

# Child Protection Policy

## Introduction

Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA) affirms the rights and obligations set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes protecting children from harm, exploitation and abuse. AOA is committed to protecting the safety and wellbeing of children, and upholds and employs the Australian Government's zero tolerance of child exploitation and abuse.

Through the identification and management of risks that may lead to harm of children, AOA aims to provide the safest possible environments for any children in the communities with whom it works. AOA mandates child-safe practices both within its own organisation and within those of its partners, to ensure children are experiencing no harm as a result of the organisation's work.

## Purpose and Scope

The purpose of AOA's Child Protection Policy is:

- To protect children from harm, exploitation and abuse, by adopting a goal of children experiencing 'no harm' as a result of Anglican Overseas Aid's work, and zero tolerance of non-compliance.
- To explain to all of Anglican Overseas Aid's implementing partners their obligations and AOA's expectations when it comes to child protection, as well as mandatory requirements to ensure partner compliance;
- To outline Anglican Overseas Aid's obligations if a breach should occur, as well as how the organisation will afford staff and representatives procedural fairness in the advent of an allegation being received; and
- To have clear internal procedures in place that prevent and deter persons from working with children if they pose an unacceptable risk.

This Child Protection Policy applies to Board members, staff, contractors and volunteers of AOA. The Policy also applies to supporters and prospective supporters visiting AOA programs. From here on, these groups will be collectively referred to in this policy as 'all parties'. Additionally, all of AOA's partners must have contextually relevant Child Protection Policies that uphold and comply with this policy. This policy is further supported and implemented through the processes, policies and procedures outlined in the AOA International Programs Handbook.

## Compliance Frameworks

AOA upholds the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in particular Article 19 which states;

*'State Parties shall protect the child [1] from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse'.*

As a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct and a non-government organisation with full DFAT accreditation, AOA also takes seriously the requirement that we have appropriate policies and procedures to promote the safety and well-being of all children accessing or associated with, our services and programs.

AOA adheres to all relevant laws and legislation in both Australia and foreign countries regarding child abuse and exploitation. This includes the Crimes (Child Sex Tourism) Amendment Act 1994 and the Victorian Child Safe Standards 2016.

## Guiding Principles

- All parties are required to report any suspicion of child abuse or exploitation. All allegations will be investigated in a fair and thorough manner. AOA believes in an open and transparent reporting process that fairly protects all those involved until a satisfactory resolution is reached.
- In interviewing and reporting on children special attention is to be paid to each child's right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from harm and retribution, including the potential of harm and retribution.
- The best interests of each child are to be protected over any other consideration, including over cultural practices, advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child rights.
- AOA is committed to providing equal protection to all children and will protect all children regardless of their nationality, culture, ethnicity, gender, religious or political beliefs, socio-economic status, family or criminal background or physical or mental health.

## Implementation and Application

### Risk Management Framework

Abuse and/or neglect causes harm to a child's well-being. AOA affirms its commitment to oppose all forms of child abuse and to continuously strengthen our child protection processes to mitigate the risk of abuse within our programs. AOA commits to implementing a comprehensive risk management approach to child protection through:

1. Employing a zero tolerance approach to child exploitation and abuse.
2. Advocating for the protection of children from all forms of exploitation, especially sexual exploitation.
3. Continuously developing, implementing and reviewing guidelines and practices that support the protection of children.
4. Networking with other Non-Government Organisations and domestic agencies for the purpose of increasing awareness and support for the protection of children.
5. Apply Child Protection Policy and Procedures equally in all situations, whether emergency or development.
6. Being vigilant in protecting confidential information about children and their families in AOA-funded projects and preventing unauthorised direct contact with children.
7. Use of images and personal information for promotion, fundraising and development education which ensures the privacy and safeguarding of children.
8. Sharing responsibility for child protection with implementing partners and ensuring partners have their own compliant policies in place and sufficient capacity for effective implementation.

9. Recognising the best interests of the child and demonstrating our responsibility to and respect for children through sensitivity in our communications that involve them in accordance with the ACFID Code.
10. Ensuring thorough recruitment and screening processes, which include criminal record and/or 'Working with Children' Checks, targeted interview questions and verbal referee checks, prior to the engagement of all staff and volunteers who may be in contact with children through AOA.
11. Screening and providing orientation information to all individuals and groups visiting projects funded by AOA, including all parties.
12. Ensure Child Protection training for relevant personnel, particularly upon induction and prior to overseas visits.
13. Not permit a person to work with or visit children if they pose an unacceptable risk to children's safety or well-being.
14. Include a provision in all employment contracts that AOA reserves the right to dismiss the employee or volunteer should he/she breach AOA's Child Protection Code of Conduct.
15. Having a documented internal procedure for handling reports related to child exploitation and abuse including notification to relevant law enforcement agencies as appropriate.
16. Using fair and proper processes and procedures when making decisions that affect a person's rights, interests and reputation.
17. Monitor internal and external compliance with this policy and conduct a comprehensive review at least every 3 years.

#### Code of Conduct

The AOA Child Protection Code of Conduct (CPCoC) is one of the core elements of our policy to protect children and applies to interaction with all people under the age of 18 years. The CPCoC clearly defines standards, rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

AOA's CPCoC follows a threefold approach of protecting:

1. Children from abuse,
2. All parties against false allegations and
3. AOA against falling victim to infiltration by offenders.

Consequently, the CPCoC states those behaviours which are acceptable and those which are not when working or associating with children. All parties and partners implementing AOA funded activities must sign the CPCoC (or a suitable local equivalent).

#### Reporting

It is mandatory for all parties associated with AOA to immediately report concerns, suspicions or allegations of child mistreatment or abuse, including any alleged breach of the CPCoC. Concerns may relate to a child or representative associated with the organisation or external to AOA's programs.

Overseas reports should be made to the AOA International Program Manager or the AOA CEO.

In Australia, reports should be made to the AOA CEO or to the AOA Board Chair.

Any person making such a report should NOT:

- Notify the person to whom the claim or allegation relates
- Seek to independently investigate or substantiate the claim prior to making any notification.

#### **The emphasis is on immediate and mandatory reporting.**

The International Program Manager or the CEO, in consultation with the Chair of the Board will review the allegations and determine a course of action consistent with AOA's due processes. If the allegation relates to a criminal matter, AOA is obliged to report to the relevant law enforcement authorities.

## Definitions

AOA's Child Protection Policy relates to the protection of children under but not including the age of 18 years, against mistreatment in the context of any AOA Australian or international program. Mistreatment includes all forms of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and/or neglect.

In this context:

1. Sexual abuse signifies forcing or enticing a child to take part in, or have any form of association with/exposure to, sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. Any sexual activity with a child under the age of 18 is considered misconduct, and a form of sexual abuse.
2. Physical abuse means a deliberate physical injury or the wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering.
3. Emotional abuse can be defined as the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child, thus causing adverse effects on the child's emotional development.
4. Neglect refers to the persistent failure to meet a child's physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in harm to a child's health and development.

## References

1. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
2. DFAT Child Protection Policy for the Australian Government's aid program (2017)
3. Guidance for Establishing the Child Protection Risk Context for Organisations and Activities (2017)
4. ACFID's Code of Conduct - Code of Conduct Section 1.4
5. Anglican Overseas Aid Child Protection Framework and Tools for Implementation
6. [ACNC External Conduct Standards](#)