

OMF International Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

1. Purpose

We believe that all people have value as image-bearers of God. We aim to fulfil our Biblical, ethical, and legal responsibilities. These responsibilities include protecting the safety and well-being of everyone in the Fellowship, as well as those in our ministries and communities.

In particular, we seek to protect and safeguard all children and all adults at risk, both those within our Fellowship and those we meet through our activities and ministries. We recognize that children and adults at risk in our Fellowship may face a higher risk of harm because they often live in communities where trust is high and people move often.

2. Commitment

Safeguarding is a framework that includes both prevention and response. It is a shared responsibility. It aims to stop harm before it happens and to take quick and appropriate action when it does.

OMF International is therefore committed to:

- Promoting a culture that prioritizes safeguarding;
- Having clear safeguarding policies and enforcing them;
- Screening all personnel;
- Training all personnel so they understand their safeguarding responsibilities to prevent, recognize, and report harm; and
- Responding to all reports of harm in a timely and consistent way.

3. Scope

All OMF personnel (including members, short-term workers, staff, and volunteers) have safeguarding responsibilities. They must follow this policy regardless of their role, culture, length of service, or place of ministry.

This policy mainly focuses on safeguarding children and adults at risk.

4. Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to create a shared understanding of safeguarding in OMF.

- **Adult at risk:** A person aged 18 or over who may not be able to care for or protect themselves from harm, abuse, or exploitation. This may include people with an illness, a physical or mental disability, or care needs. It may also include those who are being abused or neglected.
- **Child/children:** A person under 18 years of age.
- **Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM):** Any recording of child sexual abuse, such as photos, videos, or livestreamed content.
- **Grooming:** A process where a person builds a relationship with a child or adult at risk (and sometimes with their family or community) to gain trust and power, with the intention to harm them. This can happen anywhere, including in person, online, or in public.
- **Harm:** Physical or psychological damage or injury caused by maltreatment.
- **International Safeguarding Response Team:** A trained international team that responds to safeguarding concerns.
- **Maltreatment:** Any form of abuse or neglect that causes harm. This includes sexual, physical, emotional, or spiritual abuse (*see Section 5 below for more details*).

- **Personnel:** All OMF members, short-term workers, staff, and volunteers.
- **Safeguarding:** Actions taken to promote the safety and protection of children and adults at risk from harm.
- **Safeguarding Advocate (SGA):** The person in each Center who oversees safeguarding practices, training, and awareness in that Center (*Section 6 below for more details*).

5. Maltreatment

Maltreatment can happen anywhere and to anyone. It may be intentional or unintentional, active or passive. It may be a single event or repeated behavior. It includes:

1. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any act that causes a physical injury that is non-accidental. This includes unreasonably severe corporal punishment such as excessive hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, biting, shaking, burning, holding under water, or holding someone against their will.

Where allowed by local legislation, corporal punishment may be used occasionally as a last resort within a loving parent/child relationship. Where it is prohibited by local legislation, it must not be used at all.

OMF does not allow corporal punishment in any of its ministries or programs.

2. Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is a pattern of non-physical behavior that harms the development or functioning of a child or adult at risk. This includes:

- Hostile or rejecting behavior such as belittling, threatening, humiliating, blaming, discriminating or unreasonable restriction of movement;
- Imposing unreasonable expectations which are not appropriate for the age and/or stage of development of the child or adult at risk;
- Overprotecting, limiting opportunities to explore and learn, or preventing normal social interaction;
- Bullying, and all forms of harassment or intimidation;
- Failing to provide emotional support and security;
- Exposing a child or adult at risk to abuse of others, for example between other family members; and/or
- A pattern of controlling or coercive behavior in a religious context (often referred to as spiritual abuse). This may include manipulation or enforced obedience or pressure to remain silent. It may also include a misuse of religious teaching or authority, isolation as punishment, or claims of divine authority.

3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any sexual act or behavior of a sexual nature that is unwanted or takes place without consent or understanding. It may involve physical or non-physical actions.

Children

Sexual abuse of children involves using a child for sexual gain, even if the child appears to agree.

It may include:

- **Physical:** Touching for sexual gratification and/or lowering inhibitions;
- **Verbal:** Sexual comments, threats, solicitation or sexually explicit language, whether in person, on the phone, via text or on the internet;
- **Visual:** Indecent exposure, showing sexual material such as CSAM or pornography, inappropriate staring;
- **Grooming:** Preparing a child for abuse.

Harmful Sexual Behavior (HSB) refers to developmentally inappropriate sexual behavior by children that is harmful or abusive. Peer-on-peer sexual abuse is HSB between children of a similar age or stage of development. Child-on-child sexual abuse is HSB between children of any age or stage of development.

Adults at risk

Sexual abuse includes any sexual act without consent or where the adult has been pressured into consenting. This can include, but isn't limited to, physical, verbal, visual abuse, and grooming.

4. Neglect

Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet basic physical or emotional needs. It can be active or passive, intentional or unintentional. This includes failure to provide:

- Health care, education, food, or safe living conditions;
- Appropriate supervision or protection from harm;
- Emotional care and connection.

