
Girls' Education Challenge

Keeping in contact with girls

COVID-19 Communication and Safeguarding Template Standard Operating Procedures¹

Note for use:

- The aim of this document is to provide a template for projects to use as they are developing the *Keeping in Contact with Girls* Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The idea is that projects can simply copy and paste/ include their own wording under the key section headings and standard explanations (in black text).
- Examples have been provided (in blue text) – these illustrate the type of things projects need to consider including.
- This document provides an example of SOPs for a project using a group chat app as their primary means of keeping in contact. Projects should consider this to be an example only and tailor their SOPs to their project's needs and implementing modalities. The Keeping in Contact Guidance Note contains material and information that projects can use to support them in the development of these SOPs.

¹ Developed by Danielle Cornish-Spencer, Social Development Direct, on behalf of the Girls' Education Challenge. April 2020

1. Objective

Working with girls over the phone or the internet is a high-risk activity. Our objective is to ensure that all staff, volunteers and beneficiaries are as safe using two-way communications as they are when working in person.

All staff members and volunteers working with children and vulnerable adults via phone or online communications are to be socialised in the following SOP. If socialisation has not taken place, individuals should not engage in this type of communication with girls. Evidence of socialisation should be kept on file.

2. Related policies

This document is a part of a suite of safeguarding policies and procedures. It must be used in conjunction with the following documents:

- Child safeguarding policy
- PSEAH policy
- Whistleblowing policy
- Complaints policy and procedures
- Anti-fraud and corruption policy
- Anti-bullying and harassment policy
- Any additional protection policies developed globally or locally by [insert organisation name]
- Conflict of interest policy
- Data protection policy
- IT policy
- Safety and security policy

All staff members, volunteers and associated personnel must be socialised in these additional materials prior to working with beneficiaries (in any capacity). In addition, all HR processes should be followed and background checks completed for anyone engaging with beneficiaries to the same extent as is conducted for those engaging in in-person work with a child or vulnerable adult.

Code of Conduct

[Insert organisation's code of conduct here, for reference BOND's Code of Conduct template has been used]

Introduction

In keeping with its vision and values, [NGO] is committed to maintaining the highest degree of ethical conduct amongst all its staff and associated personnel. To help increase understanding, this Code of Conduct details [NGO]'s expectations of employees in key areas.

Scope and purpose

This Code of Conduct applies to all contracted staff and associated personnel, international and local, employed by [Organisation].

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to set out the conduct expected of [organisation] staff whilst under contract to the organisation, and forms part of all contracts of employment. The Code is applicable at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct are grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

Whilst recognising that local laws and cultures differ considerably from one country to another, [organisation] is an International Non-Governmental Organisation, and therefore the Code of Conduct is developed from international and UN standards. [Organisation] staff and associated personnel are expected to uphold local law wherever they operate, except where the Code of Conduct is more stringent, in which case the Code applies.

Mission and values

[Insert NGO's Mission Statement or Organisational Values here]

Code of Conduct standards

As an [NGO] employee I will:

Uphold the integrity and reputation of [NGO] by ensuring that my professional and personal conduct is consistent with [NGO]'s values and standards

- I will treat all people fairly with respect and dignity
- When working in an international context or travelling internationally on behalf of [NGO], I will be observant of all local laws and be sensitive to local customs
- I will seek to ensure that my conduct does not bring [NGO] into disrepute and does not impact on or undermine my ability to undertake the role for which I am employed
- I will not work under the influence of alcohol or use, or be in possession of, illegal substances on [NGO] premises or accommodation

Not engage in abusive or exploitative conduct

- I will not engage in sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18). Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence
- I will not exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour, is prohibited. This includes any exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries of assistance
- I will not engage in sexual relationships with beneficiaries of assistance, since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics
- I will not engage in any commercially exploitative activities with children or vulnerable adults including child labour or trafficking
- I will not physically assault a child or vulnerable adult
- I will not emotionally or psychologically abuse a child or vulnerable adult

