

# Safeguarding Children Policy

## 1. Introduction

Tearfund recognises that by the nature of our work, our operations and those of our Partners, we may encounter or pose a risk to children, therefore this policy is intended to proactively manage and mitigate those risks. Children experience increased vulnerability as a result of many factors including age, family or social context, disability, environment, natural disasters and conflict. It is therefore vital Tearfund works with all people, especially children, respectfully and in a way, which maintains their safety, dignity and security. Tearfund believes every child, regardless of gender identification, and any other points of difference, has the right to live in a safe, peaceful, and enabling environment where they can fully exercise their rights.

Through its Safeguarding Children Policy and Guidelines, Tearfund demonstrates its commitment to ensuring that children are protected from all forms of harm and abuse, and able to live a life with dignity, respect and security. Tearfund is committed to a culture of zero tolerance towards all forms of harm and abuse, and where Tearfund people “do no harm” while working for or with Tearfund.

## 2. Purpose

This Policy provides guidance to all Tearfund People and Partners to understand the importance and responsibilities of safeguarding children at all times, by:

- upholding the dignity, value and respect of children and childhood;
- taking preventative steps to ensure a safe environment for children;
- identifying and responding quickly and appropriately to concerns or allegations of abuse that are raised.

## 3. Scope

This Policy applies to all Tearfund People.

## 4. Safeguarding Approach

While compliance with applicable law is required, the philosophical basis of Tearfund’s approach to safeguarding children is informed by three main sources: a reading of Christian scriptures, Tearfund values, and an understanding of good international development practice:

- 4.1 Christian scriptures teach that children are to be cared for and protected; children can participate in the community; children are to be taught; children can serve as an example to adults.
- 4.2 Tearfund’s Values include a commitment to the whole person, which encompasses not just physical, social, spiritual and emotional needs, but also understands the needs and opportunities of a range of life stages.
- 4.3 We understand that good development for a community must work for the most vulnerable groups. In other words, what is good for children is good for communities. This is expressed in international law. Tearfund refers to The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), an agreement which commits signatory countries to ensure that children’s rights are upheld in the domains of safety, survival, development and participation.

## 5. Guiding Principles

### 5.1 Shared responsibility

The protection of children is the responsibility of all Tearfund People, and final accountability for implementation of Safeguarding Children at Tearfund rests with the Leadership Team (LT).

### 5.2 Zero tolerance of abuse

Tearfund has a zero tolerance approach to any form of child abuse and exploitation. Such behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

### 5.3 Children's rights and best interests

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the universal foundation for child protection. The fundamental principle of the Convention is that children have their own indivisible rights. In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

### 5.4 Managing safeguarding risks

Tearfund recognises its duty of care to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe from harm. While it is not possible to entirely eliminate risks of child exploitation and abuse, careful management can identify, mitigate, manage and reduce these risks associated with Tearfund programs.

### 5.5 Procedural fairness

All decisions regarding the welfare and protection of children will be made based on the Best Interests of the Child principle. Tearfund will adhere to principles of procedural fairness when responding to child safeguarding concerns or allegations.

## 6. Policy

### 6.1 Safe ideas

This policy and the Tearfund Safeguarding Children Guidelines outline the essential child safeguarding ideas, principles and standards that Tearfund people and Tearfund's partner organisations will be expected to work within and implement.

Tearfund believes that all children should be equally protected regardless of their gender, nationality, religious or political beliefs, age, sexual orientation, family and social background and culture, economic status, physical or mental health, and criminal background.

Tearfund will proactively encourage a culture where:

- issues and concerns about safeguarding are raised and discussed;
- a sense of accountability exists between Tearfund People and Partners where they can and must challenge potentially poor or abusive behaviour;
- reporting abuse allegations or concerns that relate to a child is viewed as mandatory.

### 6.2 Safe people

#### 6.2.1 Tearfund People

Tearfund people must ensure that their behaviour promotes and allows children to live free from:

- harm and abuse (physical, sexual and emotional, and including the abuse of power / trust, and coercion);
- sexual harassment;
- exploitation (physical & sexual);
- neglect;
- discrimination;
- human trafficking.

Tearfund's Code of Conduct details acceptable and appropriate behaviour for Tearfund People who are in contact with children. All Tearfund People will be expected to sign and abide by Tearfund's Code of Conduct.

Further information about recruitment practices and Tearfund's Code of Conduct and behaviour expectations is found in Tearfund's Safeguarding Children Guidelines.

