

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



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“All the ideals of the world are not worth the tears of one child.”

- Fjodor Mihajlovič Dostojevski

The Center for Missing and Exploited Children is an organization focused on children, understanding the rights and needs of both children and their parents, and providing children with the opportunity to develop their full potential and build a world tailored to their needs. The Child protection policy of the Center for Missing and Exploited Children is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and follows all relevant laws and regulations in the Republic of Croatia.

The Center's mission:

- To advocate for a better position of children in the society and to protect their rights and provide equal opportunities for all children in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Collaboration with related associations and organizations while developing and organizing actions and activities with children and for children in their free time.
- To support the children in active participation in the local community and encourage the local communities, institutions, and organizations to protect and care for children based on the principle of the child's best interest.
- To nurture the tradition of volunteering at the Center.

The Child protection policy refers to the rules of conduct and behavior of adults, namely employees, volunteers, and external associates of the Center for Missing and Exploited Children towards children.

By implementing the stated policy, the safety of children and their rights are ensured, providing a space and conditions for the optimal development of each child. The content

of the Child protection policy pertains to the shared values, attitudes, rules of conduct, and the steps needed to ensure the safety of children. All employees, volunteers, and external associates are required to implement and carry through the Child protection policy.

The policy contains the principles and values that must be transparent in working with children, outlining behaviors that are considered desirable and acceptable, and those that are entirely undesirable and unacceptable.

The advantages of implementing the Child protection policy:

- The children are protected - no norm can provide complete protection towards the children, but implementing this Policy lowers the risks of harm to children.
- The employees and associates of the Center are protected - by implementing the Child protection policy, all employees and associates will have a clear picture of how they should behave towards the children and what they should do in case there is a concern about the safety of the children.
- The Center and its reputation are protected - by implementing the Child protection policy, the Center commits to maintaining the children's safety.

The goal of the Child protection policy:

1. Express an adherence to respecting the UN Convention on the Rights of children, as the dedication to children's rights also implies a devotion to protecting those rights.
2. Provide guidelines for employees, volunteers, and external associates for more effective and secure interaction with children.
3. Proactively influence child protection measures.
4. Design and implement projects and programs that are safe for children.
5. Safely lead and organize events and activities for children.
6. Ensure best practices in media use.
7. Report child abuse within the community.

Values and principles in working with children:

- ensuring the safety, health, and well-being of the child,
- respecting children's rights as stipulated by the un convention on the rights of children and working towards their promotion, protection, and enhancement,
- protecting children from any form of exploitation and abuse,
- listening to and considering the child's opinions whenever possible in decisions affecting their life and well-being,
- involving children who are users of any service or target group in any of the projects of the Center for Missing and Exploited Children when making decisions that affect their life and well-being with provided support,
- safeguarding and enhancing the child's interests,
- preventing discrimination, exclusion, or marginalization of children on any basis,
- ensuring that partners collaborating with the center adhere to and meet minimum technical standards for child protection in their programs,
- respecting the diversity of cultures from which children come and respecting their religious and ethnic backgrounds,
- respecting the privacy and confidentiality of children's information,
- all activities of the center must be guided by the principle of the child's best interest.

Ways of implementing children's values and principles include:

- always work in the best interest of the child while respecting their individuality and diversity,
- treat children with respect on every occasion and acknowledge their needs,
- work towards the protection and improvement of children's rights as stipulated by the un convention on the rights of children,
- value and respect the opinions and views of children and encourage them to express them,

- work with children to meet their needs, strengthen their capacities and abilities, and develop their potential,
- understanding children in the context of their everyday life
- cooperate with their parents, guardians, and professional associates to ensure, protect, and enhance the children's rights,
- to have individuals sign a confidentiality agreement, familiarize employees, associates, volunteers, and partners of the center with the child protection policy and the regulations on the duty of keeping business and professional secrets,
- never leave staff, volunteers, and external associates alone with children without others present, and do not allow them to spend an extended period of time alone with children unless it is necessary for professional reasons,
- promote a culture of openness and transparency regarding issues related to the preservation of children's safety and provide space for expressing any doubts and questions in a safe environment,
- ensure the existence of a sense of responsibility among employees, professional associates, volunteers, partners, and other individuals who come into contact with children, creating a responsibility to oppose poor practices or any other abusive behavior towards children.

Child protection policy covers four areas:

1. **Organizational policy** – describes actions taken to prevent harm to children and interventions in case of harm to children.
2. **Individuals** – clearly defines the responsibilities and expectations of all employees and associates of the Center in working with children.
3. **Procedures** – implementing procedures to ensure the safety of children and a safe environment for children. These procedures are then applied throughout the organization.
4. **Responsibility** – security measures are monitored and continuously reevaluated.

1. Organizational policy

The Center for Missing and Exploited Children advocates a policy outlining a commitment to prevent and appropriately respond to harm inflicted upon a child.

The Center emphasizes the safety of all children, irrespective of their abilities, sexuality, culture, ethnicity, religion, or gender identity. All projects and programs directly or indirectly impacting children must be designed and implemented to minimize the risk of harm. Those responsible for project management must ensure careful consideration of the environment, context, and impact on children and their communities to ensure project safety for children.

The Policy addresses children's rights to protection from abuse and exploitation as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of children.

The Policy has been approved by the Assembly of the Center for Missing and Exploited Children and applies to all employees, associates, and volunteers of the Center.

The Child protection policy is publicized on the Center's website.

The president of the establishment holds a special responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the policy.

