

OXFAM GB

Safeguarding Children Policy

May 2018

Title:	Safeguarding Children Policy
Authors:	Oxfam's Safeguarding Team
CMT Sponsor:	Mark Goldring (Chief Executive of Oxfam GB)
Area of Governance:	Safeguarding Steering Group
Date for Renewal:	March 2019
Approved by:	Oxfam GB's Council of Trustees
Geographical Scope:	For all Oxfam GB employees, volunteers and representatives Worldwide, except in countries where the following policy contravenes local legislation. In these cases, local legislation must be followed with guidance from the Safeguarding Team and the People Director. This document will apply if Oxfam GB policy is more stringent than local legislation.
Confidentiality:	Public, additional guidelines and materials are available internally

Policy Statement

At Oxfam, we believe all children regardless of age, gender, disability or ethnic origin have a right to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Oxfam **will not** tolerate the abuse of *children* (defined as under the age of 18) in any form.

It is the responsibility of all representatives of Oxfam to raise any concerns you have or any concerns which are reported to you according to this policy. It is not your responsibility to decide whether or not child abuse has occurred.

It is the responsibility of all Oxfam managers to ensure the delivery of this policy and to promote it as relevant in all aspects of their work, to hold themselves and others to account and to help create a safe environment for all.

This policy will automatically be applied in the UK and in all geographies where Oxfam GB is the Executing Affiliate and must be used in conjunction with *Oxfam's Procedures for Safeguarding Children*.

This policy does not form part of an employees' terms and conditions of employment and may be subject to change at the discretion of management.

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Useful Links

Important note: These links will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure consistency across documents and with consideration for users accessing both KARL and COMPASS.

Procedures

- Oxfam's Procedures for Safeguarding Children (2018)

Related Policy

- [Oxfam International Code of Conduct \(2017\)](#)
- [Recruitment Policy \(2017\)](#)
- [Oxfam Volunteering Policy \(2012\)](#)

If in doubt about anything in this policy, please seek further advice from Oxfam's Safeguarding Team (safeguarding@oxfam.org.uk or +44 (0)1865 473813).

1. Oxfam Safeguarding Principles

Oxfam will ensure that:

- a) The welfare of the child is paramount;
- b) Concerns or allegations of child abuse are always taken seriously, investigated and acted on if appropriate;
- c) Oxfam will seek to safeguard children by valuing, listening to and respecting them;
- d) All managers, employees, volunteers and other representatives have access to, and are familiar with this policy, and know their responsibilities within it;
- e) All staff receive training on Safeguarding Children at a level commensurate with their role;
- f) All staff, volunteers and carers have access to information about how to report concerns or allegations of abuse, including children themselves;
- g) Our recruitment practices are robust enough to ensure that we will not recruit staff, volunteers or other representatives if they pose a known risk to children's safety or wellbeing;
- h) All managers are responsible for promoting awareness of this policy within their divisions, individual departments or teams.

2. Definitions

2.1. Safeguarding Children and Child Protection

Safeguarding is the process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, ensuring they are living in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes. 'Child protection' is an element of Safeguarding and promoting welfare. It refers to the

activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering or likely to suffer, significant harm¹.

2.2. Child

A child is defined as ***anyone under 18 years old***.

This definition is recognised internationally as identifying a population who are particularly vulnerable and require additional safeguards to protect their rights.

The definition of a child for the purposes of Safeguarding and child protection should not be confused with the legal definition of a child or age limits set out in other relevant laws. The fact that a person under the age of 18 may have reached the age of majority, age of sexual consent, voting age or such like does not alter their inherent vulnerability as a child.

2.3. Young Volunteer

Anyone who is under the age of 18 years old is classed as a 'Young Volunteer' when they are volunteering for Oxfam. Volunteers who are aged 14 years and above can volunteer in Oxfam's charitable shops.

2.4. Child Abuse

Different forms of harm or mistreatment of children are categorised under the broader term "child abuse". Abuse can happen anywhere and at any time, but research shows that the perpetrators of abuse are likely to be known and trusted by the child. The most commonly defined types are:

Physical: violence towards or deliberate injury of a child.

Neglect: persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and psychological needs.

Sexual: using a child for sexual stimulation or gratification.

Emotional: behaviour which attacks a child's self-esteem.

Child Sexual Exploitation: Children in exploitative situations and relationships receive something such as gifts, money or affection as a result of performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activities on them.

The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)* requires states to protect children from abuse.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility and failure to act on concerns relating to children is not an option.

