Child Protection Policy

Psientífica- Associação para a Promoção e Desenvolvimento Social

Contact person: Ana Moutas

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Reviewed and approved by the Board of Psientífica in November 2026.

Psientífica' staff is committed to providing and maintaining a caring learning environment which promotes its core values and prevents and addresses child abuse and exploitation.

We strongly condemn all forms of child abuse and exploitation and always respond to any case of proven, alleged or attempted abuse within our field of function and influence according to its nature.

Efforts ensure that mechanisms are in place to raise awareness, aid prevention, encourage reporting and ease response. They range from human resource development actions such as training and counselling to legal actions where needed.

Protection Policy is based on:

a. our vision, mission and values;

b. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);

c. Experience and input of stakeholders from various partnerships as great value is placed upon their views;

d. The standards on child protection as defined by the Keeping Children Safe Coalition.

All the partners work in accordance with the UNCRC: The best interest of the child is our primary consideration. Every child has the right to develop to his or her full potential, to quality education, participation and non-discrimination. Everybody is responsible for protecting children from all forms of abuse, abandonment, exploitation, violence and discrimination.

In this policy, specific attention is focused on specific mechanisms to prevent and respond to child abuse.

The key parts include:

a. Awareness: Raise awareness of child abuse and its risks

b. Prevention: Provide guidance on how to safeguard children from abuse

c. Reporting: Set up and adhere to a clear and simple reporting procedure

d. Responding: Ensure clear action is taken when child abuse is suspected or reported

Introduction

This policy document is binding for all staff of this institution. Based on this policy paper, each co-worker and partner shall define clear reporting and responding structures, as well as consistent crisis management plans to bring child protection to life in its field and region.

Every child is potentially at risk of abuse and exploitation. Some children may be more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, due to various forms of discrimination and marginalization relating to their socio-economic status, gender, disability, ethnicity, caste, or living situation. Therefore, it is crucial that every person connected with the institution understands child abuse, as well as his or her own role and responsibilities in protecting children.

Any definition of child abuse first requires a definition of the child. According to the UNCRC a child is *"every human being below the age of 18 years unless national law recognizes the age of majority earlier"*.

Psientífica recognizes that child abuse and exploitation take place in all countries and societies around the world. Trying to define it as a world phenomenon is still difficult because of the vast cultural, religious, social, political, legal and economic differences that children experience.

Psientífica respects all cultures and religions; within a broad intercultural and interdisciplinary approach we have attempted to create a unified frame. In order to prevent and respond to child abuse, it is crucial that we as an organization reach a common understanding as to what child abuse is and in which circumstances our policies and procedures apply.

Furthermore, Psientífica is committed to broader awareness-raising, prevention and advocacy work within families, schools, communities and national authorities to promote the protection of children's rights.

The UNCRC provides an international framework outlining children's rights to protection from abuse and neglect (article 19), discrimination (article 2) and different forms of exploitation (articles 32-36); special consideration is given to children deprived of parental care (article 20), refugee children (article 22), children at risk of developing a drug habit (article 33), children who are deprived of their liberty (article 37, 40), children in situations of armed conflict (article 38, 40).

Psientífica further recognizes the importance of children's participation, empowering girls and boys to speak up against all forms of abuse, acting as agents of self-protection and the protection of their peers.

Goals of the Child Protection Policy

This policy aims at:

• preventing cases of child abuse and reducing the number of incidents (child-to-child, adult-to-child) in families & schools of Psientífica influence,

• making children aware of their rights and their active role in child protection,

• informing children, co-workers, board members, family, school and community members, volunteers and partners (sponsors, donors, journalists, governmental authorities, etc.) about the child protection policy and related procedures (awareness, prevention, reporting, responding),

• encouraging co-workers directly involved with children to apply the skills needed to contribute to each child's development and protection,

• ensuring that all co-workers have the working conditions needed to contribute to each child's development and protection,

• fostering open and honest discussions on child abuse in national meetings and workshops in all programmes and facilities amongst all stakeholders (children, young adults and their families, child and youth care co-workers, management staff, board members, PR and fundraising staff, teachers, maintenance and security staff, etc.)

• putting in place fair, secure and transparent reporting channels in all types of programmes that guarantee the right of stakeholders (children, parents, staff) to be heard,

• forming an active network of protection so that all children and adults in our sphere of influence are safe and protected. Within and across all co-workers and partners, we strive together for the protection of children.

What is Child Abuse? – Definitions and terminology

Definitions of the four main categories of abuse:

Physical Abuse is the actual or potential physical harm caused by an action or lack of action, which is reasonably within the control of the parent or person in a position of responsibility, power, or trust. Physical abuse may involve hitting, spanking, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning and suffocating. It can also mean causing physical harm to a child by fabricating the symptoms of, or deliberately causing, ill health to a child. The incidents may be single or repeated.

