

**BURMA EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP**

**POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND  
VULNERABLE ADULTS**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Definitions of Children and Vulnerable Adults**

This policy refers to children and vulnerable adults. All principles referring to children shall also be applied to vulnerable adults.

For the purpose of this act, children are considered to be anyone under 18, as defined in the Children Act 1989.

The policy also covers ‘vulnerable adults’, such as people with learning disabilities, or who have difficulty communicating, who rely on others to provide personal care or adults which, due to their mental, physical, psychological or emotional circumstances which mean that they are temporarily or permanently vulnerable.

### **1.2 Who are Volunteers?**

For the purpose of this policy, the word ‘Volunteer’ is used to mean all people who carry out voluntary work for the charity such as teaching, undertaking presentations and attending meetings. ‘Volunteers’ imply members who carry out an activity and interface with our beneficiaries, other organisations or the public rather than members who take a non active / public interface role in the charity.

A Volunteer may be a Director of the charity or volunteer without Director status. The word ‘Director’ is used within the policy when the capacity of the role as a Director is relevant.

‘Others’ referred to in the policy are other people with whom volunteers work in carrying out their volunteer role.

### **1.3 Relationship with other policies**

Other charity policies are also relevant to child protection issues. This policy shall be read in conjunction with the Volunteer Policy, Code of Conduct, Health and Safety Policies and all other current policies.

### **1.4 Review**

The policy will be reviewed every two years through consultation with Directors, presented to Directors for consultation, adopted and made available to all Directors, Volunteers, Members and insurers.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.5 Implementation**

All volunteers must abide by this policy and abide by the current policy.

### **1.6 Child Protection Director**

The Child Protection Director (CPD) shall:

- Co-ordinate all matters relating to child protection
- Maintain a record of the signed Volunteer Agreement to abide by this (and other) policies.
- Maintain an up to date policy and procedures
- Seek to ensure that volunteers are aware of and follow the procedures
- Maintain all records relating to child protection
- Advise Directors on child protection issues
- Be the first point of contact for any concerns or allegations
- Decide, in conjunction with the Chair, on the appropriate action to be taken, in line with the organisation's procedures
- All volunteers and Directors shall co-operate with the CPD relating to matters of child protection.

During each trip to Thailand a Director must act as the “stand in” Child Protection Director and will act as the Child Protection Director for the duration of that trip.

Should volunteer/s travel to Thailand without the presence of a Director then they shall liaise with the CPD in Britain regarding child protection matters.

Should the CPD be unavailable at any time then the Chair shall act in the capacity of CPD until the CPD is contactable.

## **2.0 VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND BELIEFS**

**2.1** Volunteers shall seek to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 Article 19).

**2.2** This policy sets out common values, principles, and beliefs and describes the steps that will be taken in meeting our commitment to protect children.

- Child abuse involves the abuse of children's rights
- Child abuse is never acceptable
- The child's welfare is paramount
- All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity and have the right to protection from abuse
- The situation of all children must be improved through promotion of their rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes the right to freedom from abuse and exploitation
- All suspicions and allegations of inappropriate behaviour will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- We have a commitment to protecting children with / for whom we work

### **3.0 COMMITMENT TOWARDS CHILD PROTECTION**

#### **Our commitment as a charity**

We will seek to meet our commitment to protect children from abuse through the following means:

#### **3.1 Awareness:**

We will make all volunteers (and others) aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children and the values and principles of the charity.

#### **3.2 Prevention:**

We will seek to ensure, through awareness, good practice, training and a sense of accountability that volunteers minimise the risks to children so that poor practice or potentially abusive behavior does not go unreported.

#### **3.3 Reporting:**

We will ensure that volunteers are clear of what steps to take should they have concerns regarding the inappropriate behavior towards children or should a child say that they are being abused.

#### **3.4 Responding:**

We will respond swiftly to complaints and concerns and seek to ensure that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse and neglect and that the process of reporting and investigating possible abuse is clear.

