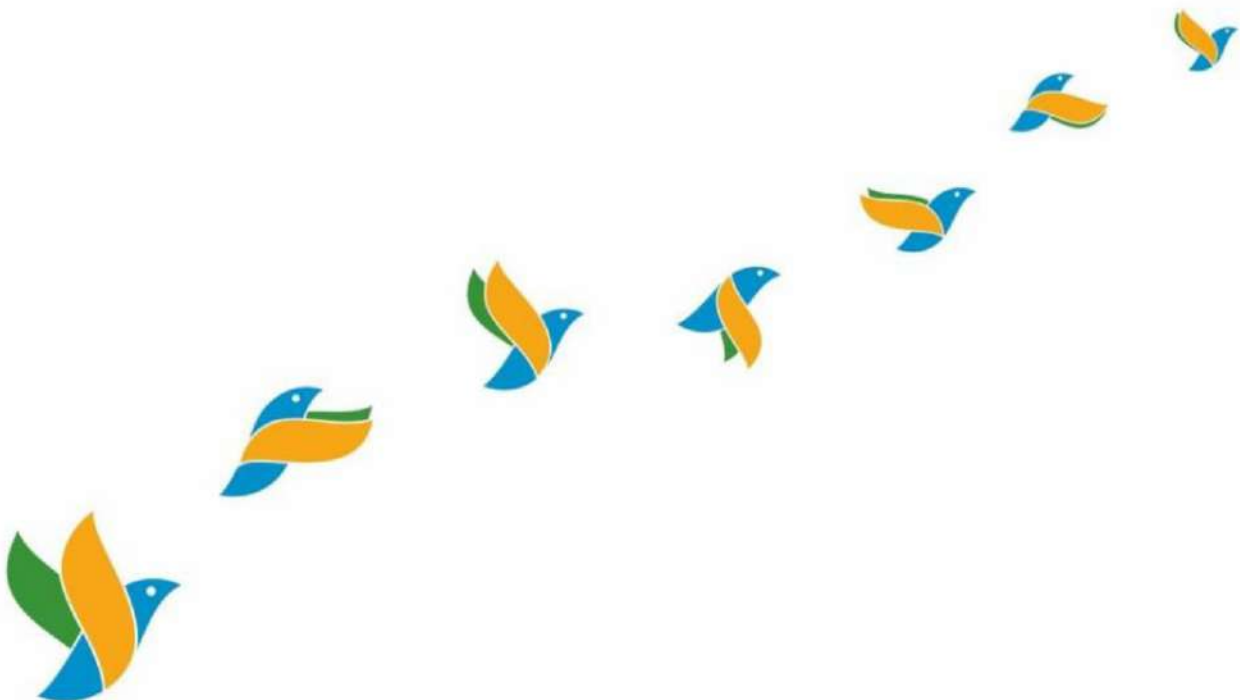




MUSKAN FOUNDATION FOR PEOPLE WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

Child Protection Policy



Muskan Foundation for people with multiple disabilities is a non-governmental organisation working with children with multiple disabilities and MDVI children. MDVI persons are those who suffer from multiple disabilities and visual impairment. Muskan was established in February 2007 under the leadership of the founder, Mrs. Dipti Gandhi, who perpetuated a new lease of life for children with multiple disabilities.

This document represents Muskan's commitment to being a 'child safe' organization by preventing abuse and protecting children associated with Muskan foundation. The aim is to help raise awareness of child abuse and of what is expected of staff and others within Muskan Foundation in relation to safeguarding children with multiple disabilities.

Muskan Foundation believes that:

- ◆ Children have the right to a happy, healthy and secure childhood.
- ◆ Children have the right to education.
- ◆ Children with disabilities (including multiple disabilities and visual impairment) have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation.

Definition:

Throughout this document: '*Child*' refers to any young person in the care, supervision or contact of an employee or volunteer of Muskan under the age of 18, as defined by the United Nations' Convention of the Rights of the Child.

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

Through its emphasis on prevention, the policy aims to minimise the risks of children being abused. Muskan will do all it can to ensure that children who are being abused, or who are at risk of abuse, are supported and given protection. The policy also recognises that, on occasions, staff and others engaged by Muskan to work with children, may pose a risk to the children and abuse their position of trust. The policy demands the highest standards of professional practice in work with children and describes the values and principles that must underpin our approach to children.

