

Safeguarding Policy



Foreword

In Malawi, the welfare and protection of children remain a significant concern. Statistics reveal that more than 65 percent of girls and 35 percent of boys experience some form of abuse in their lifetime. Even more alarming is the fact that 41 percent of women report having been subjected to physical or sexual abuse. These figures are not just numbers—they reflect the pain, trauma, and injustice that far too many children and families endure every day.



At Urunji Child-Care Trust, we believe that every child deserves to grow up in a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment, free from harm and exploitation. As an organization dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable children and communities, we recognize our responsibility to uphold the highest standards of child safeguarding. This is not only a moral obligation but a fundamental requirement for anyone who interacts with or serves children through our programs.

The *Urunji Child Safeguarding Policy* outlined in this document serves as a comprehensive guide for all staff, volunteers, trustees, interns, partners, and vendors associated with Urunji Child-Care Trust. It defines the principles, expectations, and procedures designed to prevent abuse, respond effectively to concerns, and promote a culture of vigilance and accountability. Safeguarding is not the responsibility of a few individuals—it is a collective duty that requires awareness, training, and a commitment to act in the best interests of every child.

Compliance with this policy is mandatory. All personnel must read and understand its contents and consistently apply its provisions in their daily roles and interactions. We are also committed to creating an open and transparent environment where concerns about child welfare can be raised without fear of retaliation. Reporting suspected or actual abuse is not only encouraged—it is expected.

We acknowledge that policies can always be improved. Therefore, we welcome feedback and suggestions from our stakeholders to strengthen this policy and ensure it remains responsive to the evolving needs of the children we serve. Together, let us remain steadfast in our dedication to safeguarding children and upholding their right to protection, dignity, and hope.

With unwavering commitment,

Ian C Maliseni
Executive Director

Pillar I



PILLAR 1:
Setting and
implementing
monitoring standards



PILLAR 2:
Creating and
maintaining safe
environments



PILLAR 3:
Safe recruitment
of personnel



PILLAR 4:
Zero tolerance to
abuse

SETTING AND IMPLEMENTING MONITORING STANDARDS

Urunji Child Care Trust recognises its responsibility to protect and promote the environment our children live in within the legal framework of Malawian and international law.

We will ensure that the safeguarding policy and related tools are kept up to date at all times.

All new staff and volunteers are oriented on our safeguarding policy and will provide recurrent training to existing staff and volunteers every biannually.

A standard is a mandatory procedure that must be followed at any given time.

A recommended practice is any specification for physical characteristics, configuration, material, performance, personnel or procedure, the uniform application of which is recognized as desirable in the interest of safety, regularity or efficiency of Urunji operations.

BEST PRACTICES

- There shall be a safeguarding advisory committee which shall handle issues with utmost urgency.
- Documents and forms regarding safeguarding shall be readily available to all staff and downloadable from the Urunji website.
- Video footage, images testimonies or identities of victims shall as much as possible be kept confidential (away from the public) to protect them from stigma as well as to prevent interference with evidence.

Pillar II



PILLAR 1:
Setting and
implementing
monitoring standards



PILLAR 2:
Creating and
maintaining safe
environments



PILLAR 3:
Safe recruitment
of personnel



PILLAR 4:
Zero tolerance to
abuse

CREATING AND MAINTAINING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

All children and vulnerable persons must be accompanied by a competent adult when engaging with our staff, volunteers or vendors.

All counselling facilities shall have glasses that are transparent to ensure that a supervisor can see the counselling in session.

No counselling session shall take place in the house of a staff member and in the absence of a third person.

Adults shall not share the same dormitories, toilets or bathrooms with children unless the children need supervision and there is no risk of exposing the adult's nakedness to children.

BEST PRACTICES

- Children must be given the opportunity to express themselves without fear of punishment of being judged.
- Children must receive reproductive health education based on their age and in an environment that prevents abuse.

Pillar III



PILLAR 1:
Setting and
implementing
monitoring standards



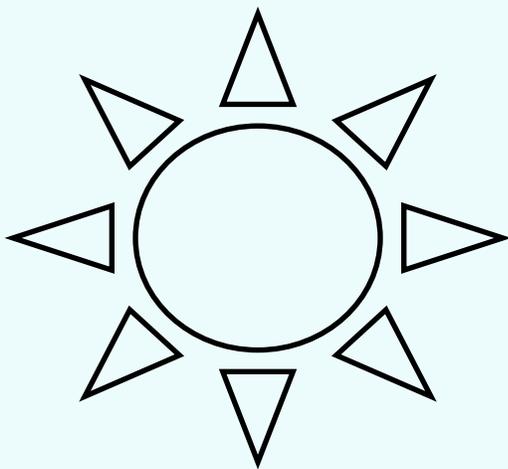
PILLAR 2:
Creating and
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environments



