



CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES

for VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS

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CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES

OVERVIEW STATEMENT

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants NC Field Office (USCRI NC) is committed to protecting the safety and well-being of children who are our clients. We value young people and children and will take reasonable measures to ensure their safety, and report instances or suspicion of inappropriate conduct or child abuse. Volunteers and interns for USCRI NC share a common responsibility and commitment to the awareness, prevention and reporting of and responding to child abuse in the course of their work.

SCOPE

The guidelines in this document apply to all volunteers, interns and partners working with USCRI NC.

DEFINITIONS

- **Child** - A person below the age of 18 years. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹ defines child as "a human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."
- **Child Protection** - Any responsibility, measure or activity undertaken to safeguard children from harm.
- **Child Abuse** - There are four distinguishable types of abuse:
 - Physical Abuse - Injuring a child by hitting, kicking, shaking, or burning, etc. him/her; also includes throwing objects at the child.
 - Emotional Maltreatment - Crushing a child's spirit with degrading derogatory verbal attacks, threats, or humiliation.
 - Sexual Abuse - Sexual contact with a child (incest, inappropriate touching, rape); pornographic use of a child.
 - Neglect - Failure to provide for a child's physical or emotional needs (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, physical or emotional attention); failure to provide guidance or supervision, abandonment.

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The following principles and values reflect USCRI NC's stance on child protection:

- **Zero tolerance of child abuse:** USCRI NC does not tolerate any form of child abuse, nor does it tolerate possession or access to any material that is abusive towards children. USCRI NC will not knowingly engage anyone who poses a direct risk to children.
- **Recognition of children's interests:** USCRI NC recognizes that some children are at greater risk of abuse. Of particular vulnerability are children with disabilities, children in conflict situations, children with a history of trauma, as well as migrant children or children without parents.

REGISTRATION, INFORMED CONSENT AND PROTECTION OF CLIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

Each child should be formally registered before taking part in the programs offered by USCRI NC. The registration process includes an information/consent form which their parent/guardian must complete.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>

The child's case manager is responsible for obtaining the consent form. A register of present/absent participants should be kept for each session with the volunteers or interns.

Informed Consent

Informed consent refers to the process for getting permission from the child and family to participate in the program. This includes the child and family having a clear understanding of the services being provided, what is expected of them as participants in the program, and how their information will be used and/or shared with others.

For all cases of volunteers and interns working with minor clients, the USCRI NC case manager will conduct an introductory meeting with the volunteer or intern, the child, and the child's parent or caregiver to explain the program and obtain the family's consent to participate. During the introductory meeting, the child, caregiver, volunteer or intern, and USCRI NC case manager will come to an agreement on the information to be shared between the volunteer or intern and the USCRI NC case manager for the purposes of ongoing case coordination and support during the child's participation in the program. For example, for a child participating in ESL classes with a volunteer, this may include information about the child's progress in ESL classes and any pertinent information about the child's education history.

USCRI NC case managers should not share information with volunteers or interns about the child's background that is not directly related to the child's participation and progress in the program (e.g., ESL, tutoring, mentoring), and volunteers and interns should not ask; this includes information about the child and family's trauma history and legal status.

Protection of Client Confidentiality

USCRI NC staff, volunteers, and interns working with a family must obtain the child and their parent or caregiver's permission to disclose their information to other parties. This includes parties outside of USCRI NC, such as a child's classroom teacher, as well as other parties within USCRI NC. For example, a case manager should obtain the family's permission to discuss their case with a USCRI NC attorney; similarly, a volunteer should obtain the family's permission to discuss concerns about a child's adjustment with his/her USCRI NC clinician. The child and family must understand exactly what it is they are consenting to, to whom the information will be disclosed, and for what purposes.

The following guidelines apply to the sharing of client information:

- The child and parent or caregiver should sign a **Release of Information (ROI)** form authorizing the USCRI staff, volunteer or intern to share their information with another party.
- The ROI should state specifically what information will be shared and for what purpose.

Limits to Confidentiality

Informed consent does not apply in situations involving suspected child abuse or threatened harm to self or others. During the introductory meeting, the USCRI NC case manager will review information with the child and family about confidentiality and its limits, including the case manager's role as a mandated reporter.

USCRI NC will not share the volunteer's or intern's information with other organizations unless the volunteer or intern gives verbal or written permission to do so. However, by law, there are exceptions that exist in which case managers have the responsibility to release information to the appropriate authorities without the volunteer's or intern's permission. These exceptions include:

- Suspected abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult.
- If the child, the volunteer or intern, or another person threatens to cause harm to themselves or someone else.
- In response to a court order or subpoena.

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Recruitment

To ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children, the following steps are taken when recruiting and selecting volunteers and interns.

- The job requirements and responsibilities have been clarified.
- Volunteers and interns have signed the Child Protection Guidelines and Volunteer Handbook or Intern Handbook.
- Child Protection Guidelines and procedures are explained, and training needs identified.

