

Child Protection Policy

of the Empowering Children Foundation



EMPOWERING
CHILDREN
FOUNDATION

Child Protection Policy

of the Empowering Children Foundation

Summary

December 2016

Table of contents

Part 1. Introduction	5
Preamble	5
About Empowering Children Foundation	5
The aim of Child Protection Policy	6
Child abuse	6
A glossary of basic terms	7
Part 2. Principles of providing support	9
General rules	9
Withholding help	10
Releasing information	10
Rules for a safe relationship between an employee/collaborator and a child	10
Protection of image rights and personal information of the child and the caregivers	11
Part 3. Preventing child abuse	13
Education and research	13
Recruitment and introduction of new employees	13
Part 4. Intervention in cases of suspected child abuse	15
Part 5. Policy implementation and monitoring	17
Appendix 1.	
Allocation of duties regarding the implementation of Child Protection Policy	18



Part 1. Introduction

Preamble

All employees and collaborators of the Empowering Children Foundation – as outlined in the vision, mission and core values of the ECF – are actively involved in promoting child safety – specifically in the context of protecting children against abuse – as well as safeguarding and facilitating children's rights. Best interest and benefit of the child have always been the beacon for our work. We consider children to be our partners in the great undertaking of building a friendly, safe environment founded on mutual respect.

Empowering Children Foundation reaches its goals by means of:

- preventive activities – minimizing the risk of child abuse;
- intervention – aiming to secure children – victims of violence or those at risk of other harm
- psychological support and psychotherapy – focusing on providing children and their families with support when coping with difficult experiences.

These actions target both children and parents, they may take the form of one-on-one or group activities, additionally covering systemic solutions enacted in cooperation with central and local authorities, as well as other organizations and institutions.

The Child Protection Policy of the Empowering Children Foundation is rooted in the Polish law, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and good practices from Poland and abroad.

A child is any individual younger than 18.

The benefit of children, their best interest and children's rights remain the core values of our work.

About Empowering Children Foundation

Empowering Children Foundation (formerly Nobody's Children Foundation) operates since 1991.

Its main objective is to ensure that all children enjoy safe childhood and are treated with respect for their dignity and empowerment.

We protect children against abuse and help those, who fell victim to violence, so that they know their rights, believe in themselves and enjoy life.

In the process of executing our mission we:

- provide abused children and their caregivers with psychological and legal support,
- teach children how to avoid violence and abuse,
- educate adults on how to treat children/ what they can do to protect children against harm
- inform adults how to react in cases of suspected child abuse
- influence Polish legal regulations, to make sure they reflect the best interest of the child.

The aim of Child Protection Policy

Child Protection Policy of the Empowering Children Foundation constitutes a framework of rules, standards and guidelines intended to:

- make all employees and collaborators of the ECF realize the importance of taking action to protect children against abuse;
- define the scope of responsibility of specific individuals for the safety of children in the care of the Foundation;
- undertake appropriate intervention in the case of suspected child abuse and/or direct threat to their health and life;
- specify educational, preventive and interventional activities aimed at keeping children safe;
- develop within the organization a culture of work based on children's rights and constant learning.

Being familiar with Child Protection Policy and implementing it in practice are moral and professional obligations of all employees and collaborators of the ECF.

All employees and collaborators of the ECF undertake to comply with the Child Protection Policy.

Child abuse

Abuse is defined as any intended or unintentional action / withholding action by an individual, institution or the society as a whole, along with any effect resulting from such action or inactivity which violates children's rights and/or prevents them from thriving.

There are 4 basic forms of abuse:

- Physical violence against a child is a situation when the child is physically harmed or at risk of such injury. Abuse results from action or inaction by a parent or other individual responsible for the child, or by other person the child trusts, or who holds power over the child. Physical violence against children can be an isolated incident or a repeated occurrence.
- Emotional violence against a child is a long-term, non-physical, harmful interaction between a child and a caregiver, encompassing both action and lack of action. The category includes among others: emotional unavailability, emotional neglect, a relationship with the child that is founded on hostility, blame, denigration or rejection, developmentally inappropriate or inconsistent interaction with the child, failing to notice or disregarding the child's individuality and emotional borders between parent and child.
- Child sexual abuse is engaging children in sexual activity they are not able to fully comprehend, give informed consent to and / or for which they are developmentally immature and unable to legally consent to and / or which violates legal and social norms of a given society. We are dealing with sexual abuse when sexual interaction happens between a child and an adult or between two children, if owing to the difference in age or maturity the two share a relationship of care, dependence or power.
- Child neglect means chronic or incidental failure to meet the child's basic physical and emotional needs and/or failure to respect the child's basic rights, resulting in their disturbed health and/or development. Neglect occurs in a relationship between a child and an individual in charge of their care, upbringing and protection.