Oxfam Managers, and ultimately Directors, hold overall accountability for this Policy and its implementation.

Oxfam GB's Directors and Council of Trustees are responsible for reviewing and updating this Policy annually and in line with legislative and organisational developments and hold overall accountability for Oxfam GB's Safeguarding of Children.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

All staff, volunteers and other representatives of Oxfam are required to adhere to this Policy and Oxfam's *Code of Conduct* at all times.

All Oxfam GB employees are obliged to report any suspicions of child abuse. Failure to report to a relevant person suspicion of abuse relating to someone else is a breach of Oxfam GB's policy, and could lead to disciplinary action being taken. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no obligation placed on any individual to report any incident that has happened to them.

Oxfam's Safeguarding Team and senior management teams can offer further support to staff, volunteers and other representatives on implementing this Policy.

4. Support for Survivors and Victims

Support will be offered to survivors and victims, regardless of whether a formal internal response is carried out (such as an internal investigation). Support can include specialist psycho-social counselling or access to Oxfam's Employee Assistance Programmes and/or access to other specialist and appropriate support as needed. Survivors and victims can choose if and when they would like to take up the support options available to them.

5. Policy Guidance

5.1. Contact with Children

Oxfam Representatives Must Never:

- Fail to disclose any convictions or child related investigations that they are subject to;
- Seek to make contact or spend time with any child with whom they come into contact as part of their work with Oxfam except as part of the designated activities set out in their role;
- Abuse their position to withhold professional assistance or give preferential treatment, gifts or payment of any kind to a child, or another person in relation to a child, in order to solicit any form of advantage or sexual favour from a child;
- **Have sexual intercourse or participate in any form of sexual activity, including paying for sex, with any person under 18 years old** or under the local age of sexual consent (where higher). *This applies to all Oxfam representatives regardless of the age of consent locally and mistaken belief in the age of the child is not a defence;*
- Hit or otherwise physically assault a child irrespective of cultural norms, including as punishment;
- Behave physically in a manner with a child which is inappropriate or sexually provocative;
- Use language or behaviour towards children that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative or that is intended to shame, humiliate or emotionally abuse;
- Use computers, mobile phones, video and digital cameras to exploit or harass children or to access child pornography through any medium;
- Recruit children for any labour which is inappropriate to their age or developmental stage, which interferes with their time available for education and recreational activities, or which places them at risk of injury;
- Do things of a personal nature for a child with whom they come into contact as part of their work for Oxfam that the child can do for themselves (e.g. toileting, bathing, dressing);
- Share a bedroom with or sleep close to an unsupervised child or children where that child/children are ones with whom they come into contact as part of their work for Oxfam;

- Visit a child's home alone or invite unaccompanied children into their own accommodation, where that child/children are ones with whom they come into contact as part of their work for Oxfam;
- Put a child at risk of harm through inaction (including failure to report a concern);
- Condone or participate in any child related activity which is illegal, exploitative, unsafe or abusive; this includes behaviour by other children;
- Act in **any** way that may be abusive or put a child at risk of abuse or exploitation.

Oxfam Representatives Must Always:

- Treat all children with respect regardless of their race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, nationality, ethnicity, social origin, property, disability or other status;
- **Avoid being placed in a position where they are alone with a child or children with whom they come into contact as part of their work with Oxfam;**
- Act professionally towards children they interact with in their role, following relevant laws pertaining to working with children, including those in relation to child labour;
- Consider the risk of harm and whether there is any possibility a child may be abused or exploited when assessing the appropriateness of any physical or verbal contact, **including in the design of Oxfam programmes;**
- Report any suspicion, allegation or witness of child abuse or other breaches of the Safeguarding Children Policy as per the reporting procedures outlined in this document.

5.2. Virtual Contact with Children

Anyone working with or on behalf of Oxfam must adhere to Oxfam's guidelines to protect children engaging with Oxfam through social media. ***Social media and technology is evolving rapidly and it is the responsibility of managers to consider the full range of risks and safeguards required to protect children in the activities that they oversee.***

6. Safe Programming

Oxfam has ***minimum standards in place intended to minimise risk when working with direct or indirect child beneficiaries.*** These standards are published in Oxfam's Procedures for Safeguarding Children.

Responsibility for ensuring these programme standards are applied lies with Oxfam's Country Directors and Programme Managers. However, all Oxfam staff and partners working with children must take personal responsibility for upholding these minimum standards.