PURPOSE OF CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The nature of Muskan as an organisation and the situations it works in mean that often there may be a limit to what it can do to intervene in the lives of the individual children and the extent to which it can afford them protection, even when it does take action. However, where concerns are identified, it is crucial that these are raised and discussed and that whatever action is practicable is taken in order to ensure the protection of children from abuse.

The purpose of this policy is to protect children from sexual exploitation and sexual, emotional or physical abuse, including neglect. Muskan believes that the welfare of the child is paramount in any situation.

It is important to note that children with disabilities are at least twice as likely to be abused as children without disabilities. The children our projects target to assist, are therefore some of the most vulnerable in the world.

We endorse the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” as an important set of standards for the rights of children and will strive to ensure a child safe environment is maintained within the sphere of our activities. We encourage our personnel, and all others associated with Muskan, to participate actively in building and maintaining a child-safe environment. The particular vulnerability of deafblind children means prevention is central to our task of child protection. Muskan will endeavour to ensure that all of our practice focuses on prevention of abuse and prevention of situations where abuse could occur.

The child protection policy essentially aims to ensure that everyone across the organisation is aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children, works in ways that minimises those risks, and is clear about their responsibilities and what to do if any concerns develop regarding the possible abuse of children. It is also intended to ensure that children are not abused or exploited by the adults who are meant to care for or work with them.

This policy refers to the guidelines that the staff and partner organisations of Muskan should follow with respect to the children they work with.



POLICY APPLICABILITY

All Muskan staff and volunteers should satisfy all of the requirements in this policy.

REPORTING

Where appropriate, where there are allegations (from any source) of serious abuse then the contact person, the Director and COO of Muskan should be informed within 24 hours.

A designated staff member should be appointed as a reporting officer and his/her name and contact details should be informed to all staff and volunteers and this should also be displayed at all prominent places including areas where children are involved.

The reporting officer, on receipt of a complaint/allegation (from any source) should initiate inquiry proceedings as per the rules of the organization and in case of serious violations may proceed as per civil law.

POLICY

Muskan is committed to working practice that protects children & vulnerable adults from harm. We aim to provide children with the maximum opportunities to develop their full potential. We want to ensure that children are protected and kept safe from harm when they are with our staff and volunteers.

Staff are central to the process of protecting children. Muskan is committed to ensuring that all staff and volunteers are carefully selected, appropriately trained and adequately supported and supervised.

Working with other involved stakeholders is important to Muskan. Parents have vital roles to play in the protection of children.

GUIDELINES

Child abuse is an issue that Muskan takes seriously. Abuse takes many different forms. No suspicion or allegation of abuse should go unreported. All reported allegations should be investigated in the appropriate manner. If you have any concerns, then you must report them.

Anyone can be an abuser- staff, volunteers, parents, other children, carers and other professionals. If you work with children, you have the duty to be aware of the potential for abuse and a right to question behaviour that you find concerning.

All staff and volunteers working with children should be aware of issues surrounding child abuse, of Muskan's child protection policy and of the process for reporting concerns.

It is important to pay attention to children. Children with multiple disabilities may have limited communication and can give messages about their experiences in a variety of ways. Changes in behaviour may be especially significant and should be observed with care.

RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Muskan Staff, Associates and Visitors must:

1. Never abuse and/or exploit a child or act/behave in any way that places a child at risk of harm.
2. Never develop relationships with children which could in any manner be considered exploitative or abusive.
3. Abide by the principle of avoiding action and behaviour that may constitute poor practise and can be considered abusive.
4. Not employ children below the age of 18 years.
5. Be aware of situations which may present risks and manage these.
6. Report any child abuse and protection concerns they have in accordance with applicable official procedures.

7. Respond to a child who may have been abused or exploited in accordance with applicable local office procedures.
8. Cooperate fully and confidentially in any investigation of concerns and allegations.
9. Contribute to an environment where children are respected and encouraged to discuss their concerns and rights.
10. The specific needs of disabled children mean that a significant amount of physical contact will be necessary in order to meet the needs of the individual. As far as possible this should be with the consent of the child.
11. As far as possible it is important for a female educator to be placed with a female child for activities involving privacy issues such as toileting and more so important with female adolescents
12. Staff and volunteers should not spend excessive amounts of time alone with children. Where privacy is necessary other staff/volunteers should be informed and if practical, doors should be left open. However, the privacy and dignity of the child are also important and should be respected. .
13. Staff and volunteers should never:
 - i. Engage in sexually provocative games.
 - ii. Allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any form.
 - iii. Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
 - iv. Make sexually suggestive statements about or to a child even in fun.
 - v. Do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves.
14. Always ask permission from children (or, in the case of young children, their parent or guardian) before taking images (e.9. photographs, videos) of them. Respect their decision to say no to an image being taken. Ensure that any images taken of children are respectful (For example: children should have adequate clothing that covers up the sexual organs. The images of children in sexually suggestive poses or that in any way impact negatively on their dignity or privacy are not acceptable). Stories and images of children should be based on the child's best interest. Be aware that where concerns exist about the conduct of Staff or Associates in relation to child protection and/or there has been a breach of the Child Protection Policy, this will be investigated under this policy either: by consideration of referral to statutory authorities for criminal investigation under the law of the country; and/or by Muskan in