#### **3.5 Partner organisations:**

When we work through partners, we will require our principle partners to demonstrate that measures are being taken to minimise risks to children.

#### **3.6 The recruitment of volunteers:**

The Volunteer Policy identifies procedures for the recruitment of volunteers. These include measures to seek to minimise the recruitment of volunteers which may present a foreseeable risk to children. This includes ensuring that a current CRB check is available and suitable or undertaking a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check on Volunteers who will be in regular contact with children or vulnerable adults and signing a self-disclosure form for periods of time living outside of Britain.

#### **3.7 Induction**

Volunteers will receive a copy of this policy, an induction into this and other policies and sign the Volunteer Agreement.

#### **3.8 Training**

We shall listen to requests, review training needs and & implement relevant training as required.

#### **3.9 Supervision and Compliance**

We shall ensure that volunteers are maintaining awareness of this policy and child protection procedures by including child protection awareness into the pre-travel information pack and briefing.

## **4.0 CODE OF CONDUCT**

### **4.1 Your responsibility as a Volunteer**

If you are concerned that a child may be being abused, it is NOT your responsibility to investigate further but **it is your responsibility** to act on your concerns and report them to the Child Protection Director.

### **4.2 It is important for all volunteers in contact with children to:**

- be aware of situations which may present risks and manage these
- plan and organise the activities so as to minimise risks
- as far as possible, be visible in working with children
- Within the context of the culture, ensure that openness exists to enable any issues or concerns to be raised and discussed.
- within the context of the culture, empower children to discuss their rights, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what they can do if there is a problem.

### **4.3 Volunteers should seek to avoid the following situations:**

- Spending time alone with children away from others
- Taking children alone in a car on journeys, however short
- Taking children to your home or to your hotel

Where any of these situations are unavoidable, ensure they only occur with the full knowledge and consent of a Director or the child's parents / carers.

#### **4.4 Volunteers must never:**

- hit or otherwise physically assault, physically abuse or neglect children
- develop physical/sexual relationships with children
- develop relationships with children which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive
- act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse
- use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive
- behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative or engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games
- allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any form
- have a child with whom you are working to stay overnight at your home or hotel unsupervised
- sleep in the same bed as a child with whom they are working
- do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves
- condone, or participate in, behaviour of children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive
- act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse
- take photographs of children which can in any way be considered to be inappropriate
- allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- let allegations from a child go unrecorded
- discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favour children to the exclusion of others.

This is not an exhaustive or exclusive list. **The principle is that volunteers should avoid actions or behavior which may constitute poor practice, abusive or potentially abusive behavior.**

However, it may be sometimes necessary for volunteers to do things of a personal nature for children, particularly if they are very young or disabled. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of parents / carers. In an emergency situation, which requires this type of help, parents should be fully informed and Child Protection Director advised as soon as possible after the event. In such situations, it is important to ensure all volunteers are sensitive to the child and undertake personal care tasks with the utmost discretion.

## **5.0 HANDLING CONCERNS AND ALLEGATIONS**

### **5.1 What a volunteer must do if a child tells you he/she is being abused?**

#### **Always:**

- Stay calm - ensure the child is safe and feels safe
- show and tell the child that you are taking what s/he says seriously
- reassure the child and stress that s/he is not to blame
- be honest, explain you will have to tell someone else to help stop the alleged abuse
- make a note of what the child has said as soon as possible after the event
- maintain confidentiality
- Report the conversation to the Child Protection Director as soon as possible and forward a written record of the allegation. If you are in Thailand and the Child Protection Director is not contactable, contact the “stand in” Child Protection Director who will act as the Child Protection Director for the duration of that trip.  
Should a Director not be present during the trip to Thailand, contact the CPD in Britain.

#### **Never:**

- Rush into actions that may be inappropriate
- make promises you cannot keep
- ask inappropriate questions, which may jeopardise any impending police investigation
- **Never discuss the issue with anyone other than the Child Protection Director, not even another volunteer or Director.**

## **5.2 Recording information from children – Guidance for Volunteers**

In cases of child abuse the main aim is to keep calm and provide a positive, friendly attitude to encourage the child to talk.

