POLICY

Child Protection Policy

"To look after orphans and widows in their distress"

Adopted October 2015 - revised May 2018 - due for review

Mahima Ministries

Reg. No. 536/2005 · PAN AABAM0005D · 12A · 80G · FCRA 010220236

mahimaministries.org

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Child Protection Policy

Organisation	Mahima Ministries, Reg. No. 536/2005
Applies to	All staff, volunteers and partners, at every location
Adopted	October 2015, revised May 2018
Review	Due - no review date recorded
Approved by	The Governing Board

> "To look after orphans and widows in their distress"

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1 Introduction

1.1 Policy Statement:

Mahima Ministries is committed to safeguarding children from harm, exploitation and abuse. This means enacting and following procedures that place the safety, protection and best interests of the child as priorities in everything we do.

The aim of this policy is to promote good practices that provide children with appropriate safety and protection in their interaction with staff, volunteers, tutors, doctors, child development specialists and visitors.

We believe in the child's active participation in decisions concerning their care and in respecting their freedom of expression and right of communication, which are advocated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and promoted by the National Child Protection Policy, upon which Mahima Ministries' Child Protection Policy is based.

The welfare and best interests of child shall be the primary consideration when making decisions with regards to this policy. The rights, wishes and feelings of the children and their families will be heard and respected, and those people in positions of responsibility within the organization shall work in accordance with the best interests of children outlined in the policy.

Every effort will be made and every reasonable measure will be taken to ensure the safety of the children and to protect them from harm including, but not limited to:

Degrading (reducing a child's worth) and exploitative treatment

Harsh, abusive or crude language

Physical abuse including bodily punishment & sexual harassment

Discrimination based on caste, creed, gender or religious beliefs

1.2 Need and Purpose

Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) are among the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Our desire is to ensure accountability in all aspects of our work by developing good practices across the complex areas where Mahima Ministries works.

In order to establish a safer context for providing care to children, it is essential for Mahima Ministries to implement appropriate protection policies, guidelines and organizational systems. When properly adhered to, these policies will help protect the organization and individuals in contact with our children, against false or malicious accusations of abuse.

This Child Protection Policy helps identify common child protection issues and sets forth appropriate standards of care designed to keep children safe and procedures that allow Mahima Ministries to respond to situations in an ethical manner.

Furthermore, the implementation of this policy helps ensure that children, along with staff and volunteers, are protected. In turn, this helps us maintain the reputation and credibility of the organization.

This Child Protection Policy applies to all the Centres of Mahima Ministries and their representatives. A Mahima Ministries representative, for the purpose of this policy, includes all paid or unpaid Mahima Ministries staff including but not limited to caregivers, volunteers, ministry partners (including their staff and volunteers), freelancers, consultants and visitors appointed or recruited by Mahima Ministries, or any such person(s) who represent Mahima Ministries.

1.3 Child Abuse

For the purposes of this policy, a "child" is defined as anyone under the age of 18, as per the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Note: The Child Protection Policy exists to protect all recipients of Mahima Ministries programming and services, regardless of age.

According to the World Health Organization, "Child Abuse" or "maltreatment" constitutes 'all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, 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'.

Six key types of abuse include:

Physical Abuse: Results in actual or potential harm from an interaction or lack of interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. This includes hurting or injuring a child, inflicting pain, poisoning, drowning, violent shaking, suffocating or deliberately making a child ill.

Sexual Abuse: Includes direct or indirect sexual exploitation of children by involving them (or threatening to involve them) in sexual activities (physical, verbal, visual or psychological) including inappropriate touch and verbal insinuation.

Emotional Abuse: The persistent ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse affect on the child's emotional development, failure in providing a developmental and supportive environment. This abuse may include repeatedly rejecting children, humiliating them or denying their worth and rights as human beings.

Exploitation: Refers to use of children in work or activity that interferes with their ability to attend regular school, or is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful.

Neglect: The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psycho-social needs likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve failing to provide safety, health, hygiene, education, or nourishment or failing to protect the child from physical harm or danger. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to a child's basic emotional needs.

Religious Abuse: Occurs when someone in a position of power or authority in a faith-based environment misuses their power and the trust placed in them with the intention of controlling, coercing or dominating a child.

2 Prevention of Abuse

2.1 Recruitment and Selection

Mahima Ministries seeks to have only those representatives who respect and value children and are committed to safeguarding them from harm. All Mahima Ministries representatives will be carefully screened through whatever means are reasonably available in order to check the persons' backgrounds for any evidence they might not be safe for the children to whom we are providing care. Such measures are intended to deter those persons of dubious intentions seeking to gain access to children through Mahima Ministries projects, and to ensure that those who are successful in their applications are safe to work with the children.

