

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



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GENERAL INFORMATION

Introduction

Sethu is a charitable trust that was formed in 2005 to provide much needed care for children with developmental and behavioral concerns. *Sethu's Mission* is to be a bridge between children and their families, their schools and their communities to foster their complete development through assessments, therapy, educational initiatives, training, awareness and capacity building.

Sethu's Child Protection Policy is designed to protect all children who come to Sethu as well as children who participate in outreach programs held by Sethu. In this document, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18. This policy shall be applicable to the Sethu trustees, staff, student interns, volunteers, visitors to Sethu as well as parents/guardians who accompany the child for therapy.

Preamble

Sethu strives to provide the best possible services to children. Its work is focused on the principle "Best interest of the child at all times". It believes strongly in child protection and wants to be able to provide a respectful and safe environment while ensuring the children in its responsibility do not come to avoidable harm.

Sethu will be protective of children under its care by being:

- **PREVENTATIVE:** Sethu representatives will take reasonable measures to ensure risks of harm to children are minimized.
- **REACTIVE:** Sethu representatives will take appropriate action to address concerns and respond promptly and adequately.

Policy Statement

Sethu recognizes the personal dignity and rights of children towards whom it has a special responsibility and duty of care and respect. All Sethu trustees, staff, volunteers, interns and visitors undertake to create a safe environment for children and young people and to prevent their physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

This policy covers all individuals involved with Sethu, including:

- Sethu staff
- Volunteer staff
- Student Interns
- Children and young people participating in the program
- Visitors including parents and family members of the child, program partners, etc

Background Principles

The Child Protection Policy at Sethu is based on the four laws mentioned below:

- Juvenile Justice Act 2000
- Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act 2012 (POSCO)
- Right to Education Act 2009
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC)

Aim and outreach of the policy

This policy is designed to provide guidance to all Sethu staff, administrative team, visitors, interns and students. Its purpose is to help everyone at Sethu to:

- Understand the importance of child protection issues
- Keep children safe by clarifying which behaviours constitute safe practice and which behaviours should be avoided.
- Give a clear message that unlawful or unsafe behaviour is unacceptable and that, where appropriate, disciplinary or legal action will be taken.
- Affirm safer recruitment practices.
- Minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations made against adults who work with children.
- Ensure that positions of trust are not abused or misused.
- Create a safe environment for children through preventative measures.
- Provide guidance to those who lead or manage child protection issues and promote good practice.

Definitions and types of abuse

Child abuse and neglect is defined as all forms of action or inaction resulting in harm (or risk of harm) to children under the age of 18 years in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

- **PHYSICAL ABUSE** results in actual or potential physical harm from an 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. Examples include smacking, hitting, shaking, poisoning, burning, drowning or suffocating or deliberately making a child ill.
- **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 violates the laws or social taboos of society.
- **EMOTIONAL ABUSE** includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies. Acts of emotional abuse may include restriction of movement, patterns of shaming, scapegoating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.
- **NEGLECT** is persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Examples could include excluding the child from participation in family social events and repeated failure of parents to use alternative augmentative communication devices to enhance the communication of children with disabilities despite providing the families the means and training to use such communication

PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

Code of conduct for Sethu staff

All Sethu staff that has contact with children at any point must ensure the following:

1. Strive to be a role model at all times.
2. Treat all children equally, with respect and dignity.
3. Always work in an open environment
4. Use positive guidance and behaviour management strategies in accordance with **Sethu's Behaviour Management Policy** (See Appendix 1). Behaviour management techniques must not include physical, verbal or emotional harm.
5. Adhere to the **Photographic Images Policy** in respect of any photographic or video images of children (See Appendix 2).
6. All information related to children and their families should be kept confidential. Sethu staff must not reveal such information to any outside party except to those colleagues who have a professional role in relation to the child.
7. All Sethu staff must avoid using inappropriate or offensive language at all times.
8. All Sethu staff must also avoid putting themselves at risk of allegations of abusive or unprofessional conduct.
9. Sethu staff must never handle children with physical force and avoid actions like pulling or grabbing children, particularly by their arms, legs, unless it is to ensure their safety in an emergency situation.
10. Acceptable circumstances for a Sethu staff to have physical contact with a child are only if the child is putting himself or another person in danger. For example the worker may also need to pick up the child when he falls, help him into a chair, and in cases where ever one has to carry the child to another room.
11. No Sethu Staff shall offer food items to the child without their parents/guardian's prior permission.
12. Sethu staff shall never reveal any information about their clients to any visitors or family members, unless permission has been obtained from the parents or guardians of the child. The staff will need to make a note of the same on the client's case paper.
13. No personal or treatment information about clients will be given to the press or media by Sethu staff. Confidentiality is paramount in our work.