7. How to raise a Complaint or Concern

Anyone can raise a concern or make a complaint to Oxfam about something they have experienced or witnessed. You can do this verbally or in writing to your Safeguarding Focal Point or the Safeguarding Team (all details on [KARL](#) and [COMPASS](#)), your Line Manager, HR or via Oxfam's Whistleblowing Service.

You can contact the Safeguarding Team confidentially on safeguarding@oxfam.org.uk or telephone +44 (0)1865 473813

Those who work with or for Oxfam (including Oxfam's beneficiaries) can also raise a concern without fear of retribution to Oxfam's Whistleblowing Service by emailing whistleblowing@oxfam.org.uk , or phoning:

English	00441 86547 2120
Arabic	00441 86547 2121
French	00441 86547 2122
Spanish	00441 86547 2123
Portuguese	00441 86547 2124

Oxfam has also set up a confidential, 3rd party, independent Whistleblowing hotline, available online at www.oxfam.ethicspoint.com and by phone (UK number 0808 234 9797, country specific numbers all available online). This is available to anyone who wishes to report a concern.

Please refer to Oxfam's [Disclosure of Malpractice in the Workplace \(Whistleblowing\) Policy](#) for further details.

If an allegation is made against you, then you must inform your manager immediately. You should create a signed and dated record of the details as you know them and send a copy of this to HR. All those accused will be treated with respect and all allegations are treated confidentially. You may wish to seek support from your Union or Staff Representative.

8. How to Respond to a Complaint or Concern

Oxfam is committed to responding to all complaints and concerns of abuse. Oxfam's Safeguarding Team are responsible for this work, and have specialist expertise in prevention, carrying out investigations, and delivering support to survivors of and victims of child abuse.

Oxfam recognises that disclosures and suspicion should *always be acted upon swiftly*, and if there is an urgent child protection situation, for example if a child is in imminent danger of abuse, then *immediate protective action must be taken*.

What to do if You Have Concerns About a Child's Wellbeing

- The first priority is the immediate safety and welfare of the child.
- Keep calm and act normally; do not say or show that you are shocked.
- Do not investigate or question the child. If a child reports abuse directly to you, only ask questions to get enough information to understand the complaint (e.g. 'who, what, where, when' questions, but not 'why' questions).
- Never agree to keep a secret. If a child is in danger you will have to inform others.
- Do not directly challenge parents, carers or teachers about your concerns.
- **Record all the details that support your suspicion and report this in line with internal reporting procedures.**

Confidentiality and Children

Oxfam staff cannot keep confidences when they involve concerns about a child. Any information offered in confidence to Oxfam staff or volunteers relating to risks or concerns about a child should be received on the basis that it will have to be shared with the relevant person or people in authority. ***In the first instance this will be a senior Oxfam manager in your division and Oxfam's Safeguarding Team.***

It is the responsibility of all who represent Oxfam, in whatever capacity, to raise concerns regarding possible or known issues of child abuse or exploitation in projects managed or supported by Oxfam immediately in line with the procedures outlined below.

9. Procedure for Handling Complaints

When a complaint or concern has been raised, it must be referred within 24 hours to Oxfam's Safeguarding Team. This can be done on behalf of somebody else, and may only involve a suspicion.

Internal Response

Within 72 hours of receiving a complaint or concern, Oxfam's Safeguarding Team must convene a case conference. An email should be sent to the complainant acknowledging the complaint as soon as possible. Oxfam must refer suspected cases of child abuse to local statutory authorities where possible.

The process for addressing complaints is outlined in Oxfam's *Procedures for Safeguarding Children*.

Confidentiality must be maintained throughout the complaints process by all staff and witnesses. Staff members who breach confidentiality will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment. In some cases, such breaches constitute breaking the law.

Retaliation Against Complainants, Victims and Witnesses

Oxfam will take action against any staff, volunteers or other representatives, whether they are the subject of a complaint or not, who seek or carry out retaliatory action against complainants, victims or other witnesses. Staff who are found to do this will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Outcomes of Misconduct

Employees who are found to contravene this policy will be subject to disciplinary action that may result in dismissal. Where possible, Oxfam will refer suspected cases of child abuse to local statutory authorities and the process and outcome will be handled by said authority. Volunteers, contractors and other representatives will have their relationship with Oxfam terminated.

False Allegations

It is extremely rare that staff or other stakeholders are found to have raised allegations which they knew to be false. If a member of staff from Oxfam is found to have made an allegation that they knew to be false they will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Complaints about Oxfam's Partners

If Oxfam receives a complaint about a partner organisation, Oxfam will expect the partner to respond quickly and appropriately. Oxfam should assist the partner to ascertain its obligations under local law to refer the matter to the police or other statutory authorities for criminal investigation.