6. Safeguarding Advocate

Each Center will appoint a Safeguarding Advocate (SGA) in consultation with the International Facilitator for Safeguarding Services (IFSS).

The SGA will:

- Oversee the implementation of this policy in the Center;
- Promote safeguarding awareness and best practices in the ministries of that Center;
- Provide and/or oversee training, including training relevant to the local context;
- Stay informed about local legislation;
- Advise on good safeguarding practices, in particular regarding the local context;
- Assist with screening volunteers.

The SGA may also be asked to support a safeguarding response when a concern arises in that Center.

7. Key Principles

The following key principles support safe interactions and help reduce the risk of harm. Personnel must apply these three principles in all work with children and adults at risk.

Accountability: Making sure other adults know what we are doing and being open to feedback.

When working with children and/or adults at risk, personnel should provide a high level of transparency and accountability. This includes informing other adults in advance and inviting questions before and/or after the activity. All personnel are responsible for giving and receiving feedback.

Visibility: Making sure our work can be seen by others and that our safeguarding practices are clear and accessible to everyone.

Personnel should always be visible to at least one other adult when working with children and/or adults at risk. In group settings, at least two unrelated adults should be present when possible. If this is not possible, make sure at least two children are present and/or remain visible to another adult through open doors or clear windows.

Power Balance: Thinking carefully about power differences to prevent any abuse of power, whether intentional or unintentional. When one person or group has more power than another, the risk of maltreatment can increase.

When planning activities for children, consider:

- Age, cultural, and gender differences. These can create natural imbalances of power and increase the risk of maltreatment.
- Appropriate adult-to-child ratios based on the ages of the children involved.

Exceptions: There may be situations where one of these principles cannot be met. In such cases, the other two principles must be applied more strictly.

8. Safeguarding Code of Conduct

All personnel must follow this Code of Conduct when working with children and adults at risk in OMF programs or in our work and/or ministries. Centers may add additional provisions required by local legislation or which are appropriate to local culture.

All personnel must review this Code of Conduct at least once a year.

General Behavior

Personnel must:

- Treat all individuals with respect;
- Create a safe and welcoming environment;
- Do no harm and do not allow harm by others;
- Report all concerns and/or complaints about harm or mistreatment to the International Safeguarding Response Team;
- Respect the right of personal privacy of all individuals;
- Apply the key principles of accountability, visibility, and power balance;
- Accept feedback in order to maintain best practices.

Specific Areas:

Personnel must follow these practices during any event or activity involving children or, where appropriate, adults at risk:

1. Obtain permission

When possible, obtain permission from parents/guardians *before* any activity with children. Consider whether a signed consent form is appropriate.

2. Avoid being alone

Ensure, whenever possible, that another adult is present when you are with a child. If you find yourself alone with a child, inform the child's parent/guardian as soon as possible to ensure accountability. If prior consent was not possible, parents/guardians must be informed after any private interaction.

3. Ensure visibility

Make sure children are always visible to supervising adults.

4. Online interactions and social media

Conduct online interactions with children with visibility and accountability to parents/guardians.

- Most social media platforms have age limits, usually 13 and over, though some countries have stricter limits. Do not be friends or contacts with children below the relevant minimum age. For children above the age limit, only become a friend or contact if the child initiates the request. Where possible, also connect with the child's parents and/or inform them of the connection.
- Avoid sending private messages to children unless their parents are included.
- Do not post identifiable photos or videos of children aged 12 or under on any social media or internet site without their parents' consent. For children aged 13–17, obtain consent from both the child and the parents.
- Do not tag children in photos, videos or posts or include their names. Do not share posts that identify children.

5. Touching

You must avoid inappropriate physical contact. Any touch should meet the needs of the child or adult at risk at that time and should usually be initiated by them, unless there is a clear need to act

(for example, to prevent harm). This may include giving comfort, helping them manage their behavior or emotions, or preventing harm. All touch must be safe, respectful, and suitable for the person's age, gender, and culture.

6. Toileting

Toileting support must only be given to the extent that the child or adult at risk needs. In the case of a child, it should be discussed with parents/guardians in advance.

- Diapers (nappies) may be changed discreetly in a semi-public space.
- Older pre-school children should only need limited help, based on their level of training.
- Fully toilet-trained children do not require an adult in the cubicle or bathroom.

7. Discipline

Children may sometimes need help to learn appropriate behavior.

- Use constructive, non-physical methods whenever possible.
- Do not use any form of physical discipline.
- Do not use humiliating or shaming discipline.

If separation from the group is needed (such as a time-out), the child must remain visible to supervising adults at all times.

8. Grooming

Avoid grooming behaviors, and seek to prevent any misunderstanding of relationships by applying the key principles of accountability, visibility, and power balance. For example, if you have a close relationship with a child, ensure it is known to and approved by the parents, and that the child understands this openness.