### **DO:**

- Listen
- Take notes
- Tell the Child Protection Director.

### **DON'T:**

- Ask direct questions
- Try to stop the child telling you about their problem
- Make promises
- Don't assume!

The complexity of child protection issues means that there can never be a set of prescriptive questions. Don't try to get too much information, rather, let the child give you as much as they feel prepared to give. Try to act as naturally as possible throughout. Make notes during the interview, but only those necessary; it might be possible to gain certain contact information from existing administrative records.

### **Common questions:**

Common questions which may be used in some situations:

- Would you like to tell me what happened?
- Can you tell me where/when this happened?
- Would you like to tell me who was involved?
- Can you tell me what happened next?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
- Thank you for telling me this but you do realise I will have to do something about it

**DO NOT:**

Ask leading or closed questions or make judgements such as:

- Was it your father/teacher/friend that did this to you?
- Are you sure that's what happened?
- Why did you let them do that to you?
- Why do you think this happened?
- I expect you must be very upset about this.
- This can be our little secret

**5.3 What a volunteer must do if he/she is concerned about the inappropriate behaviour of another volunteer or others**

**Always:**

- Report any incident or concern about inappropriate behaviour to the Child Protection Director as soon as possible. If you are in Thailand and the Child Protection Director is not contactable, contact the "stand in" Child Protection Director who will act as the Child Protection Director for the duration of that trip. Should a Director not be present during the trip to Thailand, contact the CPD in Britain.
- Make a written account of your concern, location, date and time of incident and pass this to the Child Protection Director.

**Never:**

- Fail to report a concern about inappropriate behaviour because you may consider the person to be a friend or you do not want to become involved.
- Fail to report a concern about inappropriate behaviour because you are not sure whether you think the behaviour was significant. Someone else will make this decision on your behalf.
- Fail to report a concern about inappropriate behaviour because you think that it may adversely affect the charity. Someone else will make this decision on your behalf.
- Raise your concern with the person with whom you have a concern about inappropriate behaviour or question them about what you have seen.
- Discuss the issue with anyone other than the Child Protection Director, not even another volunteer or Director.

#### **5.4 How allegations will be handled**

All concerns, reports and allegations relating to child abuse and neglect, whether occurring in Britain or Thailand, will be handled in accordance with the following guidelines. The general principle is that the information will be forwarded to the relevant body in order for them to investigate the issue.

In Britain, Social Services (and the Police) investigate child protection issues. In Thailand, The Child Protection Act 2004 is law. Thailand has also signed the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child in 1992.

These principles will be followed for all concerns of abuse whether made by children, by volunteers or by third parties.

- All information must be treated as confidential, stored securely and only shared with those who need to know.
- The identity of the person reporting the incident will be kept confidential as far as is practical.
- All reports of abuse will be co-ordinated by the Child Protection Director (CPD).
- When a CPD is not available on a trip a 'stand in' Child Protection Director will be nominated and act as the CPD for the duration of the trip. Should a Director not be present during the trip to Thailand, contact the CPD in Britain.
- On receipt of a report, the CPD shall make a written record of the issue. The CPD shall maintain a record throughout the process and hold records securely.
- The CPD shall notify the Chair as soon as is practicable and agree the course of action together.
- The CPD shall contact either the NSPCC helpline (0808 8005000), Childline (08001111), Citizens Advice Bureau or other specialist organisation in order to seek advice as to the appropriate action. (In Britain, this is likely to be to report the concern to either Social Services and or the Police).
- Should the concern be with regard to an event undertaken in Thailand, the CPD will contact International Social Services (0207 7358941) and or the Police, Child Pornography Unit (0808 1000040). Specialist advice will be sought regarding the handing of allegations being undertaken in Thailand with regard to whether, how and where to report the incident to the appropriate Thai authority and whether the British authorities should also be made aware of the issue.
- The CPD, the Chair and the person raising the concern will **not** notify the person of the allegations is being made. The item will be investigated independently by the relevant authorities.
- The CPD shall seek specialist advice with regard to determining the timing and process for notifying the incident to other Directors.