Ensure the safety, health and welfare of all [NGO] staff members and associated personnel (volunteers, partners, suppliers and contractors)

- I will adhere to all legal and organisational health and safety requirements in force at my location of work
- I will comply with any local security guidelines and be pro-active in informing management of any necessary changes to such guidelines
- I will behave in a manner such as to avoid any unnecessary risk to the safety, health and welfare of myself and others, including partner organisations and communities with whom we work

Be responsible for the use of information, assets and resources to which I have access by reason of my employment with [NGO]

- I will ensure that I use [NGO] assets and resources entrusted to me in a responsible manner and will account for all money and property
- I will not use [NGO] IT equipment, software or e-mail and social media platforms to engage in activity that is illegal under local or international law or that encourages conduct that would constitute a criminal offence. This includes any material that intimidates or harasses any group based on protected characteristics, or encourages extremism
- I will not use [NGO] IT equipment to view, download, create, distribute or save in any format inappropriate or abusive material including but not limited to pornography or depictions of child abuse

Perform my duties and conduct my private life in a manner that avoids conflicts of interest

- I will declare any financial, personal or family (or close intimate relationship) interest in matters of official business which may impact on the work of [NGO]
- I will not be involved in awarding benefits, contracts for goods or services, employment or promotion within [NGO], to any person with whom I have a financial, personal, family (or close intimate relationship) interests
- I will seek permission before agreeing to being nominated as a prospective candidate or another official role for any political party

- I will not accept significant gifts or any remuneration from governments, communities with whom we work, donors, suppliers and other persons which have been offered to me as a result of my employment with [NGO]

3. Behaviour protocols

Project specific behaviour protocol for staff, volunteers and associated personnel

[Insert organisation's behaviour protocol here and include additional two-way communication protocols – an example has been provided below.]

In addition to the Code of Conduct, further behaviour protocols have been put in place to safeguard boys and girls due to the high-risk nature of [insert name of project]'s work which often means working directly with adolescent girls during the project's usual activities. These are below.

Unacceptable teachers' and other staff's behaviour in relation to students

Teaching or non-teaching staff, associated personnel or volunteers should never:

- Engage in sexual activity with a person below the age of 18
- Physically assault any person
- Spend excessive time alone with children
- Take project beneficiaries to their home
- Come to the classroom or the school whilst intoxicated
- Use language, or make suggestions which are abuse or sexually suggestive
- Sleep in the same bed or room as a student
- Do things for students of a personal nature that they can do for themselves e.g. using the latrine
- Condone or participate in behaviour of students 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
- Discriminate against, show different treatment or favour particular students to the exclusion of others
- Insult, condemn or other psychological and emotional abuse
- Expose students to pornography or sexually suggestive images/video/written text
- Expose children to hazardous work
- Exploit students through child labour
- Exchange money or project resources for sex or labour
- Discriminate between students of different genders e.g. punishing pregnant schoolgirls, favouring boy / girl student
- Infringe students' rights e.g. to privacy and confidentiality
- Use language and images that could possibly degrade or victimise or shame children

Additional behaviour protocols for staff and volunteers working with beneficiaries via phone or internet two-way communication

- Contact girls without obtaining appropriate permissions (see organisation's consent forms)
- Work with children, online or on the phone, without appropriate permission being sought from their parents/guardians (where the child is not an emancipated adolescent)
- Not share contact details of beneficiaries without appropriate informed consent and permissions (see organisation's data protection policy)
- Do not communicate with beneficiaries via personal social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
- Be aware that behaviour protocols which have already been put in place apply during online and phone-based communication

Child-to-child behaviour protocols

[Insert organisation's child-to-child protocol here and include additional 2-way communication protocols – an example has been provided below.]