#### 6.2.2 Safe recruitment practices

In the process of recruitment and selection a range of actions will be taken to ensure that prevention of abuse and safeguarding are attended to. This policy will be featured in recruitment processes for all Tearfund People. Interviews will include questions to discover any allegations of abuse and questions around suitability in regards to the safeguarding of children. All Tearfund staff and relevant categories of volunteers, prior to commencing work, will be subject to referee checks and a criminal record check in the relevant jurisdiction/s, or statutory declarations or local legal equivalents where criminal record checks are unavailable or unreliable. People who pose an

unacceptable risk to children will not be offered paid or voluntary positions at Tearfund. Staff and fieldworkers will be contractually required to adhere to the Safeguarding Children Policy.

### 6.2.3 Safeguarding awareness and training

All Tearfund People will be made aware of the Safeguarding Children Policy, including how to report a concern about abuse of children in Tearfund-run or Tearfund-funded programs. Tearfund will communicate its Safeguarding Children Policy to relevant stakeholders as appropriate, including children, in a form that is accessible for them and is relevant to their context and level of contact with Tearfund. In addition, training will be made available to staff, tailored to the frequency and intensity of their contact with children in their work with Tearfund. Where possible, children will be consulted in the development and the implementation of child safe policy and practices. Children in Tearfund programs should be given opportunities to express their views on matters affecting them.

## 6.3 Safe practices - recognising, reporting and responding

### 6.3.1 Recognising

It is mandatory for all Tearfund People to report if they have formed a reasonable belief that a child needs protection or that an offense has been committed. This includes any witnessed, suspected or alleged incidents of child abuse or any breach of the Safeguarding Children Policy and Guidelines or of the Tearfund Code of Conduct. Any allegation or concern regarding the abuse of a child must be treated seriously.

### 6.3.2 Reporting

Reports can be made when abusive behaviour is observed or suspected; or when an allegation is made or disclosed or there are indicators (signs and symptoms) of suspected abuse on the victim. Tearfund People are required to make a report when they know of or have reasonable suspicion of the abuse of a child or children, or of any breach of the Tearfund Code of Conduct.

Concerns are managed across 3 categories:

- **Category 1** - Relates directly to a Tearfund Person or program in Australia, or a Tearfund Person whilst overseas working for Tearfund – Tearfund has a duty of care and will respond by initiating an investigation, and complying with all mandatory reporting requirements.
- **Category 2** - Relates to a person engaged by a Tearfund Partner or a Tearfund Partner program. Tearfund will:
  - require the Partner to initiate an investigation in line with their Safeguarding Policy
  - monitor and support the Partner (activating the Tearfund Safeguarding Committee), and
  - expect the Partner to share findings and reports with Tearfund.
- **Category 3** - Relates to abuse in a community in which a Tearfund Partner is working. While Tearfund or the Partner may not have a formal responsibility to investigate, Tearfund or the Partner may have some influence in the community and may pass on information to the relevant local authorities. In each case an assessment should be made of what is in the best interest of the child at risk in relation to reporting the allegation to the authorities.

### 6.3.3 Making a report

All allegations or concerns should be raised urgently, including notifying the Safeguarding Officer, and relevant Tearfund staff member (unless they are the subject of the report) outside of normal working hours if necessary. Reports should be made within 24 hours of the allegation or concern being raised. Allegations or concerns can be reported in these ways:

- Use the [Safeguarding Reporting Form](#) on the Tearfund Website;
- Email the report directly to [safeguarding@tearfund.org.au](mailto:safeguarding@tearfund.org.au);
- Phone Tearfund Reception on (+61 3) 9264 7000 or free call 1800 244 986. Ask for the Safeguarding Officer, CEO or International Program Director. Inform them it regards a Safeguarding matter;
- Post a report—address it to the Tearfund CEO or Safeguarding Officer at PO Box 164, Blackburn, VIC 3130, and mark it 'strictly confidential'.

## **Category 1**

Notify the Safeguarding Officer, CEO or Department Director. (Note: see the Safeguarding Children Guidelines for detailed information on who to notify for events and activities in schools or churches).

## **Categories 2 & 3**

Notify the Safeguarding Officer, CEO or International Programs Director.

The reporting process will be accessible for Tearfund People and for children or families of children that may experience abuse in the course of a Tearfund program. The process for reporting concerns or allegations will be communicated to all Tearfund People.

### **6.3.4 Responding**

On hearing of an allegation or concern, the first action is to ensure that the alleged survivor is safe and has access to appropriate care. This safety and care is critical within the first 24 hours immediately following an incident.