All Sethu staff needs to recognize that failure to meet these standards of behaviour and conduct may result in disciplinary action, including possible termination.

Code of conduct for students interning at the Sethu centre

1. Student interns may interact with children at the Sethu Centre only with prior permission from their supervisor.
2. Students should keep their phones in silent mode in their bag.
3. Students should never offer food items to the children at Sethu.
4. Student interns are allowed to take details of personal information about children or their families only as part of the case-history writing process during assessments or under direction of their supervisors.
5. Student interns are strictly prohibited from discussing about any child that they observe at Sethu Centre with other fellow interns or with anyone outside of the Sethu Centre. They are encouraged to ask questions related to learning to their respective supervisor or at the weekly meetings of the Sethu team.

6. While interacting with children at Sethu Centre, positive guidance and behaviour management strategies in accordance with **Sethu's Behaviour Management Policy** must be followed.

Guidelines for visitors

1. Visitors must never walk around the Centre without being accompanied by a Sethu representative. All visitors should wear the Visitor badge at all times while within the premises of Sethu centre.
2. Visitors are not allowed to give any food items to children.
3. Visitors should refrain from asking for personal or treatment information about any clients of Sethu, as this cannot be divulged unless clear permission has been obtained from the family of the child.
4. Visitors are not allowed to take any photos or videos of clients and their families at Sethu Centre. Photos of the premises or teaching aids may be taken with permission from the accompanying staff member or Trustee.

Standards for Human Resources for child protection (i.e. Police Checks, Recruitment, CapacityBuilding):

Sethu will adhere to the following standards

1. A background check needs to be done of all new recruits and volunteers before they join Sethu.
2. Perform a full national/international background check to ensure that the staff/volunteer does not have any convictions related to child abuse or other violent crimes.
3. Retrieve personal information about the staff member applicant or candidate during the application process and ask him/her to sign an authorization release.
4. Require written parental permission for any trips, outings, or activities that aren't common practice in the course of work.
5. Clear instruction/caution signs need to be put where ever required in and around the Sethu centre. The signs should be written in English/Konkani/Hindi. All instructions/cautions need to be put up in pictorial form. For example, 'Caution' signs on the trampoline.

Standards for Communication (Guidelines for the use of images and texts regarding children for Press, Marketing, Fundraising Activities)

1. Any young person/adult having their individual photograph taken for any type of promotion/awareness of Sethu should sign the Model Release Form (See Appendix 3). A copy is retained in a separate file at Sethu; the model/family also gets their copy. In the case of minors (anyone under the age of 18 yrs) either parents or guardians should sign.
2. The safest photographic images to use of children for any purpose are "unidentifiable" photographic images - photographic images taken at a distance, from the side, from above, large group activities, etc. Parents approval is to be taken before the photo is released.
3. If parents do not wish to make their children's pictures available on the internet or printed in promotional material or Sethu reports, then their decision should be respected.
4. Professional photographers should be made aware that any images taken will remain the property of the organisation and cannot be used or sold for other purposes.
5. Photographers will be supervised and will not be allowed individual access to children.

6. There should be no identifying personal information accompanying photographs, such as the child's name, address or telephone number. Group photographs reduce the risk of identifying individual children.
7. Only images of children that are relevant to the organization's activities and services, such as children participating in an activity specifically associated with that organization will be used.
8. As far as possible, once the report/video/promotional material is prepared, it should be shared with the families of the children to get their consent for its use. This is to avoid any distress caused to families about issues surrounding confidentiality and stigma and to facilitate their participation in the goals of using that material (i.e. training, to raise funds for Sethu, create awareness about various programs, etc).

CASE MANAGEMENT

Sethu upholds the safety of their clients to the maximum possible and will respond to any situation of abuse with utmost care and competence.