Sexual Abuse is evidenced by an activity between a child and an adult or another child who, by age or development, is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power; the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. Child sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact and penetrative or non-penetrative acts. This may also include involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Neglect and Negligent Treatment is the inattention or omission on the part of the caregiver to provide for the development of the child in: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions, in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers and which causes, or has a high probability of causing, harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is feasible.

Emotional Abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child that adversely affects his or her self-perception and development. It may involve conveying to the child that he or she is worthless, unloved, and inadequate, or there only to meet the needs of another person; or imposing inappropriate expectations upon him/her. Acts include restricting movement, threatening, scaring, discriminating, scapegoating, corrupting, ridiculing, degrading, bullying, humiliating (e.g. asking potentially embarrassing questions, demanding potentially embarrassing action) or other nonphysical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

The Psientífica Child Protection Code of Conduct

Psientífica is committed to protecting children from abuse and exploitation. It will take all necessary actions to prevent and/or respond to children in such situations. Psientífica will respond to all reports of actual or alleged abuses based on its Child Protection Policy, irrespective of the nature of the referral, who the allegations are about or who the referrer is or where she/he is from. This Code of Conduct includes guidance on ethical and proper standards of behaviour of adults towards children, and also of children towards other children. It has been developed with the best interests of the child as the primary consideration and should be interpreted in a spirit of transparency and common sense. Psientífica aims for everyone, children and adults, to participate in a safe and happy way in our work and activities.

DO:

Be aware what constitutes child abuse and exploitation (included in the Child Protection Policy) and understand its provisions. Know signs of abuse and report any suspicious observations immediately to the Child Protection Officer and each countries respective authorities. Respect lines of authority and reporting procedures. Respect the basic rights of others by facing fairly, honestly, and tactfully, and by treating people with dignity and respect. Treat all children equally: be inclusive and involve all children without discrimination. Work actively to ensure the highest levels of respect towards each other. Maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct both personally and in others. Protect the health, safety and well-being of yourself and others. Be aware of high-risk peer situations (e.g. unsupervised mixing of older and younger children and possibilities of discrimination against minors) Be aware of potential for peer abuse (e.g. bullying of children) Be concerned about the way in which your language, actions, and relationships with children could be perceived. Develop special measures/supervision to protect younger and especially vulnerable children from peer and adult abuse. Provide an enabling environment for children's personal, physical, social, emotional, moral and intellectual development. Encourage and respect children's voices and views. Limit access to and/or not expose children to any inappropriate electronic material. At all times respect the confidentiality of children's personal information. Obtain written consent from the child and parent/carer when photographing, filming or requesting personal information for activities. Ensure that there is a minimum of two staff members (or one staff member and teacher/legal guardian responsible for children) present in meetings with children (to allow one to go out to deal with any immediate needs of children). Ensure that when children with disabilities participate that all buildings are fully accessible for them. Precise information on specific equipment used by the disabled child needs to be obtained prior to the event to ensure its accessibility to all buildings and meeting spaces. When participants are invited to stay overnight, room-sharing arrangements are agreed in advance and with the consent of the parents/guardians and children.

DON'T:

Engage in any form of sexual activity with children. Avoid any action or behaviour that could be construed as poor practice or potentially abusive. For example, never behave in an inappropriate or sexually provocative manner. Never have a child stay overnight in the adult's room or sleep in the same bed (unless prior consent is provided by both the child and his/her parent/guardian). Do not perform activities for children that they can do themselves, including dressing, bathing and grooming. Do not discriminate, shame, humiliate, belittle, or degrade children. This includes anything that may be considered emotional abuse (e.g. using language that will mentally or emotionally abuse a child or telling a story/show pictures that will mentally or emotionally abuse a child). Do not hit or otherwise physically assault participants. Do not act in any way that may be abusive or place others at risk of abuse. Do not condone violations of this code by others – staff, interns, consultants, etc. Do not be alone with a child in any circumstances that might be questioned by others. Do not allow children to engage in sexually provocative games with each other. Do not kiss, hug, fondle, rub, or touch a child in an inappropriate or culturally insensitive way (e.g. do not initiate physical contact, such as holding hands, unless initiated by the child) Do not suggest inappropriate behaviour or relations of any kind or encourage any crushes by a child. Do not take photos, film or request personal information if not required for Psientífica activities. Do not use inappropriately contact details (including social media accounts) from children out of Psientífica's institution activities. Report any suspicious observations or alleged abuse as well as any circumstances or situations, which may be subject to misinterpretation to the Child Protection Officer.

Specific Considerations:

Child-to-Child Abuse

Allegations or concerns regarding the abuse of a child by another child need to be responded to with particular sensitivity; nevertheless, they have to be dealt with through child protection procedures. All work with young people who have committed abuse requires an effective approach which ensures the protection of people affected, while at the same time supporting the young person in challenging and changing his/her behaviour.

Any such approach requires:

• the recognition that a child who has abused another child differs significantly from adults who have committed similar offences, as the child is not fully aware of why he or she has committed abuse and what the consequences are

• keeping in mind that the best interest of the child is the primary consideration in all decisions made - for both the victim and the abuser.

