropriate communication through phones, messaging applications, and social media.

Any necessary exception must be based on legitimate programme or protection needs and managed safely.

9. CHILDREN'S IMAGES, STORIES, AND PERSONAL INFORMATION

CRS recognizes that photographs, videos, stories, names, and personal information can expose children to risks if used improperly.

CRS personnel must:

- Obtain appropriate consent and authorization before using children's images or stories for communication or publicity.
- Consider the child's safety and best interests before publication.
- Avoid publishing information that could expose a child to identification, stigma, discrimination, exploitation, or retaliation.
- Protect confidential personal information.
- Never share sexually explicit, degrading, humiliating, or otherwise harmful images of children.
- Use organizational communication channels responsibly.

Where consent cannot safely be obtained, CRS shall prioritize the child's protection and privacy.

10. RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING

CRS shall take reasonable safeguarding measures during recruitment and engagement of personnel working with children.

These measures may include:

- Verification of identity and references.
- Appropriate background or criminal record checks where available and legally appropriate.
- Safeguarding-related interview questions.
- Verification of previous relevant employment or volunteer experience.
- Safeguarding clauses in contracts and agreements.
- Signing of the CRS Professional Code of Conduct.
- Orientation and safeguarding training before or shortly after engagement.

No person should be knowingly placed in a position of responsibility for children where credible safeguarding concerns make such placement unsafe.

11. SAFEGUARDING IN PROGRAMME DESIGN

CRS shall consider child safeguarding risks when planning and implementing programmes.

Programme teams should:

- Identify potential safeguarding risks.
- Establish appropriate risk-reduction measures.
- Ensure activities are suitable for children's age and circumstances.
- Provide safe spaces where appropriate.
- Ensure children know how to raise concerns.
- Consider the needs of children with disabilities and other vulnerabilities.
- Monitor safeguarding risks during programme implementation.

12. REPORTING SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

Any person who becomes aware of, suspects, observes, or receives a disclosure concerning possible harm to a child should report the concern through an appropriate CRS reporting channel.

Reports may be made to:

- The designated Child Protection or Safeguarding Focal Person.
- The Child Protection Officer.
- The Executive Director or designated supervisor.
- The CRS complaints and feedback mechanism.
- Other designated safeguarding reporting channels established by CRS.

Reports may be made verbally or in writing and, where the mechanism permits, anonymously.

A person receiving a disclosure should:

- Listen calmly.
- Take the concern seriously.
- Avoid blaming or judging the child.
- Avoid making promises that cannot be kept.
- Record relevant information accurately where appropriate.
- Report the concern through the designated safeguarding mechanism.

Staff and volunteers must not conduct their own investigation of an allegation.

13. RESPONSE TO SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

CRS shall respond to safeguarding concerns promptly and appropriately.

Depending on the circumstances, the response may include:

- Immediate assessment of the child's safety.
- Protection from further harm.
- Referral to appropriate child protection services.
- Medical assistance where required.
- Psychosocial support.
- Legal or other specialized support.
- Appropriate notification of competent authorities where required.
- Internal safeguarding or disciplinary procedures.
- Confidential documentation and follow-up.

Responses shall prioritize the child's safety, dignity, and best interests.

14. CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

CRS shall protect information relating to children and safeguarding concerns.

Personnel must:

- Keep safeguarding information confidential.
- Share information only with authorized persons who have a legitimate need to know.
- Protect physical and electronic records.
- Avoid discussing cases in public or inappropriate settings.
- Never publish identifying information about a child involved in a safeguarding case without appropriate authorization and safeguarding consideration.

Confidentiality does not prevent CRS from taking necessary action to protect a child or comply with applicable legal obligations.

15. CHILD PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK

CRS recognizes children as rights-holders and encourages their safe participation.

CRS shall:

- Inform children about their rights in age-appropriate ways.
- Provide safe opportunities for children to express their views.
- Include children and young people in appropriate programme feedback.
- Provide accessible ways to raise concerns.
- Ensure that participation does not expose children to additional risks.
- Give appropriate consideration to children's views in programme development.

