

## **Project Didi Australia Child Protection Policy**

Updated: August 2018

Project Didi Australia (PDA) is committed to sustainable, community-driven practices that transform and empower the lives of our beneficiaries in Nepal. We understand we have a fundamental duty of care to our beneficiaries, including children. We aim to safeguard them through working with our local partners to ensure the development and delivery of all programs are in line with best practice safe and effective care and have a zero-tolerance to child exploitation or abuse.

This Child Protection Policy will be reviewed every two years (or earlier if required), and lessons learned in the implementation of this Policy will be documented and reflected in future policies. This policy has been written to adhere to the standards established by leading international development organisations, including Australian Volunteers International and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

This Child Protection Policy must be read and signed with the Code of Conduct.

### **Scope of this Policy:**

The policy applies to all PDA partners, Board Members, administrators and volunteers, hereafter referred to as members.

PDA works with partners and organisations in Australia and Nepal to deliver programs for its beneficiaries, survivors of trafficking, domestic violence, sexual abuse and other forms of gender-based violence. These programs include but are not limited to family-based care, capacity building, training and income generation, peer-to-peer learning programs with Australian school students and awareness raising and fundraising events in Australia.

This policy sets out specific expectations of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Breaching or contravening the Child Protection Policy and/or Code of Conduct may lead to suspension and termination of any type of engagement. This will be determined on a case by case basis. After thorough consideration of the facts, PDA will decide whether the case needs to be reported to law enforcement authorities in full conformity with the Australian and Nepali laws.

### **Child Protection Principles:**

#### **Principle 1:**

*Zero tolerance of child exploitation and abuse.* PDA is committed to supporting families, women and children in Nepal and will not overlook, support or condone any activity or practice that places our beneficiaries at risk of exploitation or abuse.

#### **Principle 2:**

*Ensuring child protection.* PDA works directly with local partners in Nepal to minimise and

end the social and economic conditions that enable the exploitation and abuse of children, particularly girls.

**Principle 3:**

*Everyone is responsible for child protection.* PDA recognises that it is the shared responsibility of all adults to prevent child abuse and exploitation. This policy is mandatory for all PDA members.

**Principle 4:**

*We work in an open, transparent and collaborative way, with partners and those exposed to trafficking and abuse.* All reports of concern regarding the safety and protection of a child will be taken seriously. We recognise that situations of abuse and harm can be perpetuated when members or beneficiaries do not feel able to raise their concerns.

**Principle 5:**

*Recognition of the best interests of the child.* Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. PDA is committed to upholding the Rights of the Child and Australia's obligations under this Convention. In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be our primary consideration.

**Child Protection - Professional Behaviours:**

All PDA members that work directly or indirectly with children are expected to adhere to the following behaviours:

1. Treat all children<sup>1</sup> with respect.
2. Do not use language or behaviour towards children that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate.
3. Do not engage children in any form of sexual activity, including paying for sexual services.
4. Wherever possible, ensure that another adult is present when working directly with children.
5. Do not invite unaccompanied children into private residences, unless they are at immediate risk of injury or in physical danger.
6. Never use any computers, mobile phones, video cameras, cameras or social media to exploit or harass children, or access child exploitation material through any medium.
7. Do not use physical punishment on children.
8. Do not hire children for domestic or other labour: which is inappropriate given their age or developmental stage; which interferes with their time available for education and recreational activities; or which places them at significant risk of harm.
9. Comply with all relevant Australian laws and local legislation in Nepal, including labour laws in relation to child labour.

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<sup>1</sup> A child is considered any person under 18.

10. Immediately report concerns or allegations of child exploitation and abuse and policy noncompliance to a member of the Board or where this is not possible to the member's direct supervisor.
11. Immediately disclose all charges, convictions and other outcomes of an offence that relates to child exploitation and abuse, including those under traditional law, which occurred before or occurs during association with PDA or its partners.
12. Be aware of behaviour and avoid actions or behaviours that could be perceived by others as child exploitation and abuse.
13. When **photographing or filming a child** or using children's images members must:
  - Not take, use, display, post or distribute photographs or film that reveal a child's identity and without authorisation of PDA's Communications Manager.
  - Always seek informed consent of a parent or guardian and the child and assess the willingness of the child to have their picture taken before taking photographs or film. An explanation of how the photograph or film will be used must be provided.
  - Take care to ensure local traditions or restrictions for reproducing personal images are adhered to before photographing or filming a child.
  - Ensure photographs and films present children in a dignified and respectful manner and not in a vulnerable or submissive manner. Children should be adequately clothed and not in poses that could be seen as sexually suggestive.
  - Ensure images are honest representations of the context and the facts.
  - Ensure file labels, meta data or text descriptions do not reveal identifying information about a child when sending images electronically or publishing images in any form.