RESPONDING TO SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

Any report or incidence of abuse that comes to the attention of any member of staff of Sethu needs to be handled sensitively and competently. These could be instances such as

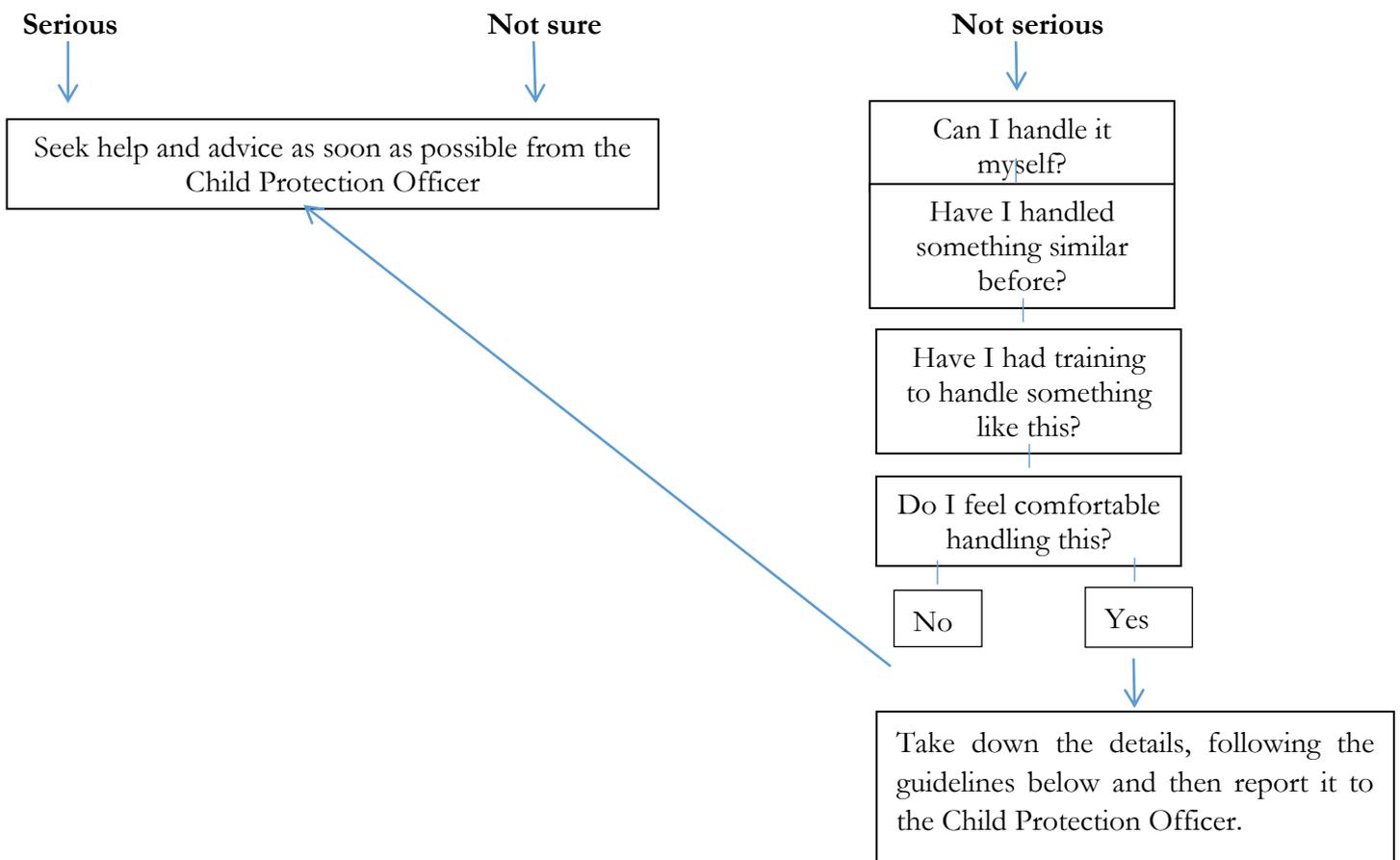
- 1) A child or any person caring for him or her comes to a staff member with an allegation or report of harm coming to a child
- 2) The staff member witnesses an incident of abuse
- 3) An anonymous complaint is received by any member of the organization.

Here are some general useful tips to guide one's response:

- 1) Use your common sense, backed up by good child protection practice.
- 2) Always be guided by the best interests of the child - ensure the immediate physical and psychological safety of the child.
- 3) If in doubt, ask Sethu's Child Protection Officer for advice.

Refer to the response flowchart below for further guidance.

RESPONSE FLOWCHART



With the passage of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, any disclosure, suspicion or incident of sexual abuse which comes to the notice of a Sethu staff, has to be reported to the police by law. This reporting should be made to the Special Juvenile Police Unit, if available or to the local police. Family members of the child should be informed about this legal requirement.

Reporting abusive behaviour

Any member of Sethu staff that is aware of the abuse of any of the clients should bring this to the notice of the Child Protection Officer. All staff should be alert to recognise any warning signs of abuse and do their utmost to create a safe environment for children and young people in Sethu. If anyone notices these signs, they should inform the Child Protection Officer for further action.