A glossary of basic terms

Child is any person younger than 18-years-of-age.

Legal intervention means notifying the Police or the Prosecutor's Office about suspected crimes against children, or notifying Family and Minors' Division of the relevant regional court that child's interest may be at risk.

Crisis intervention is a combination of specialized activities (mostly psychological in nature, but associated with other types of actions, namely social, legal or medical), executed for the benefit of individuals and families either at risk of crisis, already in crisis or facing a chronic crisis situation. The goal of crisis intervention is to prevent the loss of psychological and social balance or to restore such balance, as well as to reestablish the capacity for action and autonomy of persons and families experiencing crisis. In the course of crisis intervention, children require dedicated activities taking into account their specific legal status.

Client of the Foundation is any individual using the services provided by the Foundation as part of its core activity, in particular: clients of direct and indirect support, including primarily children and their parents / caregivers, professionals working with children and participants of group events organized by the Foundation. Both a child and an adult can be clients.

Direct contact with a child encompasses all core activities of the Foundation addressed directly to children. Direct contact would include: direct support to the child, education and play.

Indirect contact with a child is understood as contacting children by means of electronic communication, phone or post.

Caregiver of a child – parent / parents enjoying full scope of parental rights or a legal guardian authorized to represent the child.

Employee of the Foundation is a person employed in the Foundation on the basis of an employment contract.

Collaborator of the Foundation is an individual employed on the basis of a civil law contract or performing voluntary work for the Foundation free of charge, under an internship program regulated by an internship contract or under a voluntary work contract, fellowship contract or other contract of collaboration.

Caregiver's consent refers to granting consent by a person entitled to represent a child, in particular by their statutory representative (parent, legal guardian) or other individual authorized to represent the child by virtue of special regulation or court order. Parental consent is understood as the consent of one parent. In case of disagreement between parents, the case is settled by the court.



Part 2. Principles of providing support

General rules

The Foundation is providing psychological, legal and psychiatric help. It may take the form of direct support, individual or in a group setting (e.g. consults, crisis intervention, therapy, diagnosis, workshops, support groups), as well as indirect assistance (by phone, online). Employees and collaborators of the ECF offer support to children and their families as part of the Foundation's core activity. Any such help is free of charge.

Direct support is offered in Foundation-operated centers or at home with a client, in justified cases also in the field, wherever crisis happens.

Help is available to all children requiring protection against abuse, no matter their sex, nationality, skin color, religion or health status. For a child to benefit from direct support, caregiver's consent is necessary.

Interactions of the ECF employees and collaborators with child-clients are always founded on respect for the dignity of the child, for their empowerment and their rights, with special focus on the right to protection against abuse.

Any and all activities involving contact with the child take into account the child's right to privacy.

Direct contact of ECF employee/collaborator with children is adapted to the child's needs and happens only if the child consents to it.

Foundation employees and collaborators explain to children what to expect during their visit to the Foundation. In the course of interaction, children are always addressed with respect and the language used in conversation is adapted to their capacity.

As well as this, all employees and collaborators of Empowering Children Foundation:

- treat all children equally, no matter their origin, appearance, convictions;
- show respect for the child's otherness, other convictions, other experiences, other child-like perspective;
- listen to children attentively and treat their statements, as well as their version of events with due respect;
- use non-judgmental language, no labels, express themselves in a way adapted to the child's level of development;
- create within the Foundation a culture of openness and mutual responsibility, facilitating discussion of numerous topics and issues regarding child protection.

Support of the ECF can be extended to children requiring protection against abuse, irrespective of their sex, nationality, skin color, religion or health status.

Interactions with children are founded on respect for their dignity, empowerment and their rights, with special focus on the right to protection against abuse.

Withholding help

An employee may withhold support in the following situations:

- when supporting the client contradicts best interest of the child;
- when the client grossly disrespects or violates order and disobeys the rules of Empowering Children Foundation;
- when offering support threatens the employee;
- when a conflict of interest is likely, due to close relationship, being related, etc.,
- when priority should be given to other forms of support, unavailable in the Foundation, e.g. protecting health and life;
- when the client is in the care of another psychologist (as regards psychological help) or professional representative (as regards legal assistance).