Violation of Children's Privacy

The protection of a child's privacy refers to private data of the child as well as pictures, texts, films etc. about children which are produced for publicity purposes:

Any information about a child's history, medical condition and family background has to be stored carefully and to be handled confidentially and with discretion.

Children and even their parents or caregivers might not always be aware of a specific form of emotional abuse that might occur in fundraising, public relations or communication. A child's privacy is, for instance, violated by the production of unauthorised publicity material (pictures, films, texts, etc.) featuring the boy or girl; or by presenting sensitive information within a context that reveals the child's identity.

In all operations, Psientífica follows the guidelines laid out in the General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR, 2016/679). In the case of working directly with minors, a prerequisite for their participation in our activities is the requirement for their legal guardians to sign a form of consent may we need to use their image, for purposes of reporting. They include the following:

• When producing publicity material featuring a child, we need to ask both the child and his or her legal guardian (or at least an adult caregiver of the child) for permission to do so.

• We do not actively ask children to do or say anything that might make them feel displayed as 'objects of pity' (e.g. to speak about their past or ask for donations).

• We handle children's names carefully, especially in connection with sensitive information about the same children (e.g. the family background, their medical condition, disability or negative behaviour).

• We act with caution when it comes to combining textual and visual information whenever a text includes sensitive information about a child and whenever a photo or video track shows sensitive aspects of a child's life and reveals his or her identity.

Following these guidelines ensures the respect of the children's privacy while at the same time preventing, and raising awareness for, violations of that privacy. Based on these guidelines, coworkers who are directly involved with children have the right and obligation to protect the children from any attempted violations of their privacy – be they intentional or not.

Stakeholders

Child protection is everyone's business. It is an integrated part of our work and affects everyone at Psientífica and anyone who comes into contact with our organization. The specific approach is defined by each member association based on the Child Protection Policy on hand.

Stakeholders & KEY MESSAGES FOR THESE STAKEHOLDERS

• Children (below 18 years of age)

• Young adults (18 years of age or older attending activities)

- You have rights – and this includes the right to say 'No'.

- Violence is not allowed.

- We listen to you and take you seriously.

• Child development co-workers: Educators, social workers, psychologists, community-based carers, volunteers

-You are role models and are listened to.

- You have support in developing positive and participatory discipline processes.

- Listen to children: pay attention to possible signs of abuse; take your responsibility and be there for them when they need your support!

• Leaders of various facilities and programmes

• Organisation members

• Sponsors, donors, journalists and visitors

• Partners of other organisations who work and interact with Psientífica organization.

• External contractors and consultants who provide services

- Protection is everybody's business; you are part of the staff.

Ensuring child protection internally

There are a number of mechanisms in place to ensure that the guidelines, as laid out in the Child Protection Policy, are in place. This includes the nomination of a child protection policy officer, who is responsible for ensuring that the Child Protection Policy adheres to the most up-to-date requirements and is followed by all employees and affiliated partners working with and in the institution.

Ana Moutas will act as primary Child Protection Policy Officer (CPPO) from August 2024. Psientífica will also conduct criminal background checks on candidates who will be involved in working with minors in their job, in accordance with the Child Protection Policy.

The Child Protection Policy will be revised annually by the Child Protection Policy Officer and updated accordingly.

All new employees of Psientífica will be required to read and acknowledge the most up-to-date Child Protection Policy as a requirement of their employment. Existing employees will also be required to read and formally acknowledge the current version of the policy.

For this, written acknowledgement of the Child Protection Policy will be required from all employees and individuals involved in its implementation. All relevant staff and collaborators will receive an annual briefing on the Child Protection Policy, conducted by the Child Protection Policy Officer.

The Child Protection Officer will report any incidents to Psientífica in writing (no form necessary) immediately and with the highest priority upon gaining knowledge of the incident.

Ensuring child protection externally

For more guidelines and information on ensuring child protection policies beyond the limits of the organization, please refer to the standards developed by Keeping Children Safe, as well as their self-assessment tool.

Complaints and accountability

All complaints regarding these guidelines or towards their non-compliance, as laid out within Child Protection Policy, should be addressed to the Child Protection Policy Officer (geral@psientifica.org) and will be responded to immediately and with the highest priority.

Notes:

• Definitions in this paper are based on the definitions used by EveryChild as well as on the definitions elaborated by the WHO, 1990.

• Training for Child Protection, Trainer's notes, p. 123 following. This toolkit was produced by the Keeping Children Safe Coalition, UK in 2006: http://www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk/

• Any concerns or allegations raised, results of investigations, and interviews etc. are documented and stored safely. It is recommended to record and analyze child protection issues that occurred within the communities as well in order to adjust the actions and services provided by the beneficiary organizations of the institution accordingly.

Lead organization representative signature



(Ana Moutas, Vice President of Board of Direction)