All prospective Mahima Ministries representatives are required to provide the following documentation:

Name and contact information of two references they have known for at least 2 years. The references will be asked about the candidate's experience in working with children, conduct and disclose any other concerns that they may have.

Identity and relevant certificates will be cross-checked with the original documents.

Note: Should we learn of, or have suspicions that a prospective representative may have a criminal record, or behavior that is not suitable to caring for, serving or protecting children, we will rely upon that as evidence for not hiring; or if discovered after the representative has been hired, then as grounds for terminating employment immediately.

Before becoming a representative of Mahima Ministries, suitable candidates will be provided with a copy of this Child Protection Policy and will be required to sign the Statement of Commitment indicating they have received the policy, read it, understood it and agree to abide by it.

2.2 Training and Education

Training and education are essential to implementing the Child Protection Policy. Mahima Ministries believes in investing in its representatives and in building capacity so they can be better equipped to protect the child from abuse. In keeping with this commitment, Mahima Ministries will conduct an orientation training about the Child Protection Policy and provide training on behavior guidelines for those persons coming into direct contact with children, as well as guidance concerning the acceptable and unacceptable sharing of information on children.

Opportunities will also be provided to representatives to learn about the nature of abuse, effects of abuse, how to recognize and respond to child abuse and information and support on who to contact

for child protection issues.

Mahima Ministries considers children as active participants whose hopes and aspirations are to be respected and whose welfare is of paramount importance.

Wherever possible, children will be involved in programs designed to ensure their safety with appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure they have a voice in their own care, and that teach them skills for protecting themselves.

Children will have a voice and a vehicle by which they can speak out about abuse or suspected abuse, keeping them free from abusers and empowering them to become actors in their own protection without discrimination or shame.

This training will also help children to know about and to understand their rights, like, the children have the right to be heard; a right to communication which enables them to ask questions, receive information, make decisions and choices, etc.

By being aware of their rights and in being provided a safe environment in which to exercise these rights, they strengthen mightily the benefits of this policy.

2.3 Requirements of Ministry Partners

All Mahima Ministries ministry partners are required to have their own Child Protection Policy that is known by all its staff, volunteers and visitors, has been implemented and is actively being used to safeguard the children in their care. If they do not have such a policy or if it is inadequate, they will be required to develop a policy of their own to commence or continue. If required, Mahima Ministries will help partners receive training, guidance and support to develop a child protection policy of their own.

Mahima Ministries expects all partners to consistently apply good practice in child protection to all activities involving children, and to pursue regular and ongoing training in areas involving the proper care and safety of children.

Child protection concerns must be reported to the Manager of Mahima Ministries (see Appendix 1 - Definition of Terms) immediately, once known or suspected, and necessary steps will be taken to address these concerns and any potential long-term effects on the child.

2.4 Behavior Protocols

Any Mahima Ministries representative who has direct contact with children will be fully informed of Mahima Ministries Code of Conduct - shown herein below.

2.5 Code of Conduct

Mahima Ministries believes in and advocates for a child's rights to protection, development and participation. This Code of Conduct includes guidance on appropriate and expected standards of behavior of adults towards children, and also of children towards other children. This has been

developed with the best interests of the child as the primary consideration and should be interpreted in a spirit of transparency and common sense.

All Mahima Ministries representatives are required to understand and abide by this Code of Conduct. Any breach of this Code will be seen as a serious concern and may result in disciplinary action or dismissal, in accordance with the Mahima Ministries disciplinary procedures.

Appropriate standards of Behavior/Code of Conduct

Conduct yourself in an exemplary way to the children around you in all areas that include: physical, educational, emotional, religious and social.

Be non-judgmental to children where there is difference of opinion.

Encourage and respect children's voices and views.

Do not show favoritism. Treat all children with respect and dignity regardless of color, gender, disability, language, ethnicity, religion or any other status.

Be aware of the potential for peer abuse (e.g., bullying, discriminating against, victimizing or abusing children)

Kissing children is not permitted, regardless of intentions.

Do not hug or touch a child in an inappropriate manner or in an insensitive way.

When meeting with a child or children, only meet in an open area visible to others. In unique situations, supervision by another Mahima Ministries representative may be required.

No private meetings, counseling sessions, or late night conversations with individual children.

Encourage children to ask questions and seek help when you are not able to answer them.

Listen to children.

Dress appropriately to cover your whole body.

Address children by their names rather than by their "pet" or "nicknames."

Do not use abusive language.

Children shall not be struck physically, or corrected with physical force.

Do not act in any way that embarrasses, shames or degrades a child.

A relationship with a child, other than that as a caring, safe adult, is prohibited.