### **Physical contact**

Children may initiate physical contact. It is important to be warm with them but also mindful of our guidelines of what is appropriate and inappropriate.

- Do not hold, hug, kiss, touch or act in any sexually provocative manner.
- It is okay to return hugs but try to give shoulder-to-shoulder hugs. Encourage other forms of physical contact instead, for example high-fives.
- Be careful with pre-teens (10- 12 years) and teenagers as physical contact can be confusing. This includes pre-teens and teenagers who experience intellectual or physical disability, or who have experienced abuse.
- Do not do things of a personal nature for a child or young person that they can do for themselves.

### **Attachments**

- Avoid favouring any individual child with gifts and share your attention fairly between all children, even children who might not be easy to interact with.

- Respect and support a child's attachments with their principal caregiver.
- Do not make promises to the children that you may not be able to fulfil (for example that you will visit next year, send them something or that you will stay in touch with them).

#### **Realistic and positive expectations:**

- Members should not discuss any inappropriate topics or use inappropriate language.
- Members should avoid being purely figures of fun or people who dispense goods. Engaging in over-the-top play (for example piggy back rides and throwing the child in the air) can create an understanding that members are there solely for fun. This can make it difficult for children to concentrate during learning activities when members present.
- Do not provide sweets or gifts to children, without authorisation from PDA or its partners, as this can create unrealistic expectations and dependency.

#### **Sensitive topics**

Be careful about the questions you ask children, as well as the content and materials you use in activities. Be aware that some topics may be sensitive and inappropriate due to the children's personal situations, past experiences and cultural differences. Examples include family life, dreams for the future and your living circumstances in Australia. Many of PDA's beneficiaries have experienced loss, trauma and abuse and are in a period of recovery. Questioning them on their experiences can cause further trauma.

#### **Raising Concerns about a Child's safety:<sup>2</sup>**

All reports of concern regarding the safety and protection of a child will be taken seriously.

While working in Australia or overseas members may observe incidents where children are at risk, are harmed, or have suspicions or disclosures child abuse and/or exploitation.

Incidents or risks include:

- An observation or disclosure (by an adult or child) of abuse or exploitation.
- An observation or disclosure of potential risk of harm or child abuse.
- A breach of this Child Protection Policy or PDA Code of Conduct.
- A situation or environment which is working in opposition to or poses a threat to children's rights.
- An observation or disclosure of behaviour which could be considered suggestive.
- Child exploitation materials that are received by electronic equipment (this can include, but is not limited to SPAM, popups, text messages, emails, or social media communications).

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<sup>2</sup> This section has been adapted from the *AVI Child Protection Policy, April 2018*.

Members must inform a member of the PDA board or where this is not possible the member's direct supervisor if they have formed a *reasonable belief that a child or young person has been harmed or is at potential risk of harm*. A report must be made within 24 hours of becoming aware of the incident or risk.

If a disclosure occurs PDA will refer immediately to local partners and authorities in Australia and Nepal.

**Strategies for responding to children if they disclose:**

The following strategies will help support children if they disclose that they have been harmed or abused:

- Try to keep calm and give the child your attention.
- Listen to the child, do not ask leading questions.
- Let the child take his or her time to tell you what happened.
- Reassure the child that it is the right thing to tell.
- Let the child use his or her own words to tell.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Let the child know what you will do next.
- If the child is injured seek medical attention.
- Do not examine the children unless you are a parent or a medical practitioner.
- Don't confront the person who has allegedly abused the child (this can endanger the person who reports or the child themselves).

**Working with Children Check**

All PDA members (over 18) are required to complete and obtain a Working with Children Check or equivalent in their country of residence.

**Criminal Record Check**

As required, PDA members may be required to satisfy a National Criminal Record Check or equivalent in their country of residence.

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I understand that I must adhere to this Child Protection Policy as set out above. By my signature I hereby acknowledge that I have read and understood the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct and agree to abide by the conduct set forth in this document.

Print Full Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

**Related documents**

- PDA Code of Conduct
- PDA Constitution
- DFAT Child Protection Policy
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

**References:**

- Australian Volunteers International (2018) [Child Protection Policy](#). April.
- Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (2018) [Child Protection Policy](#). January.
- Volunteering Australia (2015) *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement*.

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