Releasing information

Parents/caregivers of the child are entitled to receive information regarding the support provided to the child in question, unless such information may threaten the child's interest.

Employees and collaborators of the ECF who offer direct and indirect help are prohibited from releasing any client information gained in the course of their professional activity. Exceptions to this rule are precisely outlined in the law and internal procedures of the ECF.

Rules for a safe relationship between an employee/collaborator and a child

In their contact with children, it is unacceptable for employees and collaborators of the ECF to do any of the following:

- embarrass, humiliate, belittle or demean children or display any behavior bearing signs of emotional, physical or sexual abuse;
- come into inappropriate physical contact with the child, violating the child's dignity; permissible physical contact is naturally associated with play, hygienic assistance, ensuring safety or the need to soothe the child;
- serve children alcohol, medications or other psychoactive substances;
- condone or participate in illegal activities involving a child;
- establish sexual relations with children;
- exhibit sexually provoking behavior;
- host the child in their own private home;
- maintain private relationship with the child, outside the framework of work and support;
- accompany the child during travel in the absence of a caregiver;
- sleep in the same room with children during summer camps, trips;
- be alone in the room with the child, when providing in-home support.

Any and all suspicions regarding proper conduct of ECF employees and collaborators are investigated and clarified without delay.

Protection of image rights and personal information of the child and the caregivers

Support provided to child and family is documented. The ECF abides by the laws regulating data protection, sensitive data in particular, by:

- obtaining written consent from clients regarding personal data processing;
- appointing an individual responsible for data protection;
- training employees;
- securing documentation, both electronic and in hard copy;
- defining clear rules for releasing information from documentation to third parties (courts, Prosecutor's Office, interdisciplinary teams).

The Empowering Children Foundation does not release client information to the media, nor does it use client images in its information and educational materials without prior client consent, or in the case of children – without the consent of a caregiver.

ECF protects image rights and personal information of children and caregivers.



Part 3. Preventing child abuse

Education and research

In order to prevent child abuse, the Empowering Children Foundation runs a number of educational initiatives addressed to parents/caregivers, professionals working with children and children themselves.

Educational activities are founded on observations from latest research and draw from good practices of other organizations, as well as validated models based on experience and proper evaluation. The ECF also endeavors to promote ongoing professional advancement of its employees and collaborators.

As well as this, the ECF is running its own research initiatives, hoping to shed some light on the nature of the problem, the mechanisms behind it, its causes and outcomes. When conducting research with children and adolescents, the ECF makes sure their interests are not at risk.

Conducting research involving children and adolescents, one must bear in mind that the best interest of respondents is essential.

Recruitment and introduction of new employees

The ECF makes every effort to choose employees and collaborators possessing appropriate skills and competencies, as well as sharing our belief in the values proposed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically the right to protection against abuse.

Each prospective employee/collaborator is to submit their resume and references. An interview is conducted by two ECF employees, focusing on candidates' knowledge and competencies, as well as explaining any existing gaps in employment/education. As early as the interview, the candidate is informed about the ECF's Child Protection Policy.

Before they commence their employment, candidates must submit legally required documents, along with a certificate of clean criminal record regarding crimes against sexual freedom and morality, crimes against minors and ongoing criminal proceedings involving them.

All newly appointed ECF employees and collaborators are expected to familiarize themselves with the stipulations of Child Protection Policy, bylaws of employment, rules for upholding children's rights and principles of safeguarding and processing personal data in the ECF. This is confirmed by the employee's signature on a relevant statement appended to employment contract.

Each new employee reads Child Protection Policy, submits a certificate of clean criminal record and goes through training regarding children's rights and data protection.



Part 4. Intervention in cases of suspected child abuse

All employees and collaborators of the ECF act for the purpose of protecting children against abuse. In our work we comply with the Polish legal regulations. Every suspected case of child abuse is treated seriously and investigated, whether reported by a child, caregiver or professional and no matter if suspected abuse was perpetrated by another child, caregiver, professional or employee/collaborator of the ECF.

Every report of suspected child abuse is treated seriously and investigated.

In the case of suspected crime or threat to the child's interest, ECF employees immediately undertake legal intervention. The decision to intervene is made by a team made up of: the reporting employee, coordinator of the relevant program, expert in protecting children against abuse appointed by the coordinator. The decision to intervene by informing the Prosecutor's Office is authorized by the ECF Management Board. Other forms of intervention are only communicated to the Board. At the same time, ECF employees offer help and support to the child and non-offending caregivers.