Where appropriate, Oxfam should work with the partner to address the issue through an appropriate independent investigation. If the outcome is that child abuse has occurred, ongoing work with the partner cannot involve the individual(s) concerned.

If there is reason to believe that an allegation of child abuse has been dealt with inappropriately by a partner then they risk withdrawal of funding or ending the relationship (including networks and consortia).

Receiving External Complaints and Concerns

Complaints raised from outside the organisation should be referred to Oxfam's Safeguarding Team and must adhere to Oxfam's policy and procedures as outlined in this document.

10. Safe Recruitment

Oxfam is committed to recruiting staff, volunteers and other representatives safely. All application forms, interviews and references must address Safeguarding and equality requirements and attitudes in line with the *Recruitment Policy*.

Recruitment for all applicants to roles supervising young volunteers or working directly with child beneficiaries must follow Oxfam's *Safeguarding Children Guidelines*, particularly that:

- All applicants must be asked **to disclose all criminal convictions** in keeping with the parameters of local employment law;
- We are not able to offer volunteering opportunities to anyone with spent or unspent convictions for sexual offences or any form of child abuse;
- **Legitimate registers must be checked** to establish whether applicants are a known risk to children;
- Applicants should not start work until **reference checking and checking of legitimate registers** has taken place

11. Young Volunteers

Engaging Young Volunteers

When a young person expresses an interest in volunteering for Oxfam, an 'initial chat' must take place with at least two Oxfam representatives present. During this meeting, the young person should be made aware of Oxfam's *Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures*.

For one-off campaigning or fundraising events, an initial chat should take place but if it is not possible the young person must still receive a copy of Oxfam's Policy and Procedures prior to volunteering.

Consent must always be sought before any young volunteer begins volunteering. It is important to **check what type of consent is needed** as this will vary depending on the local context.

Health and Safety for Young Volunteers

All relevant **health and safety checks must be completed before taking on** a Young Volunteer. During their inductions, young volunteers must also be told who is responsible for their safety and how to raise concerns.

Supervision of Young Volunteers

Effective supervision must be in place to safeguard young volunteers in Oxfam's care.

- Young volunteers must **not be left alone in a property at any time.**
- At least **two adults should be present** when a young volunteer is volunteering, one of whom must be designated as the young volunteer's supervisor for the duration of their shift.
- Oxfam **representatives who regularly supervise children must be subject to a criminal records check.**
- **If an activity is identified as higher risk** in the Health and Safety assessment, this **must have constant supervision** from the nominated supervisor.

- Young volunteers should work alone with an adult only in exceptional circumstances, and managers are responsible for monitoring this.
- Managers must ensure appropriate supervision arrangements are clear and agreed in advance with anyone who will supervise young volunteers.
- **IN THE UK** If a young volunteer is being regularly supervised by the same adult, that adult must be subject to an Enhanced DBS check, as allowed by DBS rules. Failure to do this could result in criminal liability if the adult is later found to be a known risk to children.
- **IN THE UK**, Sexual relations between an adult supervisor and a young volunteer aged 17 or 16 will often constitute a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act (2003) due to the position of trust held by the adult. Oxfam must refer such allegations to the relevant statutory authorities for investigation.
- **OUTSIDE THE UK**: Oxfam will follow all local laws relating to the supervision of young people.

12. Use of Personal Data about Children

Oxfam staff must adhere to Oxfam's [Data Protection Policy](#) which is guided by the *General Data Protection Regulation in the European Union (2018)*. All information stored by Oxfam about children and young people must be processed in accordance with this Act and Oxfam's policy.

Research with children must be in line with Oxfam's *Procedures for Safeguarding Children*. Oxfam representatives must consider how to protect a child's identity, how to share and store such content and how to achieve "informed consent".

Disputes about the use of child images must be raised to the Safeguarding Steering Group.

13. Training

All Oxfam staff and representatives must receive training on Child Safeguarding commensurate with their role. This training will be carried out by specialists on a regular basis and will include information about Oxfam's policy positions, reporting and investigation procedures and how to embed Child Safeguarding in Oxfam's work.

Overall responsibility for ensuring that staff receive regular training and messages about Safeguarding lies with all Oxfam Managers.

Children require training to ensure that their capabilities and competencies are at a level where they can operate without putting themselves and others at risk.