

# Child Protection Policy

**Voluntary Association for Rural Development of Bangladesh (VARD of Bangladesh)**



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## Voluntary Association for Rural Development of Bangladesh (VARD of Bangladesh)

### Introduction

Voluntary Association for Rural Development of Bangladesh (VARD of Bangladesh) is a non-profit, non-political, non-government national voluntary and holistic developmental humanitarian organization serving the needy and most vulnerable especially focusing on children, Women, youths and families in rural communities of Bangladesh. As a child focused organization VARD of Bangladesh must ensure that:

- the welfare of the child is paramount
- all children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse
- all suspicions and allegations of abuse and poor practice will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- all staff (paid/unpaid) working in project / Program for children have a responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate officer.

### Policy statement/aims

VARD of Bangladesh has a duty of care to safeguard all children involved in VARD of Bangladesh from all sorts of harm. All children have a right to protection, and the needs of disabled children and others who may be particularly vulnerable must be considered. VARD of Bangladesh will ensure the safety and protection of all children involved with VARD of Bangladesh.

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 (The convention on the rights of the child, (Act1989).

### Policy aims

The aim of the VARD of Bangladesh Child Protection Policy is to promote good practice:

- providing children with appropriate safety and protection whilst in the care of VARD of Bangladesh or any types of involvement of VARD of Bangladesh
- allow all staff /volunteers to make informed and confident respondent to specific child protection issues.

## **Promoting good practice**

Child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can arouse strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgment about the appropriate action to take.

Abuse can occur within many situations including the home, school and the project/Program environment. Some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with young people in order to harm them. Animator, coach, instructor, teacher, official or volunteer will have regular contact with young people and be an important link in identifying cases where they need protection. All suspicious cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document.

When a child enters the project / Program activity having been subjected to child abuse outside the project / Program environment, project / Program can play a crucial role in improving the child's self-esteem. In such instances the club activity organizer must work with the appropriate agencies to ensure the child receives the required support.

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## **Good practice guidelines**

All personnel should be encouraged to demonstrate exemplary behavior to promote children's welfare and reduce the likelihood of allegations being made. The following are common examples of how to create a positive culture and climate.

### **Good practice means:**

- Always working in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication with no secrets).
- Treating all children equally, and with respect and dignity.
- Maintaining a safe and appropriate distance with children (e.g. it is not appropriate for staff or volunteers to have an intimate relationship with a child or to share a room with them).
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empowers children to share in the decision-making process.
- Making project / Program activities fun, enjoyable and promoting fair play and learn.
- Ensuring that if any form of manual/physical support is required, it should be provided openly.
- Keeping up to date with technical skills and qualifications.
- Involving parents/foster parent's / care givers wherever possible. For example, encouraging them to take responsibility for their children in the changing rooms. If groups have to be supervised in the changing rooms, always ensure parents, teachers, coaches, animators or officials work in pairs.
- Ensuring that if mixed teams are taken away, they should always be accompanied by a male and female member of staff. However, remember that same gender abuse can also occur.

- Ensuring that at residential events, adults should not enter children's rooms or invite children into their rooms.
- Being an excellent role model - this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of children.
- Giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Recognizing the developmental needs and capacity of children and not pushing them against their will.
- Securing parental consent in writing to act if the need arises to administer emergency first aid and/or other medical treatment.
- Keeping a written record of any injury that occurs, along with the details of any treatment given.
- Requesting written parental consent if project / Program officials are required to transport children in their vehicle.

### **Practices to be avoided**

The following should be **avoided** except in emergencies. If cases arise where these situations are unavoidable it should be with the full knowledge and consent of someone in charge in the club or the child's parents. For example, a child sustains an injury and needs to go to hospital, or a parent fails to arrive to pick a child up at the end of a session:

- avoid spending time alone with children away from others
- avoid taking or dropping off a child to an event or activity.

### **Practices never to be sanctioned**

The following should **never** be sanctioned. You should never:

- engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games
- share a room with a child
- allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun
- reduce a child to tears as a form of control
- fail to act upon and record any allegations made by a child
- invite or allow children to stay with you at your home unsupervised.