Children will be cared for and taught systems of virtue and right behavior. We respect the right of children that, when they mature, they will make their own decision concerning their religious faith.

Avoid arguments and shouting in the presence of children.

Ensure games and play areas are safe for children and if appropriate, well-supervised,

age-appropriate and friendly to those having a physical impairments.

Do not make any false promises to the children.

Consider the child's age, developmental level, maturity and level of care required. For example, touching a child to gain their attention, guiding or comforting a distressed child.

Be alert to cues from children about how comfortable they are in your proximity and respect their need for personal space.

Be sensitive when interacting with children who may misinterpret an adult's actions or, due to cultural norms, may feel they are unable to voice their discomfort. Factors include an adult's status of age, gender, and authority. Another dynamic is the child's limited understanding of how to protect their personal space due to conventions of hospitality.

Be aware of cultural norms that may influence the interpretation of your behavior towards children.

Be aware that the giving and receiving of gifts, giving extra attention, accepting a different standard of behavior from a child, exhibiting a different standard of behavior or having a "special time" with a child must be appropriate and justified as a strategy to meet teaching and learning outcomes -- AND MUST first be reviewed and approved by the Mahima Ministries person(s) having authority over the ministry area and the care of the child.

Be aware that talking about sex or making comments of a sexualized nature that are outside of the bounds of appropriate sexual health curriculum, is inappropriate. This behavior may be perceived as sexual harassment, misinterpreted and/or cause distress to a child who may (or may not) believe they are not permitted to voice their discomfort.

2.6 Visual Images of Children & Communications

Mahima Ministries is committed to ensure that all photos, videos and other visual images of children, as well as information from interviews, is obtained and used with sensitivity in order to safeguard the child's rights to dignity, confidentiality and privacy.

When using images or information about any child, Mahima Ministries will not divulge specific geographical locations or provide detailed information about the identity of the child such that it would increase the risk to the child's safety and well-being.

In the use of visual images, Mahima Ministries will:

Respect the dignity of the child

Never exploit the child

Seek to depict the hope we see for the child

All information relating to the children we serve is limited solely to those employees who need to know, and who know to treat the information as confidential.

Photography and video footage of the children is limited to the staff and members of Mahima Ministries. Volunteers and visitors should take permission, with proper explanation, prior to taking any photographs. In the case of a video shoot, prior written permission from the Mahima Ministries Manager is required.

3 Reporting and Responding to Abuse Cases

3.1 Reporting Incidents of Abuse

All witnessed, suspected or alleged violations of the Child Protection Policy will be immediately reported to the designated Child Protection Officer, who will record and act on the allegations in a confidential and expeditious manner, and in the best interests of the child.

The Child Protection Officer report to the Director in person by email or by telephone, as dictated by the urgency of the incident.

Mahima Ministries will take whatever appropriate action is available in order to protect the child/children in question from further harm, as well as taking steps to ensure the safety of all other children in its care following an incident or allegation.

All representatives of Mahima Ministries have the right to report a suspected incident of child abuse directly to the Child Protection Officer, who will then contact the appropriate government authorities, like the District Child Protection Officer.

If a child wishes to seek out to share information about abuse or neglect, or talk spontaneously individually or in groups, the Mahima Ministries representative should:

Give the child time and attention.

Listen carefully to the child.

DO NOT directly question the child.

Allow the child to give a spontaneous account; do not stop a child who is freely recalling significant events.

Make an accurate record of the information that has been given, taking care to record the timing, setting and people present, the child's presentation as well as what was said.

Use the child's own words where possible.

Avoid promising the child total confidentiality as it is in their best interests that key trusted people, who can help, also know.

As soon as possible, and within 24 hours of the disclosure or suspicion of abuse, the informant should complete the Incident Reporting Form (see Appendix 4), taking special note to accurately record the date, time, place and details of incident, ensuring the report is factual and as accurate as possible. Inform the child's parents/guardians (unless they are the alleged perpetrators) of the

allegation and any action that is needed to ensure the child's safety.

The completed Incident Reporting Form should then be sent to the Mahima Ministries Child Protection Officer for further course of action.

3.2 Responding to Reports of Alleged Abuse

Mahima Ministries Child Protection Officer, will immediately remove from the child's environment, the employee, intern, volunteer or visitor who is alleged to have violated the Child Protection Policy, pending the outcome of an investigation.

Within 24 hours of receiving an Incident Reporting Form or a complaint relating to the alleged child abuse, the Mahima Ministries Child Protection Officer, with help from support staff, shall convene a child protection meeting to obtain further information, inform partners who are linked to the case, log the complaint, take the lead to initiate investigations and monitor the progress of investigation.