9. Screening

OMF will carry out safeguarding screening of all applicants. This includes:

- Requiring the completion of the Safeguarding Screening Form to:
 1. Confirm agreement with this policy;
 2. Require disclosure of any concerns or reports raised and any restrictions, refusals or criminal proceedings relating to children or adults at risk; and
 3. Obtain a basic police check where legally able to do so.
- For those applying for a role working directly with children or adults at risk, additional screening includes:
 1. Obtaining references from at least two referees which include questions concerning the applicant's ability to work with children and/or adults at risk and any concerns the referee may have; and
 2. Obtaining a higher-level background/police check where legally able to do so.

If concerns arise as to the applicant's suitability to work with children or adults at risk, the personnel dealing with the application will consult the relevant SGA(s) to decide on next steps.

10. Training

All personnel must complete the following trainings. These will help them understand the importance of safeguarding, help prevent and recognize harm, and make sure that they respond consistently to safeguarding concerns in line with OMF procedures:

- **Foundational training:** the foundational safeguarding training, "*Everyone's Responsibility*" e-learning module. This must be completed before starting work or ministry.
- **Local training:** training on the local safeguarding context within three months of starting work or ministry. This will be provided at a Center Level.

- **Refresher training:** Safeguarding Refresher Training for personnel serving more than 12 months. This must be completed each year.
- **Role holder training:** Safeguarding Advocates, members of the International Safeguarding Response Team, and the International Facilitator for Safeguarding Services will receive additional specialist training so they can carry out their roles effectively.

11. Reporting Concerns

All cases of suspected maltreatment of a child or adult at risk must be responded to in a way that first ensures the individual's immediate and future safety. All interactions must put the needs of the child or adult at risk first. This is known as a trauma-informed approach.

The following applies to all personnel:

1. Reporting and recording concerns

If you observe, hear about, or suspect maltreatment of a child or adult at risk, you should:

- Report it to the International Safeguarding Response Team as soon as possible. A form for this purpose (the Safeguarding Concern Reporting Form) is available on the website of OMF International. You may also report by email to safeguarding@omfmail.com.
- Make a written record of your observations, impressions, and/or communications that caused concern. Include dates, times, and details of any witnesses. Keep this record secure.

If in doubt, report. Members of the ISRT will decide if further action is needed (*see Section 12 below*).

2. Do not investigate

Do not try to investigate the concern yourself. Those with the right training will carry out any inquiry in the safest way, using a trauma-informed approach.

3. Responding to a disclosure

If a child or adult at risk shares a concern with you:

- Do not question or interrogate them;
- Protect them from intrusion by others;
- Reassure them that they did the right thing by telling you;
- Explain what you will do next.

4. Ensure immediate safety

If there is a risk of further harm, act to protect the immediate safety of the individual.

5. Seek support

Do not panic and do not act alone. Contact the International Safeguarding Response Team immediately. They will respond in line with our Response Protocols.

6. Managing risk from personnel

If any personnel in direct contact with the child or adult at risk is suspected of causing harm, that person must be removed immediately from contact or from any situation where harm may occur.

12. Responding

The International Safeguarding Response Team (ISRT) oversees and carries out responses across the Fellowship, following the Safeguarding Response Framework. They do this under the leadership of the International Facilitator for Safeguarding Services. The ISRT will take all reported concerns seriously and will respond in a consistent way, in line with the Safeguarding Response Framework.

1. Initial review (triage)

As soon as a safety concern is reported, at least two members of the ISRT will review it using a Triage Form.

2. **Deciding next steps**

These members will decide if a Safeguarding Response is needed and act as follows:

- If no action is needed, the decision will be recorded and stored in a secure, confidential online location.
- If action is needed but not a Safeguarding Response, the relevant leader will be informed so they can take the appropriate steps.
- If a Safeguarding Response is required, a Safeguarding Response Team will be formed. This team will carry out the response in line with our protocols (*see Section.12.3 below*).

3. **Safeguarding Response Process**

All Safeguarding Responses will follow the Safeguarding Response Framework. This includes:

- An initial assessment to identify key issues and plan next steps;
- Informing relevant Center Leaders and SGAs (and other local leaders as appropriate), working with them during the response as needed;
- Ensuring compliance with any mandatory reporting requirements in all relevant jurisdictions;
- Conducting an inquiry to build a clear understanding of what happened. This usually includes interviews and gathering relevant information;
- Evaluating the information, which may include a safety assessment for a child or adult at risk, and/or a misconduct assessment if needed;
- Working with the relevant Center's Personnel Manager and/or Center Leader if a disciplinary process is required, to ensure that OMF's Disciplinary Policy is followed;
- Developing and communicating an action plan as needed; and
- Ensuring all stages of the response are properly documented, and all records are stored securely.

When developing the action plan and final recommendations, the ISRT will seek agreement, where possible, with the family of any child who was harmed, with the adult at risk, and with Center Leadership, as appropriate.

4. **Use of external expertise**

OMF International will act within its level of experience and expertise. When needed, it will consult and work with relevant external agencies in addition to following its own policies and protocols.