2. Individuals

Employees, volunteers, and external collaborators **must:**

- be aware of situations that may pose risks to children,
- plan and organize the work environment and activities in a way that minimizes risks for children as much as possible,
- be transparent in their work with children,
- ensure an open and comfortable atmosphere where challenging issues or concerns can be freely raised and discussed,

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- foster a sense of openness among staff, volunteers, and external associates so that potentially abusive behavior does not go unnoticed,
 - engage in conversations with children about their interactions with staff, volunteers, and external collaborators, encouraging them to express their concerns without hesitation,
 - empower children through discussions about their rights and responsibilities, acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and what they can do to address potential issues,
 - respect the confidentiality agreement, regulations, and the child protection policy of the Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Employees, volunteers, and external collaborators **must never**:

- physically harm or abuse children in any way, including hitting or any other form of physical abuse,
- abused children in any other way, be it emotional, psychological, sexual, economic, etc,
- exploit children in any way,
- develop relationships with children that could be considered exploitative or violent in any sense,
- develop relationships with children that could be perceived as offensive or as a form of exploitation,
- act in any way that could be considered abusive or put the child at risk of abuse,
- use inappropriate language and expressions, provide suggestions, or offer advice that is inappropriate, uncomfortable, or offensive,
- behave in a manner that is indecent or sexually provocative,
- offer children with whom they work to spend the night in their homes without supervision unless exceptional circumstances exist and prior approval has been obtained from the president of the center,
- sleep in the same bed as the children with whom they work,

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- sleep in the same room as the children with whom they work, unless exceptional circumstances that have been previously approved by the president of the center,
 - perform personal tasks for children that they can do themselves,
 - tolerate or accept children's behavior that is illegal, unsafe, or violent, or participate in such behavior,
 - act to shame, humiliate, demean, or degrade children in any way or engage in any form of emotional abuse towards children,
 - discriminate, treat certain children differently, or show favoritism,
 - spend excessive time alone with children, away from others,
 - put themselves in a situation where they risk accusations of violating work duties and the child protection policy,
 - behave in a way that is unacceptable, contrary to the child protection policy, national and international regulations, or in a manner that constitutes bad practice and violent behavior,
 - use language expressions, provide suggestions, or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive, or in any way humiliating.

This list is not final. Center employees, partners, volunteers, and other associates must always avoid any activities or behaviors that could be misinterpreted or lead to potential child abuse.

3. Procedures

The Center for Missing and Exploited Children, through the implementation of child safety preservation procedures within the organization, creates a secure environment for children. The Center always emphasizes the safety of children, making it the top priority for all employees and volunteers. Every claim or concern regarding the abuse or neglect of a child must be treated with the utmost seriousness.

Compliance with these procedures is ensured by:

- Integrating measures for child safety into existing processes and systems (strategic planning, budgeting, hiring, program management, procurement management, agreements with partners, management systems, etc.).
- Providing information on legal protection methods and rights within the social welfare system in one accessible location for children and parents.
- Children and their families will be informed about the standards of behavior they can expect from Center staff and how they can express concerns.
- Employees, volunteers, and external associates will sign a confidentiality data statement.
- Employees, volunteers, external associates, and partners will be familiar with the Child protection policy.
- Employees, volunteers, and external associates will be familiar with the House Rules.
- Strict standards for finding, selecting, and verifying candidates will be applied during employment.
- The suitability of candidates for the position and the suitability of volunteers for working with children and youth, as well as their criminal records, will be checked.
- All staff working with children will undergo appropriate training.
- Child protection will be a regular topic in all training or education programs, and a review of existing policies and practical examples will be an integral part of meetings held at least once every three months.
- Employees, volunteers, and external associates will receive instructions and information on where and how to report suspicions of child abuse and exploitation.
- Employees will talk to children about their contacts with other staff, volunteers, associates, or other individuals outside the Center, encouraging them to express any concerns and ask questions about any uncertainties.
- Employees will empower children, and educate them about their rights, acceptable behavior, and what to do in case of problems.
- The Center will act in partnership with parents/guardians, specialists, and partners to ensure child protection.

The Center for Missing and Exploited Children will have specialists on its team responsible for identifying the needs of children and youth and reporting inappropriate behavior and actions toward them.

Employees of the Center are required to collaborate with the Croatian Institute for Social Welfare and the police to ensure the protection of children and youth.

Employees of the Center are required to collaborate with the children's parents and/or guardians to ensure the protection of children and youth.

Employees of the Center are required to provide professional assistance and support to children and youth in case their rights are violated in any way.

4. Responsibility

The Center regularly monitors and reviews its security measures.

The President of the Center is responsible for creating an environment in the Center's work that will enable and facilitate the implementation of all aspects of this Policy.

The implementation of child protection policies and procedures is monitored regularly. Progress, performance, and lessons learned in child protection are communicated to all employees and included in the Center's regular meetings.

The President of the Center is responsible for initiating an internal investigative procedure in case of a report or a suspicion of any form of child abuse in the Center and must, in case of serious doubts, forward the case to the competent public authority.

In all cases of suspected abuse by employees, associates, and volunteers of the Center, an internal investigation will be conducted by a neutral person with no connection to the case. This person will present their findings to the president of the Center, who will decide on further steps.

In cases of abuse where both the victim and the perpetrator are children, the emphasis is on what is best for the development and protection of all children involved in the case.

Learning from practical cases/experiences influences policy control and changes in child safety measures.

The Center must conduct an internal audit using self-audit tools at least once a year to assess progress in achieving child safety.



Tomislav Ramljak

predsjednik Centra za nestalu
i zlostavljaju djecu