

Crèche Safeguarding Policies - August 2012

Introduction

COPT crèches recognises its responsibility to protect and promote the welfare of children within the legal framework of South African law. It is important that we create a safe environment within which young people can thrive and adults can work with the security of clear guidance. We will not tolerate any form of abuse by anyone working within the crèche.

We are aware that many children are the victims of different kinds of abuse and that they can be subjected to many social factors that have an adverse impact upon their lives – including, but not limited to, verbal, physical and emotional abuse, domestic violence, substance misuse, child prostitution and ritualistic abuse.

In terms of this safeguarding policy, and according to South African law, a person is regarded as a child if they are under the age of 18.

These guidelines are for the use of all paid staff, volunteers and COP Trust representatives, all of whom must read and uphold the principles of the guidelines, and must sign to say that they have read them. We will make them available, on request, to the parents/carers of the children with whom we work.

Through these guidelines, we aim to ensure that:

- Children are listened to, valued and respected;
- COPT crèche staff (paid staff, volunteers and COP Trust representatives) are aware of the need to be alert to the signs of abuse and know what to do if they have concerns.

Best Practice

There are certain procedures that can be followed at all times to ensure that children, staff and volunteers are protected. Some important best practice guidelines are:

- All staff are responsible for children while on the crèche premises and must make sure that health and safety guidelines are adhered to;
- All staff responsible for children on the crèche premises must have read, and signed to say that they have read, these guidelines;
- All staff working with children should receive regular supervision from a more experienced staff member;
- All staff should be encouraged to undertake some basic child protection training;
- Staff should always be publicly open when working with children - avoid situations where you and an individual child are completely unobserved and avoid spending a lot of time with children away from others;
- Staff should not encourage over-enthusiastic embraces or kisses;
- Staff should not take children to their home if they will be alone with them;
- Staff should not engage in rough physical games with children;
- Staff should not help a child with things of a personal nature (e.g. toileting) if that child can do it for themselves;
- Staff must display high standards of personal behaviour;
- Staff should never overtly criticise children or use sarcasm;
- Under no circumstances should visitors be allowed to wander around the premises unaccompanied when children and young people are present.

Safe Recruitment

Applying rigorous procedures for the recruitment of any staff who come into contact with children, both directly and indirectly, can reduce the likelihood of allegations of abuse being made that are founded. As an absolute minimum, the following standards should be followed:

- All prospective workers (paid and unpaid) should provide details of their previous employment and the names of two referees;
- All prospective workers (paid and unpaid) should have police disclosure before they start employment with you – anyone who refuses to do so should not be employed;
- All prospective workers (paid and unpaid) should be interviewed to establish previous experience of working in an environment where there is contact with children and perceptions of acceptable behaviour;
- Nobody should start work before references have been received. Referees should be reminded that references should not misrepresent the candidate or omit to say things that might be relevant to their employment;
- All appointments to work with children should be subject to an agreed probationary period;
- New members of staff should be clear about their responsibilities and wherever possible, work to an agreed job description.

What to do if you have concerns

All Lamontville crèche employees, volunteers and COP Trust representatives have a responsibility to the children in their care. In the event that a child makes an allegation or disclosure of abuse against an adult or another child or young person, it is important that you:

- Stay calm;
- Listen to them and/or closely observe their presentation and behaviour;
- Let them know that you take what they are saying seriously;
- Do **not** attempt to interview them yourself – keep any questions to a minimum and make sure questions are open ended (i.e., not questions with yes or no answers);
- Keep a written record of everything regarding what the child has said to you and how they have behaved;
- Let them know that you will need to tell someone else in order to help them;
- **Do not promise to keep what they tell you secret.**

The Children's Act of 2008 requires that all people in positions of authority who suspect that a child is being abused report their concerns to the police. This includes, but is not limited to; educators, volunteers, religious leaders, traditional leaders, police officers, doctors and nurses.

In the event that a child discloses information that you are obliged to report to authorities:

- Make a written record of the incident or events including the child's full name and address as well as factual details of concern (bruising, what the child said, details of alleged abuser)

- Inform the COP Trust link person as soon as possible that a child has made allegations of abuse and a report should then be made immediately to the SAPS who may then involve other agencies such as social welfare and child protection agencies.