## **Incidents that must be reported/recorded**

If any of the following occur, you should report this immediately to the appropriate officer or authority and record that incident. You should also ensure the parents of the child are well-informed after the consultation with appropriate officer:

- if you accidentally hurt a child
- if a child hurt other child / children
- if a child hurt himself / herself
- if he/she seems distressed in any manner
- if a child appears to be sexually aroused by your actions
- if a child appears to be misbehave with you or conduct inappropriate actions
- if a child misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.

## **Use of photographic/filming equipment**

There is evidence that some people have used children events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of children in vulnerable positions. All projects/programmed for children should be vigilant and any concerns should be reported to the VARD of Bangladesh Child Protection Officer or responsible person.

However, children and their parents/ foster parent's / care givers should be made aware that this is part of the project /Program for children and their consent obtained, and such photographs / films should be stored safely.

It is must to get written concern from parents / foster parents / care givers when using the individual photographs or filming of child.

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## **Recruitment and training of staff and volunteers**

VARD of Bangladesh recognizes that anyone may have the potential to abuse children in some way and that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children. Pre-selection checks must be included the following:

- All volunteers/staff should complete an application form. The application form will elicit information about an applicant's past and a self-disclosure about any criminal record.
- Two confidential references, including one regarding previous work with children. These references must be taken up and confirmed through telephone contact.
- Evidence of identity (national identity card or passport or driving license with photo).



## **Interview and induction**

All employees (and volunteers) will be required to undergo an interview carried out to acceptable protocol and recommendations. All employees and volunteers should receive an induction, during which:

- A check should be made that the application form has been completed in full (including sections on criminal records and self-disclosures).
- Their qualifications should be substantiated.
- The job requirements and responsibilities should be clarified.
- Child protection procedures are explained, and training needs are identified.
- They should sign up to the organization's Code of Ethics and Conduct and Child Protection policy.

## **Training**

In addition to pre-selection checks, the safeguarding process includes training after recruitment to help staff and volunteers to:

- Analyze their own practice against established good practice, and to ensure their practice is not likely to result in allegations being made.
- Recognize their responsibilities and report any concerns about suspected poor practice or possible abuse.
- Respond to concerns expressed by a child.
- Work safely effectively with children.

## **VARD of Bangladesh requires:**

- Child Protection Officer(staff) to attend a recognized 3-hour good practice and child protection awareness training workshop, to ensure their practice is exemplary and to facilitate the development of a positive culture towards good practice and child protection.
- Non-coaching staff and volunteers to complete recognized awareness training on child protection.
- Relevant personnel to receive advisory information outlining good practice and informing them about what to do if they have concerns about the behavior of an adult towards children.

## **Responding to allegations or suspicions**

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in VARD of Bangladesh in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However, there is a responsibility to act on any concerns by reporting these to the appropriate officer or the appropriate authorities.

VARD of Bangladesh will assure all staff/volunteers that it will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith reports his or her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.

Where there is a complaint against a member of staff there may be three types of investigation:

- a criminal investigation
- a child protection investigation
- a disciplinary or misconduct investigation.

The results of the police and child protection investigation may well influence and inform the disciplinary investigation, but all available information will be used to reach a decision.

## **Reporting concerns about poor practice**

If, following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice the designated/Child Protection Officer will deal with it as a misconduct issue.

If the allegation is about poor practice by the Organization/Child Protection Officer, or if the matter has been handled inadequately and concerns remain, it should be reported to the relevant officer who will decide how to deal with the allegation and whether or not to initiate disciplinary proceedings.

## **Reporting concerns about suspected abuse**

Any suspicion that a child has been abused by either a member of staff or a volunteer should be reported to the Organization /Child Protection Officer, who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.

The Organization/Child Protection Officer will refer the allegation to the social services department who may involve the police.

If the Organization /Child Protection Officer is the subject of the suspicion/allegation, the report must be made to the appropriate Manager or in his/her absence the Child Protection Officer who will refer the allegation to Social Services.

## **Confidentiality**

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a **need to know** basis only. This includes the following people:

- the Child Protection Officer
- the parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused
- the person making the allegation
- social services/police
- the VARD of Bangladesh Program Manager and Child Protection Officer

Seek social services advice on who should approach the alleged abuser (or parents if the alleged abuser is a child).