accordance with disciplinary procedures. This may result in disciplinary sanctions and/or dismissal for Staff. Where an incident is alleged to have occurred, the alleged perpetrator will be prohibited from all contact with the child until the matter is resolved.

15. Staff and volunteers should not use excessive physical forms of punishment or verbal abuse as a means of punishment.
16. Be aware that Muskan will sever relations with any Muskan Associate or visitor who is proven to have committed child abuse.
17. Be aware that, if a legitimate concern about suspected child abuse is raised, which proves to be unfounded on investigation, no action will be taken against the reporter. However, any employee who makes false and malicious accusations will face disciplinary action.
18. Be aware that Muskan will take appropriate legal or other action against Muskan Associates and Visitors who make false and malicious accusations of child abuse.

Muskan staff must:

19. Undergo thorough induction and ongoing training programs to be updated on Muskan policies and practices and be kept abreast of current standards in child protection.
20. Never disclose information that identifies sponsored families or children or make it available to the general public unless that disclosure is in accordance with standard Muskan policies and procedures.
21. Ensure an enabling environment where children, staff and associates feel comfortable to raise and discuss issues and concerns.
22. Ensure absolute accountability exists between staff so potentially abusive behaviour is recognized and corrective and/or penal action taken.
23. Inform children of their rights and build their capacity to identify and address issues and concerns.

Muskan Associates and Visitors must not

24. Disclose information that identifies sponsored families or children and make it available to the general public without explicit consent from Muskan.
25. Muskan will:

- i. Ensure no member of its staff employs children below the age of 18 years old. It will not partner with organisations employing children below the age of 18 years.
 - ii. Ensure all its contracts have clauses stipulating zero tolerance towards any form of and/or exploitation.
 - iii. Undertake to build awareness on and sensitize all its stakeholders and communities it works with on child protection.
 - iv. Work towards ensuring mechanism exists in the community to prevent and report instances of child abuse and/or exploitation and violation of child rights.
26. We are committed to ensuring that our staff and representatives apply high standards towards children within both their professional and private lives. While it does not attempt to influence the value system to which its employees conduct their personal lives, Muskan believes that the latter has some bearing on the culture of the organization. As a result it remains firm and uncompromising on its insistence on its principles being internalized by its employees which guide their conduct in personal lives. Principals among these core values is Muskan's commitment to child safety protection and development. Any unlawful or other conduct by Muskan employees which jeopardize the organizational core values, principles and position during or after business hours will not be permitted.
27. Such principles includes but is not limited to any unlawful activity related to sexual abuse; any other unlawful activity' sexual harassment' physical/verbally abusive behaviour' and public disorderly conduct.
28. Staff and Associates are required to bear in mind the principles of Child Protection Policy and heighten their awareness of how their behaviour may be perceives both at work and outside work.

This policy has been adopted with minor modifications from Plan India’s “Child Protection Policy”. We acknowledge with gratitude, Plan India’s contribution to our efforts towards institution on paper Muskan’s Child Protection Policy. It is due to note here that the spirit of Child Protection and the UNCRC has always guided our actions and approach even when the policy was not inked on paper. Having this now as an approved policy is one of the many tiny but commendable steps in our long journey in building “a world where every child counts a world of children living in dignity”.

TRAINING

Child Protection training is important for all staff working with children. The training should be comprehensive and delivered by trainers with appropriate qualification and experience.

- Staff and volunteers may not work with children unless they have received basic child protection information.
- Any member of staff or volunteer who has extensive unsupervised access to any child at any time must receive full child protection training. People who manage teams of staff/volunteers working with children should receive full child protection training. This should include:
 - Nature of abuse
 - Effects of abuse
 - Information on how to recognize child abuse (especially with deaf-blind children)
 - Muskan code of behaviour
 - Whom to contact in the event of any concerns