Allegations Made Against Staff or Volunteers

Organisations that work or come into contact with children need to be aware of the possibility that allegations of abuse will be made against members of their staff. Allegations will usually be that some kind of abuse has taken place. They can be made by children and they can be made by other concerned adults. Allegations can be made for a variety of reasons. Some of the most common are:

- Abuse has actually taken place
- Something happens to a child that reminds them of an event that happened in the past – the child is unable to recognise that the situation and the people are different
- Children can misinterpret your language or your actions because they are reminded of something else
- Some children know how powerful an allegation can be; if they are angry with you about something they can make an allegation as a way of hitting out
- An allegation can be a way of seeking attention

All allegations should immediately be brought to the notice of COP Trust link person. In cases where the allegation is made against this person, the complainant should approach another COP Trust official or take the following action him or herself:

- Make sure that the child in question is safe and away from the alleged abuser
- Irrespective of any investigation by social workers or the police, you should follow the appropriate disciplinary procedure; common practice is for the alleged abuser to be suspended from work until the outcome of any investigation is clear
- Consider whether the person has access to children anywhere else and whether those organizations or groups need to be informed
- Act upon the decisions made in any management meeting
- All incidents should be investigated internally after any external investigation has finished in order to review organisational practice and to put in place any additional measures to prevent a similar thing happening again.

Recognising Signs of Abuse

It can often be difficult to recognise abuse. The signs listed in these guidelines are only indicators and many can have reasonable explanations. Children may behave strangely or seem unhappy for many reasons, as they move through the stages of childhood or their families experience changes. It is, however, important to know what could indicate that abuse is taking place and to be alert to the need to consult further.

Someone can abuse a child by actively inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Abuse can take place within a family, in an institutional or community setting. Abuse can be carried out by someone known to a child or by a complete stranger. If you are worried about a child it is important that you keep a written record of any physical or behavioural signs and symptoms. In this way you can monitor whether or not a pattern emerges and provide evidence to any investigation if required.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any act which may result in injury to or death of a child. It can involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, and suffocating. Symptoms that indicate physical abuse include:

- Bruising in or around the mouth, on the back, buttocks or rectal area
- Finger mark bruising or grasp marks on the limbs or chest of a small child
- Bites
- Burn and scald marks; small round burns that could be caused by a cigarette
- Fractures to arms, legs or ribs in a small child
- Large numbers of scars of different sizes or ages

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse can be defined as any act, or failure to act, by a parent, guardian, caregiver, young person or adult working with or in contact with a child which results in the impaired psychological, emotional functioning or development of a child. Symptoms that indicate emotional abuse include:

- Excessively clingy or attention-seeking behaviour
- Very low self esteem or excessive self-criticism
- Excessively withdrawn behaviour or fearfulness
- Despondency
- Lack of appropriate boundaries with strangers; too eager to please
- Eating disorders

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any act which results in the exploitation of a child, whether with their consent or not, for the purpose of sexual or erotic gratification. This may be by adults or other young persons who are intellectually, emotionally, physically or sexually more mature than the child victim. Types of sexual abuse include, but are not limited to, incest, rape, exhibition, sodomy, child prostitution, paedophilia or pornography.

Symptoms of sexual abuse include:

- Allegations or disclosure
- Genital soreness, injuries or discomfort
- Sexually transmitted diseases; urinary infections
- Excessive preoccupation with sexual matters; inappropriately sexualised play, words or drawing
- A child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults
- Repeated sleep disturbances through nightmares and/or bed wetting

Older children and young people may additionally exhibit:

- Depression
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Eating disorders; obsessive behaviours
- Self mutilation; suicide attempts
- School/peer/relationship problems

Under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, it is a criminal offence for an adult or another child to have sex with or to sexually violate a child under 16.

Useful Contacts

If you are concerned for the safety of a child, please contact one of the following organisations.

Childline SA Help Line 08000 55555

Childline KZN Help Line 031 303 222

Open Door Trauma Safe House 031 709 2679

Bobbi Bear Children Sexual Abuse 031 312 0904

SANCA Substance Abuse 031 325 4757

In an emergency, you can contact

Police Emergency 10111