16. SAFEGUARDING AND ONLINE COMMUNICATION

CRS personnel must use digital communication responsibly.

They must not:

- Send inappropriate or sexual messages to children.
- Request inappropriate photographs or videos.
- Use social media to manipulate, exploit, threaten, or harass children.
- Share confidential information about children.
- Establish inappropriate private relationships with programme participants through digital platforms.

Digital communication involving children should be professional, necessary, transparent, and appropriate to the programme context.

17. NON-RETALIATION

CRS prohibits retaliation against any person who:

- Reports a safeguarding concern in good faith.
- Discloses abuse or suspected abuse.
- Supports a child who raises a concern.
- Participates appropriately in a safeguarding process.
- Raises concerns about unsafe practices.

Retaliation may itself constitute a breach of this policy and may result in disciplinary or other appropriate action.

18. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Directors

The Board provides governance oversight and ensures that safeguarding remains an organizational priority.

Executive Director

The Executive Director provides leadership, ensures implementation of the policy, supports safeguarding resources, and promotes organizational accountability.

Child Protection Officer / Safeguarding Focal Person

The designated safeguarding personnel support prevention, awareness, reporting, referrals, documentation, and follow-up within their authorized responsibilities.

Programme Staff

Programme staff are responsible for identifying safeguarding risks, maintaining safe programme environments, and reporting concerns.

Volunteers

Volunteers must follow CRS safeguarding standards, maintain professional boundaries, and immediately report concerns.

Partners and Contractors

Partners and contractors working with CRS are expected to meet applicable safeguarding requirements and cooperate with CRS safeguarding measures.

19. TRAINING AND AWARENESS

CRS shall provide appropriate safeguarding orientation and training for personnel whose roles involve contact with children.

Training should cover:

- Child safeguarding principles.
- Recognizing signs of abuse and exploitation.
- Professional boundaries.
- Safe communication with children.
- Reporting procedures.

- Confidentiality.
- GBV and PSEA awareness.
- Online and digital safeguarding.
- Child participation and safe feedback.

Refresher training shall be provided periodically as resources and operational circumstances permit.

20. DISCIPLINARY AND LEGAL ACTION

Violations of this policy may result in appropriate action, including:

- Formal warning or disciplinary measures.
- Suspension from duties or activities.
- Termination of employment, volunteer engagement, or contract.
- Removal from CRS activities.
- Referral to relevant authorities where appropriate or required.
- Other action permitted under applicable organizational policies and Malawian law.

CRS shall seek to ensure that disciplinary processes are handled fairly and appropriately.

21. MONITORING AND REVIEW

CRS shall periodically review the effectiveness of its safeguarding arrangements.

Monitoring may include:

- Review of safeguarding reports and trends.
- Staff and volunteer training records.
- Programme safeguarding risk assessments.
- Community and child feedback.
- Review of reporting mechanisms.
- Lessons learned from safeguarding concerns.
- Periodic review of safeguarding procedures.

This policy shall be reviewed periodically and updated when necessary.

22. RELATED CRS POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

This Child Safeguarding Policy should be read together with:

- CRS Constitution and Bylaws.
- CRS Professional Code of Conduct.

- CRS Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy.
- CRS Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention and Response Policy.
- CRS Complaints and Feedback Mechanism.
- CRS Privacy Policy.
- Other applicable CRS safeguarding procedures and organizational policies.

23. STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Children Relief Service (CRS) is committed to creating an environment in which every child is treated with dignity, respect, compassion, and care.

Protecting children is central to the identity and mission of CRS. Every staff member, volunteer, board member, partner, consultant, and other representative has a responsibility to help create safe environments and to act when a child may be at risk.

CRS will not tolerate child abuse, exploitation, neglect, violence, or other conduct that places children at risk.

Children Relief Service (CRS)

Protecting vulnerable children, empowering youth and girls, fighting hunger, strengthening food security, and building resilient refugee and host communities through sustainable, community-led development.

POLICY APPROVAL

Approved by: _____

Position: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Policy Review Date: _____