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws (e.g. that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

## **Enquiries and further action**

### **Internal enquiries and possible suspension**

The VARD of Bangladesh Child Protection Officer will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further police and social services inquiries.

Irrespective of the findings of the social services or police inquiries the VARD of Bangladesh Disciplinary Committee will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of staff or volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled.

This may be a difficult decision; particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases, the VARD of Bangladesh Disciplinary Committee must reach a decision based upon the available information which could suggest that on a balance of probability, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of the child should remain of paramount importance throughout.

### **Support to deal with the aftermath of abuse**

Consideration should be given to the kind of support that children, parents and members of staff may need. Use of helplines, support groups and open meetings will maintain an open culture and help the healing process. In this case, VARD of Bangladesh will use available professional counselors. Consideration should be given to what kind of support may be appropriate for the alleged perpetrator.



## **Allegations of previous abuse**

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (e.g. by an adult who was abused as a child or by a member of staff who is still currently working with children).

Where such an allegation is made, the organization should follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to the social services or the police. This is because other children, either within or outside sport, may be at risk from this person. Anyone who has a previous criminal conviction for offences related to abuse is automatically excluded from working with children.

## **Providing information to police or social services**

Information about suspected abuse must be accurate and a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure/concern. It should include the following:

- The child's name, age and date of birth of the child.
- The child's home address and telephone number.
- Whether or not the person making the report is expressing their own concerns or those of someone else.
- The nature of the allegation. Include dates, times, any special factors and other relevant information.
- Make a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
- A description of any visible bruising or other injuries. Also, any indirect signs, such as behavioral changes.
- Details of witnesses to the incidents.
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred.
- Have the parents been contacted?
- If so what has been said?
- Has anyone else been consulted? If so record details.
- If the child was not the person who reported the incident, has the child been spoken to? If so what was said?
- Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record details.
- Where possible referral to the police or social services should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours and the name of the contact who took the referral should be recorded.

## **Child Abuse Definitions**

**What is child abuse?** There are many definitions of child abuse.

The initially used definition is as follows:

“Acts or omissions by a care-giver leading to actual or potential damage to health and development, and exposure to unnecessary suffering to the child”.

A wider definition is:

“Anything which individuals, institutions, or processes do (acts) or fail (omissions) to do which directly or indirectly harms children or damages the prospects of safe and healthy development into adulthood” The World Health Organization Report of the consultation on Child Abuse and Prevention (1999) proposed modified definitions for child abuse, which cover wider areas.

### **General definition:**

‘Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power’

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse of a child is that which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power, or trust. There may be single or repeated incidents (WHO, 1999).

### **Neglect & Negligent Treatment**

Neglect is the inattention or omission on the part of the caregiver to provide for the development of the child in all spheres: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions, in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers and 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. (WHO, 1999)

## **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, including the availability of a primary attachment figure, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies commensurate with her or his personal potential, and in the context of the society in which the child dwells. There may also be acts toward the child that cause or have a high probability of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. These acts must be reasonably within the control of the parent or person in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Acts include restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, denigrating, scapegoating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing, or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment (WHO, 1999).

## **Exploitation**

Commercial or other exploitation of child refers to use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labour and child prostitution. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, moral or social-emotional development. (WHO, 1999)

## **Sexual Abuse**

- Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child 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. This may include but not is limited to:
  - The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity.
  - The exploitative use of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices.
  - The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

### **Personal Declaration of commitment**

To be signed by all VARD of Bangladesh staff members working with children and youth, including volunteers and assistants. A copy must be given to the staff member and the signed original kept on the file at the project or program office.

Name of the Worker: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

I, declare that:

1. I will accept the leadership and guidance of my supervisor.
2. I will work within the procedures laid out in the VARD of Bangladesh Child Protection Policy.
3. I have not been accused or convicted of any offense involving physical or sexual abuse of the children or young people.
4. I understand that if a complaint be should be reported against me, I will be obligated to follow the child protection procedures laid out in the VARD of Bangladesh Child Protection Policy for suspected or reported abuse.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_