

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY OVERVIEW

Background:

The Child Protection Policy aims to ensure the safety and well-being of the children with whom Earth Focus Foundation interacts. Its primary goal is to protect children from all forms of harm, including neglect and abuse, such as mental/emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. This policy is designed to reduce children's vulnerability and preserve their innocence by providing them with the necessary care, protection, and support to thrive in all environments. Child protection is an integral part of children's rights.

Definition of Child Abuse:

The term "child/children" refers to any person/s under 18 years of age. "Child abuse" or "maltreatment" includes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligent treatment, and commercial or other exploitation, which can result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity within a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power (WHO, 1999). This policy ensures that all children, without exception, have the right to protection from abuse in any form, including but not limited to infanticide, child labor, trafficking, and sexual abuse. Discrimination or harmful behavior based on factors such as class, caste, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, beliefs, or any other criteria is strictly prohibited.

Scope:

This Policy applies to everyone associated with the Earth Focus Foundation, including staff (which includes any staff of Earth Focus Foundation, consultants, donors, NGO partners, interns, volunteers during volunteer work, vendors, trustees, and board members) collectively referred to as "Personnel." This policy came into effect on June 1, 2022.

Guiding Principles: This Policy is founded on the following guiding principles:

- Respect for the dignity, liberty, and freedom of children.
- Prioritizing the best interests of children in all matters concerning them.
- Acknowledging children's right to freedom of expression.
- Ensuring children's participation in decisions that affect them.
- Respecting children's right to privacy.

- Maintaining zero tolerance for any form of abuse against children, whether direct or indirect.
- Belief that child protection is the responsibility and duty of all Earth Focus Staff.
- Incorporating provisions of national child protection laws into this Policy and reviewing them periodically to ensure alignment.

Objectives:

This Policy aims to achieve the following primary objectives:

- Ensure the highest levels of child protection standards are upheld and practiced at Earth Focus.
- Establish a clear and effective reporting mechanism for violations of this Policy and institute a time-bound redressal mechanism for such violations.

Code of Conduct:

To uphold honesty, integrity, and respect for children, the following code of conduct is established for all Earth Focus Personnel:

- Respect the privacy and dignity of each child.
- Avoid seclusion when in contact with children at the workplace (defined as Earth Focus' premises, offsite project locations, events, or any place where Earth Focus Staff/Personnel represent the organization, including schools).
- Foster a culture of openness that encourages interaction between children and Staff, allowing children to express their concerns without fear of retribution or negative consequences.
- Promote an environment of mutual respect and make children feel comfortable expressing their views.
- Protect the child's identity by not disclosing it outside the assigned team responsible for their care, education, or protection during any proceedings under this Policy.
- Safeguard the child's privacy by not disclosing their identity to individuals outside Earth Focus who do not require such information for the child's benefit during any proceedings under this Act.

- Be aware of the potential need to provide different responses when dealing with children who may have experienced trauma or face challenges to their abilities, making them more vulnerable than other children in similar situations. Ensure that the child's traumatic experience is not publicized before visitors, funders, or the public during any proceedings under this Policy.

Earth Focus Personnel should not:

- Make sexually suggestive gestures or display sexually explicit material in any form, including photos, videos, or other materials, to children.
- Be alone in a room with a child for an extended period.
- Involve children in personal work or employ them at work or at home.
- Use inappropriate language or expressions that may harm or humiliate a child.
- Use or tolerate corporal punishment.
- Develop exploitative or abusive relationships with children.
- Discriminate against children on any grounds, including but not limited to community, color, language, disability, physical features, race, religion, caste, background, or any other factors.

Awareness of Abuse:

Child abuse may become apparent through various means, including:

- A child disclosing abuse.
- Someone else reporting that a child has disclosed abuse or expressing strong belief that abuse is occurring.
- Physical injuries in a child without a satisfactory explanation.
- Behavioral changes in a child suggesting possible abuse.
- Concerning behavior exhibited by a member of Personnel in their interaction with a child.
- Denial or disciplining of a child without parental consent, particularly in teaching and playgroup settings.

Response Mechanism for Child Protection Violations:

Earth Focus will establish a panel to address complaints made under this policy. The responsibilities of Earth Focus Personnel regarding reporting child protection violations are as follows:

- Maintain written records of concerns about children, even when immediate escalation is not required (see Annexure A).
- Document the nature of the offense and details of the offender in writing and report it directly to the Panel.
- Upon receiving such a report, the Panel, in conjunction with the Program Coordinator(s) and/or Manager responsible for the relevant program, will investigate the matter and take appropriate action following disciplinary guidelines established in the past or outlined in this Policy.
- Both the Panel and the complainant(s) must ensure strict confidentiality throughout the process, with all records securely stored.
- During the investigation, both the child and the alleged offender must be given ample opportunity to provide separate accounts of the incident, and the Panel should create an environment conducive to obtaining accurate information.
- The Panel will take all necessary precautions to protect the identities of the complainant and the alleged accused, as well as the incident details during the investigation, to ensure that the complainant is not victimized or stigmatized as a result of the complaint or investigation.
- While the matter is under investigation, the individual suspected of violating this Policy must be removed from direct contact with children and may be suspended at the Panel's discretion until the matter is resolved.
- The Panel is responsible for ensuring that the matter is addressed and resolved within one month of the initial report.
- Any concerning or inappropriate behavior by the implicated Staff member and any actions taken against them must be documented in their personal record.
- In cases where a complaint is filed against the Program Manager or a member of the Panel, it must be submitted in writing and addressed to the remaining members of the Panel. These remaining members are jointly responsible for investigating all claims against the implicated personnel. If necessary, an additional member may be invited to participate temporarily in an ongoing inquiry. Once a complaint is reported, the Panel

may, through unanimous decision, temporarily limit the accused individual's powers to the extent they deem necessary to protect the independence and integrity of the investigation and the reporting and redressal mechanism.

- During the course of the inquiry proceedings, the Panel must take all possible precautions to ensure that the complaint, whether filed by the child, their parents, or any other person, is not motivated by vindictiveness, personal vendettas, or an attempt to tarnish the reputation of the concerned Personnel/Organization for personal gain.

Representation of Children in the Media:

Earth Focus Personnel are responsible for safeguarding the dignity, identity, and privacy of children when they interact with the media. All documents and records that could identify children or imply their identity must be kept confidential, except when disclosure is mandated by law.

Policy Dissemination:

This Policy will be shared with all individuals listed under the "Scope of the Policy," including new recruits. It will also be prominently displayed on the organization's website, and physical copies will be readily accessible at all Earth Focus workplaces.

This policy became effective on August 10, 2019.

Child Protection Committee:

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2. Vipul Gupta
3. Shalini Gupta
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