Training

In addition to pre-selection checks, the child protection and safety process includes training after recruitment to help volunteers and interns to:

- Analyze their own practice against what is deemed good practice, which will help to protect them from false allegations.
- Recognize their responsibilities and report any concerns about suspected poor practice and/or abuse.
- Respond to concerns expressed by a minor.
- Work safely and effectively with children.

All volunteers and interns are required to undergo USCRI's child protection training to ensure their practice is exemplary and to facilitate the development of positive culture towards good practice and child protection.

CHILD PROTECTION BEST PRACTICES

Guidelines to Minimize Risks of Abuse

- Children under 18 years of age should not be left unattended at any time.
- Volunteers and interns should avoid being alone with an individual child for a long time. If there is a need to be alone with a child (e.g., first aid or if he/she is distressed) make sure that another team member knows where you are and why.
- Classroom instructors should always be supervised (i.e., open door policy) or should have two or more instructors present.
- At no time should a volunteer or intern arrange to meet a minor client outside of the organizational facility/activities without someone else being there.
- Any such meetings should be planned and have the approval of a USCRI NC staff member, as well as permission from the child's parent/guardian.

Safe Travel to and from Activities

- Volunteers and interns can only transport children after confirming with the case manager that the child's parent/guardian has signed the Consent and Agreement to Transport Minor Form.
- Volunteers and interns should not transport children under 13 years of age, unless accompanied by their parent/guardian or an older sibling.
- Children are to wear their safety-belt while traveling, remain in their seats and not yell or be disruptive to the driver of the vehicle.
- If walking instead of traveling in a vehicle, follow pedestrian safety principles: look left, right and left again before crossing the street. Put phones, headphones, and devices down when crossing the street. It is particularly important to reinforce this message with teenagers. Walk on sidewalks or paths and cross at street corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks.
- Never let a child leave with another adult unless the parent/guardian has informed you that this will happen.

RECOGNIZING CHILD ABUSE

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect (see lists below). It is important to note that any one of these things could mean anything or nothing. However, when you have a cluster of two or more of these, this should raise a red flag to at least talk to the child, or at most alert the child's case manager. It is also important to remember that issues related solely to poverty are not considered child maltreatment issues.

The Child:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance.
- Displays overt sexualized behavior or exhibits sexual knowledge that is inconsistent with their age.
- Has not received medical attention for a physical injury that has been brought to the parents' or guardian's attention.
- Has learning problems that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes.
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- Is overly compliant, an overachiever or too responsible.
- Comes to scheduled event early, stays late and does not want to go home.
- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones or black eyes.
- Has bruises or marks in non-prominent, "fleshy" areas of the body (for example, inside of biceps or behind the knees).
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from class.
- Seems frightened of the parents/guardians and protests or cries when it is time to go home.
- Shrinks at the approach of adults.
- Reports injury by a parent/guardian or another adult caregiver.

The Parent/Guardian or Other Adult Caregiver:

- Shows little concern for the child, rarely responding to requests for information or home visits.
- Denies the existence of or blames the child for problems in school or at home.
- Asks the volunteer or intern to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves.
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless or burdensome.
- Demands perfection, or a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve.
- Offers conflicting, unconvincing or no explanation for the child's injury.

- Describes the child as "evil" or in some other very negative way.
- Is abusing alcohol, prescription drugs or illegal drugs, and that abuse is having an adverse impact on the child.
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child.
- Has a history of abuse as a child.

The Parent/Guardian and Child:

- Rarely touch or look at each other.
- Consider their relationship entirely negative.
- State that they do not like each other.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

Child protection is the response to the different ways in which a child's physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual health are damaged by the actions of another person.

What you should do in case of a disclosure (when a child reports abuse):

- Listen to the child/young person.
- Look at them directly and do not promise to keep any secrets before you know what they want to tell, but always let the child know if, and why, you are going to tell anyone.
- Take whatever is said to you seriously and help the child to trust his/her own feelings. Make notes soon after the event. Try to write down exactly what the child said. Avoid assumptions or filling in the gaps with what you think happened.
- Any disclosure by a child must be reported immediately to the case manager at USCRI NC.
- It is not the role of the volunteers or interns to investigate any allegations.

What you should not do:

- No volunteer or intern should begin investigating the matter themselves.
- Do not discuss the matter with anyone except the necessary authorities and case managers at USCRI NC.
- Do not form your own opinions and decide to do nothing.

Things to say:

- "What you are telling me is very important."
- "This is not your fault."
- "I am sorry that this has happened/is happening."
- "You were right to tell someone."
- "What you are telling me should not be happening to you and I will find out the best way to help you."

If the volunteer or intern suspects that a child is being abused or neglected, or a child expresses wanting to harm him/herself or someone else, reach out immediately to the child's case manager for support in further assessing the situation. The USCRI NC case manager will make the appropriate report to Child Protective Services or other authorities as needed.