In the case of direct threat to the child's health or life, ECF employee immediately informs the Police.

If the child's health or life are in imminent danger, an employee learning of the situation intervenes without delay, by immediately informing proper Police unit by phone and by fax about direct threat or damage to health and life of a child.

All activities undertaken in the course of the intervention are documented.

If despite ECF's support the client suffers serious damage to health or loses life, ECF Management Board initiates the procedure of Serious Incident Analysis to make sure all available support options were employed and to draw conclusions for future operation.

If despite undertaken activities the client suffers serious damage to health or loses life, the employed support measures are subject to careful analysis.



Part 5. Policy implementation and monitoring

Child Protection Policy of the Empowering Children Foundation comes into force at the moment of its full version being published and made available by the ECF Board to all employees/collaborators of the Foundation, and at the moment of its abridged version being posted on the ECF website at www.fdds.pl.

The ECF Board appoints a coordinator responsible for implementation and execution of Child Protection Policy, whose duties include among others:

- coordinating – in collaboration with the Data Security Administrator – introductory training sessions and refresher courses for employees;
- once every 2 years performing a survey to investigate the efficacy and appropriateness of Policy stipulations, and to evaluate how familiar ECF employees and collaborators are with the Policy;
- periodically consulting with ECF employees and collaborators.

Basing on the outcomes of consultations and surveys, every two years (more frequently if needed, or if relevant legal regulations in Poland are amended) the Policy coordinator will initiate a revision of Policy stipulations, to make sure they remain effective and appropriate. Proposed changes will be presented to the Board for approval. In the case of substantial amendments, prior to making the decision the Management Board will consult with the ECF Council. Any revision to the Policy document must be communicated to all ECF employees and collaborators.

Appendix 1. Allocation of duties regarding the implementation of Child Protection Policy

ECF Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues opinions regarding Policy revisions
ECF Management Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approves Policy, approves revisions • Publishes Policy • Makes binding decisions in case of doubts in interpreting Policy stipulations • Appoints Policy Coordinator • Communicates substantial amendments to the ECF Council for their opinion • Issues authorization to represent ECF in the course of legal intervention • Approves legal intervention in cases of suspected crimes • Initiates proceedings in cases of suspected child abuse by ECF employee/collaborator • Appoints members of the ECF Ethics Committee for Research Studies • Initiates Serious Incident Analysis
Policy Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinates preparation and execution of introductory and refresher training courses about the Policy • Keeps a register of frequently asked questions • Monitors compliance with the Policy by means of surveys and consultations held no less than once every 2 years • Proposes Policy amendments to the Board • In cooperation with the Board, investigates any doubts regarding Policy implementation • In cooperation with the Board and the legal department investigates any cases of infringement of Policy stipulations • Runs a database of Serious Incident Analysis (SIA) reports • Once a year, presents SIA conclusions to the Board and other Coordinators.
Program coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise day-to-day implementation of Policy stipulations • Report the need to develop consent forms for specific activities • Having consulted with a lawyer, an employee reporting abuse and appointed expert, decides to undertake legal intervention and signs intervention brief.

Legal Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafts consent forms for specific program activities • Takes part in legal intervention, consults on the wording of intervention briefs • Notifies Policy Coordinator about legal changes relevant to the Policy
HR Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides every new employee with the following set of documents to read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child Protection Policy - Personal Data Protection Policy - Employment Bylaws • Other than legally required documentation, collects in personnel files relevant statements and certificates of clean criminal record, as well as declarations confirming that all such documents were read
ECF employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarize themselves with the Policy and abide by its stipulations • Submit certificates of clean criminal record • In suspected cases of child abuse, notify relevant program coordinator • Undertake emergency intervention • Report any doubts regarding interpretation of this Policy to the Policy Coordinator • Report cases of Policy stipulation infringement to Policy Coordinator
ECF collaborators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarize themselves with the Policy and abide by its stipulations • Submit certificates of clean criminal record, as well as a certificate from the National Criminal Register (if they provide help outside ECF premises and without the presence of ECF employee) • In suspected cases of child abuse, notify relevant program coordinator, or – if unavailable – their supervisor. • Report any doubts regarding interpretation of this Policy to the coordinator of their program, or – if unavailable – to their supervisor.