Children and young people are expected to:

- Be friendly and particularly welcoming to new children
- Challenge (where they feel safe to do so) or report the bullying of their peers
- Be helpful and supportive to peers / younger children in completing their tasks
- Not use any kind of violence (sexual, emotional, physical)
- Respect each other's differences
- Treat staff and volunteers with respect
- Not bully
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of others regardless of age, gender, ability, race, cultural background or religious beliefs
- Report anything that worries or concerns you to [Insert reporting mechanism]

Additional behaviour protocols for distance learning, or keeping in touch via internet or phone

- Do not share anyone else's number or contact details without their permission (if they are an adult or an emancipated adolescent) or their parent's permission (if they are under the age of 18)
- Do not take or share photos of yourself in online spaces or via SMS with anyone. Do not take or share photos of others in online spaces or via SMS without their permission (if they are an adult or an emancipated adolescent) or their parent's permission (if they are under the age of 18)
- Be aware that behaviour protocols that applied in classroom and other learning activities, also apply online and on the phone

4. Procedures for communicating through group chat apps

[Insert procedures here. This may be a new activity for many projects – an example has been provided below]

Set up of groups

1. Two members of staff, or appropriately vetted volunteers, are selected as moderators for the group. They are trained in this SOP and asked to use this document as a guide.
2. Appropriate permissions are collected for girls to take part in the group chat.
3. Parents/guardians (where the girl is under the age of 18 and not an emancipated adolescent) should be contacted and their daughter's engagement in this activity discussed.
4. Staff members or volunteers are provided with a phone specifically for use in moderating the group chat (and other work-related activity).
5. Ensure group members are briefed on the behaviour protocols accepted in the group and that they agree to these protocols. This activity should be repeated semi-regularly (every month). Behaviour protocols can be placed on an online storage location, so that a link can be shared in the group chat itself. Members of the group must actively affirm they have read and agree to the protocols in the chat itself.
6. Members are provided with information regarding the times that moderators are available on the chat and when they are not (e.g. outside working hours).²

² From our guidance note: [Has the project thought through the safety and well-being of staff members and their work-life balance? For example, does the use of the new communication method mean that staff will be 'on call' at all times, or will there be a plan put in place for handover, call forwarding and/or operating hours?]. Project should consider this here.

Communicating with girls about the dangers of being online

When working with girls through the internet and phones, particularly during COVID-19, it is important to communicate with them regarding keeping safe on the internet and through phones.

[Organisation] will share IEC materials, or tell girls through calls, SMS, group chat or audio clips sent to girls' phones, about ways to stay safe online.

[Insert materials and ways of communicating on this here]³

Dealing with safeguarding complaints and reports

[Insert project and organisational safeguarding reporting, case handling framework and victim/survivor assistance SOPs here]

Additionally, when working through distance learning activities, or keeping in contact over the phone or internet, girls may not be able to report using the usual means of reporting. Women and girls may lack confidential space to speak on the phone. Making girls aware of the code word 'I need to speak to Mrs. Abet' is one way that staff and volunteers can ask girls to make them aware that an incident has occurred. Working through call or one-to-one SMS/Chat communication, the moderator can ask the girl to disclose information if they feel comfortable, or to ask if the girl requires urgent care. The moderator should know the local referral pathway for each area that the project works in. At a minimum, the moderator should send the girl a list of services. In the context of COVID-19, services' availability may change.

[Insert local service mapping here for moderator reference]

Online bullying

Bullying in the classroom and in schools is managed through teachers. However, bullying may occur between children online, outside of the classroom and within the new group chat. Where behaviour protocols are breached and bullying takes place, [your organisation] should have in place a system, communicated to girls, on how these breaches of the behaviour protocol will be dealt with.

Disciplinary measures for girls should be applied to communicate that bullying behaviour is wrong. Disciplinary measures must be applied fairly, consistently, and reasonably taking account the needs of vulnerable girls. It is also important to consider the motivations behind bullying behaviour and whether it reveals any concerns for the safety of the perpetrator. Where this is the case the child engaging in bullying may need support themselves. Disciplinary measures for breaching the behaviour protocols and engaging in bullying behaviour should be communicated clearly to girls. The following protocols should be used for different types and severity of bullying behaviour.

[Insert adapted classroom management and bullying protocol here]

³ See Keeping-in-Contact Guidance Note for further information.

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