RETALIATION

Retaliatory action against anyone acting in good faith who has reported inappropriate conduct/child abuse in accordance with these guidelines, or who has been involved in reporting, investigating, or responding to inappropriate conduct or child abuse, is a violation of these guidelines.

TRAUMA-INFORMED BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN**Safety**

Recognizing the likely existence of a traumatic history in the lives of many USCRI NC children is the first step in facilitating safety in the physical environment and in relationships between them and providers (including volunteers and interns). Warm and welcoming surroundings will create a sense of serenity for these children. Respectful language, boundaries, and use of power can establish and model safe and appropriate limits without recreating the oppressive dynamics of authority figures in the lives of many USCRI NC children. In essence, safe relationships are consistent, predictable, and non-shaming.

Trust

When a client's basic needs for safety, respect, and acceptance in the helping relationship are understood, an atmosphere of trust can be established. Trust is earned and demonstrated over time. By eliminating ambiguity and vagueness, volunteers and interns can assist children to clearly anticipate what is expected of them and what they can expect from the volunteers and interns, diminishing the anxiety that comes with uncertainty and unpredictability. Volunteers and interns should recognize their role, which is as the child's teacher or mentor, not a therapist. Even if the intention is to get to know the child better, volunteers and interns should not ask probing questions about the child's history.

Choice

All children who experienced trauma progress at their own pace as they explore their unique experiences and realize how those encounters primed them to respond in a certain fashion to environmental stressors. As they develop an expanded repertoire of coping strategies, they begin to recognize that they cannot always control others or the environment, but they can control their own responses. As a result, they gain a new sense of control in the service delivery environment. Facilitating choice can include asking the children about their preferences in service delivery, helping them to identify options and set goals, and guiding them in their own informed decision making.

Collaboration

Many children who have experienced abuse or trauma are particularly vulnerable to instinctive compliance and may need to be reminded that they have the right to ask questions, decline services, or make requests. By allowing the children to participate in determining the course of the engagement, volunteers and interns can engage the children in a productive manner.

Empowerment

Children who have experienced trauma have a profound sense of powerlessness when choice and predictability are absent from their daily existence. Volunteers and interns should consider using a

strengths-based approach such as the use of positive reinforcement and learning that builds off of the children's skills, strengths, interests, and goals.

TRAUMA AND BEST PRACTICES

Understanding that many of USCRI NC children have a history of significant trauma in their home countries, volunteers and interns should be sensitive to curriculum topics that may be triggering for students. Questions and topics that we may normally think of as benign and well-intentioned conversation starters to get to know the children better could be emotionally harmful to those with a history of severe trauma. For example:

- Avoid questions about the child's family. Getting-to-know-you questions such as "Who is in your family?", "How many brothers and sisters do you have?", "Tell me about your family in your home country." could be triggering for a child who has lost a sibling or other family member to gang/community violence, a child who has been abused by a close family member, etc.
- Avoid questions such as "Why did you come to the U.S.?" and "Tell me about your life in your home country." These questions could be emotionally triggering for our young clients, many of whom have come to the U.S. fleeing violence, abuse, and persecution.
- Present-oriented or future-oriented questions/topics such as "What are your future goals?", "Tell me about your interests and hobbies.", "How would you describe yourself?" may be safer and more appropriate than questions or topics that ask the children to talk about their past.

It is important for USCRI NC volunteers and interns to maintain healthy boundaries with the children, recognizing and establishing their role as the child's teacher or mentor, not their friend. Clear and balanced boundaries help ensure children's safety and emotional well-being.

What to Do:

- Create a warm and welcoming learning and mentoring environment.
- Use respectful language and treat the children with dignity and respect.
- Establish clear ground rules and discuss roles/expectations for both parties.
- Dedicate time and attention to each child.
- Maintain professional behavior.
- Redirect the children respectfully when needed.
- Develop a consistent structure so children know what to expect.
- Use a strengths-based approach.

What Not to Do:

- Reveal information about yourself unrestrainedly.
- Get overly angry or saddened by the choice made by the child.
- Have intruding thoughts about the child while not working with the child.
- Have an overt interest in changing the child's behavior.
- Promote the child's dependence on you.

CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND RECEIPT*

Signature on this receipt acknowledges that you have reviewed the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants NC field office's Child Protection Guidelines.

Child Protection Guidelines Statement of Certification

I, _____, certify that I have received and reviewed the **Child Protection Guidelines**.

I further understand that, by signing this statement as required, I am indicating that I have read the Child Protection Guidelines and understand its contents, or have discussed questions I have with the Volunteer Coordinator or Case Manager. I also realize that this statement will become a permanent part of my volunteer/intern personnel file.

Volunteer/Intern Name (Print)

Signature

Address

City, State, Zip

Date

*Print, sign and return to:

Volunteer Coordinator
USCRI North Carolina Field Office
3824 Barrett Drive, Suite 200
Raleigh, NC 27609
919-334-0072
volunteer@uscrinc.org