The Safeguarding Committee will determine the best response to concerns or allegations. This may include an internal investigation and/or report to an external authority. We are committed to reporting any incidents to the appropriate regulatory bodies and government departments (i.e. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), as required, including mandatory reporting where applicable. Where there is reason to believe that criminal activity may have taken place we will report to the relevant police and/or child protection authorities as appropriate. The investigation may recommend internal disciplinary measures, including suspension and/or dismissal. Further information around responses to reports is found in the Safeguarding Children Guidelines.

Safeguarding issues reported are managed by Tearfund's Safeguarding Committee and recorded on a Safeguarding Incident Register, which is reviewed by the LT and Board quarterly.

The Safeguarding Committee will consider lessons learned from each safeguarding case that may help prevent or manage future safeguarding cases. When identified, these lessons will be shared as appropriate with the LT and/or the Board.

### **6.3.5 Safe record keeping**

All information from reports and investigations will be carefully documented and stored confidentially by the Safeguarding Officer. All incidents will be handled in a way that upholds the principles of: protection of all parties involved, confidentiality, expedient reporting, truthfulness, fairness and professionalism. Tearfund's Safeguarding Children Guidelines provide further information around investigation, recording and reporting procedures.

## **6.4 Safe plans – risk management**

As appropriate to the work being proposed, programs run by Tearfund and Tearfund's partners will include an assessment of activity-related risks to children in their planning and proposals. As part of assessing and managing risks to children within our work, Tearfund will ascertain the resources available in various locations, and jurisdictions for notification and assistance, in the event that abuse is reported or suspected. An assessment and management of child-safeguarding risks will form part of any program facilitating field visits or access by persons introduced by Tearfund (i.e. consultants, supporters, volunteers). Further information around risk assessment and management is found in Tearfund's Safeguarding Children Guidelines.

## **6.5 Safe partnering**

All Partners working with Tearfund, are expected to consistently apply good safeguarding practice in all activities involving children. Tearfund's partners will develop their own policies and processes, adapted to their own local contexts that have as their minimum basis the standards included in this Policy (see Safeguarding Children Guidelines for more information). Tearfund is committed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety, cultural safety for culturally and/or linguistically diverse people/communities, and the safety of children with a disability.

## 6.6 Safeguarding in our communications

To respect the dignity of children, all personal information and details of children, which may identify them or may increase the potential risk of harm or injury to their name or reputation or their families should not be used in Tearfund's public communications. Tearfund People are required to abide by Tearfund's Visual Images and Social Media policies in all aspects of their roles with Tearfund.

## 6.7 Review of Safeguarding Policies and Guidelines

Tearfund is committed to reflecting currency in its safeguarding practice and will review this Policy and Guidelines at least every 3 years.

## 7. Definitions/Terminology Clarification

For the purpose of this policy:

**Abuse** – includes sexual, physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and exploitation. (See Safeguarding Children Guidelines for full definitions of each.)

**Child** - A child is anyone under the age of 18.

**Child Protection** – is the term used to describe the responsibilities and activities undertaken to prevent or stop children being abused or maltreated.

**Child Safeguarding** - Actions, policies and procedures that create and maintain protective environments for children including to protect them from exploitation and abuse of all kinds.

**Contact with children** - Any interaction with or proximity to children. This includes both intentional and incidental contact, oral, written or electronic communication as well as face-to-face and physical contact. Most roles can be considered to involve contact with children at some point.

**Duty of Care** - refers to the responsibility of the organisation to provide children with an adequate level of protection against harm. It is the duty of the organisation to protect children from all reasonably foreseeable risks of injury.

**Safeguarding Officer (SO)** - The SO is responsible for the implementation of this policy across the organisation, is an advice point for the organisation and assists the Leadership Team in the implementation of this policy. They are also a key person in reporting and responding to suspected abuse. This role is currently incorporated into the position of People & Culture Director at Tearfund, and the Chief Executive Officer (when the People & Culture Director is not available).

**Tearfund Person or People** - refers to all Tearfund staff, volunteers, exposure visit participants, fieldworkers, and any contractors or consultants having contact with children or vulnerable adults in the course of their work with Tearfund.

## 8. Related References

- ACFID Code of Conduct
- Complaints Policy
- DFAT Child Protection Policy
- Discipline Policy
- Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy and Guidelines
- Recruitment Policy and Guidelines
- Safeguarding Children Guidelines
- Social Media Policy and Guidelines
- Tearfund Code of Conduct
- Visual Images Policy and Guidelines
- Volunteer Policy and Guidelines
- Whistleblowing Policy and Guidelines