4 Implementation and Revision of Policy

The following measures will be taken by Mahima Ministries to support the implementation of this child protection policy:

Broad distribution of the policy to Mahima Ministries representatives and ministry partners.

Child protection will be communicated as 'everybody's responsibility'.

All Mahima Ministries staff should be advocates who promote the rights of children and seek their protection from all forms of exploitation and abuse.

Recruitment will include police and reference checks on suitability for working with children.

As part of induction of staff, volunteers and interns, briefing and training on child protection issues will be mandatory.

All Mahima Ministries representatives will be required to read and sign a Statement of Commitment to agree to the terms of this policy before their appointment.

Mahima Ministries will review this child protection policy after a child protection issue has occurred or, if warranted, in order to determine if modifications are necessary to protect the well-being of the children under its care and the integrity of the organization.

Appendix 1 - Definition of Terms

Child - any person below the age of 18 years old.

Child Protection Officer (CPO) - an employee of Mahima Ministries responsible for this Child Protection Policy.

Partner - any individual or organization which has an agreement with Mahima Ministries and is in

receipt of funds or has received funding for projects or programs.

Representative - all paid or unpaid Mahima Ministries staff, volunteers, freelancers or consultants, appointed or recruited by Mahima Ministries.

Sexual Harassment - any approach to a child that is in the nature of a sexual advance, or could be considered an advance with a sexual undertone of any degree. It includes:

a. Spoken or written harassment, for example; sexualized jokes or obscene remarks.

b.Non-verbal harassment, for example; glaring, staring, gesturing in a sexual way, the presence of suggestive or sexual magazines, pictures, posters, etc. on display and/or visible to a child.

c.Electronic harassment, for example; the use of email, text/sms messages, social media applications with messaging capabilities (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.), and including any future means of electronic communication not currently listed or known, that allow for the delivery and/or publishing in private or public domains, of sexual content or content that could be considered as sexual in nature.

Visitor - a person who is invited by Mahima Ministries to visit Mahima Ministries, its partners or operations in India.

Manager - The person who oversees a ministry site or ministry program of Mahima Ministries.

Caregiver - A person who directly provides care and protection to the children and staying with them on the campus.

Appendix 2 - Statement of Commitment

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Mahima Ministries's Child Protection Policy

I, _____ (name), have received, read and/or been explained the standards and guidelines outlined in the Mahima Ministries Child Protection Policy. I hereby acknowledge that I understand them completely and agree to abide by the policy and principles therein.

I understand that I must raise any concerns I may have about child protection in my role with Mahima Ministries, in a confidential manner with the Mahima Ministries Child Protection Officer.

_____

(Print name in full)

_____

(Job title/role)

_____

(Signature)

_____

(Date)

Appendix 3 - Incident Reporting Form

This form is to be used to report child safety concerns in accordance with Mahima Ministries' Child Protection Policy. The incident should be reported to the Mahima Ministries Child Protection Officer within 24 hours, when possible. This information is strictly confidential and should only be sent to the designated people (contact details at the end of this form). The information will be kept in safe and secure place.

Please ensure that the information provided is as unbiased and factual as possible. Distinguish between what you personally know or have observed, and what was told to you by someone else. Fill in as much as you can and leave blank those areas where you have no knowledge. The form should be completed and singed solely by you.

1 About You

Your name:_____

Your position/relationship to Mahima Ministries:_____

Contact details:_____

_____

_____

Your relationship to the Child:_____

- 2. About the Child (if more than one child involved, add rows or duplicate)

Child's name:_____ Sex:_____ Age (est.):_____

Parents/Guardian's name (if known): _____

Parent/Guardian's Contact details:

_____

_____

Where is the child now? Is he/she in a place of safety?

_____

Are there any immediate medical or safety issues?

_____

Any other important information about the child? (Disabilities, etc.)

_____

3 About Your Concern

Who is the alleged perpetrator? (Staff or representative of Mahima Ministries; spouse; child/children; someone in the community)

Name (and any contact details known) of the alleged perpetrator:

_____

Who disclosed the alleged abuse to you?

_____

Was the abuse observed or is it suspected?

Who observed or suspects the abuse?

What were the circumstances that led to the disclosure?

_____

What is alleged to have happened?

_____

_____

_____

Date of alleged incident: _____ Time of incident:_____

Location of alleged incident: _____

List your personal observation; e.g., visible injuries, emotional state, etc. (make a clear distinction between what is fact and opinion):

_____

_____

Exactly what has the child or person who disclosed said to you (in their own words) and how did you respond?

_____

Any other information you would like to add:

_____

What action has been taken and what external agencies (if any) have been contacted?

_____

Signed:_____ Date:_____

Email as "Confidential" to the Child Protection Officer:

AND to: mahimaministriesindia@gmail.com