## **6.0 MISCONDUCT**

### **6.1 Dealing with misconduct or concerns and allegations:**

- Owing to the nature of the charities work, all reports, concerns and allegations will be taken seriously.
- Should any volunteer be convicted in Britain or overseas of any matter of child abuse or neglect then they will be dismissed as a volunteer with the charity immediately.
- The charity will take no risks whatsoever with regard to this matter owing to its principle commitment to protect children and the need to reduce risks in other activities undertaken by the charity.
- During the course of an investigation by relevant authorities, the Directors may suspend the Volunteer from all work with the charity, what ever the probability of the outcome. This action is not intended to be an implied decision of guilt but as a prudent temporary measure that all volunteers must accept in order to protect the wider work of the charity.
- Should a volunteer be accused (not necessarily be convicted) of any matter relating to child abuse or neglect during the course of volunteering or whilst working outside the charity, then they must report this to the CPD who will discuss this with the Chair and seek advice from Social Services. The volunteer may be suspended from volunteering during the course of the investigation.
- Should a concern or allegation be found to be unproven, then, in exceptional circumstances, the Directors may decide that the volunteer shall not continue to volunteer with the charity. Should this occur, the decision will be not based upon a judgement of guilt but will be based upon the risk to other charity activities, the reputation of the charity and the impact on other volunteers. The Directors decision is final.
- Should it be discovered that the self-disclosure within the application form be incorrect, then the volunteer will be dismissed from volunteering immediately.

## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix 1

### What is child abuse?

Child abuse is a term used to describe ways in which children are harmed, usually by adults and often by people they know and trust. It refers to damage done to a child's physical or mental health. Child abuse can take many forms:

#### **Physical abuse**

Where adults or other children:

- Physically hurt or injure children (eg. by hitting, shaking, squeezing, biting or burning)
- Give children alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison
- Attempt to suffocate or drown children

#### **Neglect**

Neglect includes situations in which adults:

- Fail to meet a child's basic physical needs (eg. for food, water, warm clothing, essential medication)
- Consistently leave children alone and unsupervised
- Fail or refuse to give children love, affection or attention

#### **Sexual abuse**

Boys and girls are sexually abused when adults (of the same or opposite sex) or other young people use them to meet their own sexual needs. This could include:

- Full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, fondling
- Showing children pornographic books, photographs or videos, or taking pictures for pornographic purposes

#### **Emotional abuse**

Emotional abuse can occur in a number of ways. For example, where:

- There is persistent lack of love or affection
- There is constant overprotection which prevents children from socialising
- Children are frequently shouted at or taunted
- There is neglect, physical or sexual abuse

## **Bullying**

Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated or sustained over a period of time, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. The bully may often be another young person. Although anyone can be the target of bullying, victims are typically shy, sensitive and perhaps anxious or insecure. Sometimes they are singled out for physical reasons – being overweight, physically small, having a disability or belonging to a different race, faith or culture.

## **Recognising Abuse**

It is not always easy, even for the most experienced carers, to spot when a child has been abused. However, some of the more typical symptoms which should trigger your suspicions would include:

- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries
- Sexually explicit language or actions
- A sudden change in behaviour (eg. becoming very quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden outbursts of temper)
- The child describes what appears to be an abusive act involving him/her a change observed over a long period of time (eg. the child losing weight or becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt)
- A general distrust and avoidance of adults, especially those with whom a close relationship would be expected
- An unexpected reaction to normal physical contact
- Difficulty in making friends or abnormal restrictions on socialising with others.

It is important to note that a child could be displaying some or all of these signs, or behaving in a way which is worrying, without this necessarily meaning that the child is being abused. Similarly, there may not be any signs, but you may just feel that something is wrong. If you have noticed a change in the child's behaviour, first talk to the parents or carers. It may be that something has happened, such as a bereavement, which has caused the child to be unhappy.