If a child or young person discloses abuse to any staff member, s/he should bring this to the attention of the Child Protection Officer. In case of an anonymous complaint of abuse received by any member of staff, the matter must be reported to the Child Protection Officer by the person who received it, as soon as possible.

Any staff member who is aware of abuse being perpetrated on a Sethu child by another staff member, the child's family member or anyone else, is obliged to report this to the Child Protection Officer of Sethu.

In a professional relationship, any disclosure of current, on-going abuse that is criminal in nature cannot be considered as confidential. The need to protect the child overrides the issue of confidentiality.

Under no circumstances should there be any attempt to intimidate a complainant or dissuade him/her from proceeding with a complaint or disclosure of abuse.

Allegations from a child - listening to a child's disclosure of abuse

General points

- The Child Protection Officer (CPO) of Sethu is the first point of contact for any reporting of abuse.
 - If a child or young person reports abuse, whatever the outcome, the child's voice of expression must be taken seriously.
 - Stay calm and in control and reassure the child that care will be taken to protect him/her and keep him/her safe. Do not appear shocked.
 - Accept what the child says and write it down including information like dates, place, person/s involved. Accuracy is paramount in this stage of the procedure.
- Never ask leading questions. Do not fill in words, finish their sentences, or make assumptions. Do not repeat the same questions to the child. The person to whom the abuse has been reported just has to record the statements made by the child and NOT conduct an investigation.
- Assure them that they are not to blame for the abuse and they are right to tell you.
 - Be aware that the child may have been threatened.
 - Be honest. Let the child know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens. Inform them that you need to tell someone else in authority.
 - Do not permit personal doubt to prevent you from reporting the allegation to the designated CPO

At the end of the disclosure

- Reassure the child that they are brave and did the correct things by telling you, the abuse is not their fault and they have a right to be protected.
- Let them know what you are going to do next
- Immediately seek help, at first, from the designated CPO
- Write down accurately what the young person has told you. Sign and date your notes. Keep all notes in a secure place for an indefinite period. These are essential in helping your organisation/ Social Services/ the Police decide what is best for the child, and as evidence if necessary
- In case the abuser is known to the child, the first step is to ensure the safety of the child.
- Seek help for yourself if you feel you need support

The CPO will take down the details of the case and urge the parents to seek appropriate medical, psychological and legal support. For emotional or physical abuse by the family members, this will include training in respectful discipline methods. If such abuse has been reported to have occurred in school or another educational institution, and perpetrated by a staff member, then Sethu staff should try to gather information from the school/concerned person too, so that guidance about proper discipline can be given too.

Once the CPO has gathered the details of the case, s/he will make a decision about the next steps (action to keep the child safe, guidance to families, information gathering from school, contact a Child Rights NGO, inform the police, and so on) and inform the Director in writing. In cases of sexual abuse where there is mandatory reporting under POCSO, the CPO will notify the Director who will in turn bring this to the attention of the Managing Trustee and then report the case to another organization that deals with juvenile justice issues (such as Childline and Children's Rights in Goa), as well as the Women and Child Cell in the Panjim Police Station (Ph no: 0832-2428992)

Working with Partners:

Any Sethu staff working with children at a location other than the Sethu Centre shall abide by the guidelines as per the organizational code of conduct for staff.

Monitoring and Adjusting the CPP:

Some of the Sethu visitors and beneficiaries of Sethu services will be provided with a feedback form to review the Child Protection Policy. The data will be collected and the CPP will be reviewed and edited if required every year.

The Child Protection Policy at Sethu outlines the organization's commitment to ensuring child safety at all times and these guidelines should be followed in letter and spirit by all who work at or with Sethu and come into contact with the children and families we serve.

DEFINITIONS/GLOSSARY

CHILD: For the purposes of this document, a “child” is defined as anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CHILD ABUSE: According to the World Health Organisation, “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.’

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY: ‘A statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to safeguard children from harm and makes clear to all what is required in relation to the protection of children. It helps to create a safe and positive environment for children and to show that the organisation is taking its duty and responsibility of care seriously.’

INFORMED CONSENT: Capacity to freely give consent based on all available information, according to the age and evolving capacities of the child. For example, if you seek consent from a child regarding taking their photograph and using it for publicity purposes, the child is informed as to how the photograph will be used and is given the opportunity to refuse. If a child is invited to input into the development of a child protection policy, they must be made aware of the time it will take, what exactly will be involved, their roles and responsibilities and only then will they be able to give their “informed consent”.

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