PILLAR 3:
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of personnel



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abuse



SAFE RECRUITMENT OF PERSONNEL

Urunji shall always maintain an open and transparent recruitment process to ensure equal opportunities for all. As an absolute minimum, the following standards should be followed at Urunji Child-Care Trust:

- All prospective workers (paid and unpaid) should provide details of their previous employment and the names of at least two professional referees who are not related;
- All prospective workers (paid and unpaid) should have police disclosure before they start employment with Urunji Child-Care Trust – anyone who refuses to do so should not be employed;
- All prospective workers (paid and unpaid) should be interviewed to establish previous experience of working in an environment where there is contact with children and perceptions of acceptable behaviour;
- Nobody should start work before references have been received. Referees should be reminded that references should not misrepresent the candidate or omit to say things that might be relevant to their employment;
- All appointments to work with children should be subject to an agreed probationary period;
- New members of staff should be clear about their responsibilities and wherever possible, work to an agreed job description.

Pillar IV



PILLAR 1:
Setting and
implementing
monitoring standards



PILLAR 2:
Creating and
maintaining safe
environments



PILLAR 3:
Safe recruitment
of personnel



PILLAR 4:
Zero tolerance to
abuse

ZERO TOLERANCE FOR ABUSE

Urunji shall maintain a zero-tolerance policy on abuse of any form. This includes child labour, depriving a child of education, physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

We will promptly and deliberately respond to any allegations of abuse, no matter how small. We shall provide legal aid, shelter, counselling and any support needed to any victim of abuse in our programme.

We shall endeavour to put measures that ensure the physically challenged are given a chance in our society and those with ailments are given the care they need.

- All staff are responsible for children while on the Urunji premises and must make sure that health and safety guidelines are adhered to;
- All staff responsible for children on the Urunji premises must have read, and signed to say that they have read, these guidelines;
- All staff working with children should receive regular supervision from a more experienced staff member;

BEST PRACTICES

- All staff must undergo police clearance vetting before engagement, and that frontline staff must undergo recurrent training every 6 months.
- Under no circumstances should visitors be allowed to wander around the premises unaccompanied when children and young people are present.
- Staff shall not be permitted to engage in sexual relationships with any beneficiary even if they are an adult.
- Staff shall make ethical disclosures if any of the beneficiaries is their relative or spouse before they can receive any support from Urunji.



To ensure zero tolerance for abuse, Urunji shall ensure that:

- All staff should be encouraged to undertake some basic child protection training;
- Staff should always be publicly open when working with children - avoid situations where you and an individual child are completely unobserved and avoid spending a lot of time with children away from others;
- Staff should not encourage over-enthusiastic embraces or kisses;
- Staff should not take children to their home if they will be alone with them;
- Staff should not engage in rough physical games with children;
- Staff should *not* help a child with things of a personal nature (e.g. toileting) if that child can do it for themselves;
- Staff must display high standards of personal behaviour;
- Staff should never overtly criticise children or use sarcasm;
- All people are equal and should be treated with utmost respect. Those with exceptional and special needs need to be cherished, welcomed and loved in our society.
- Women and men both have strengths and we complement each other: No person in UCCT shall be treated either more favourably or unfavourably because of their gender.
- People with the same qualifications and experience should have the same benefits if they are doing similar work. No person shall be given more benefits than the other because of their closeness to the team leader or anything.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS

All Urunji Child Care Trust employees, volunteers and board members have a responsibility to the children in their care. In the event that a child makes an allegation or disclosure of abuse against an adult or another child or young person, it is important that you:

- Stay calm;
- Listen to them and/or closely observe their presentation and behaviour;
- Let them know that you take what they are saying seriously;
- Do **not** attempt to interview them yourself – keep any questions to a minimum and make sure questions are open ended (i.e., not questions with yes or no answers);
- Keep a written or audio record of everything regarding what the child has said to you and how they have behaved;
- Let them know that you will need to tell someone else in order to help them;
- **Do not promise to keep what they tell you secret.**

All people in positions of authority who suspect that a child is being abused report their concerns to the police. This includes, but is not limited to; educators, volunteers, religious leaders, traditional leaders, police officers, doctors and nurses.

In the event that a child discloses information that you are obliged to report to authorities:

- Make a written record of the incident or events including the child's full name and address as well as factual details of concern (bruising, what the child said, details of alleged abuser)
- Inform the most senior member of management as soon as possible (unless the allegations are against them) that a child has made allegations of abuse. A report should be made immediately to the police who may then involve other agencies such as social welfare and child protection agencies.
- Ensure that you report to more than one police officer to ensure that there will always be someone handling the case when the other officer is off-duty.



VIGILANCE IS KEY...

Organisations that work or come into contact with children need to be aware of the possibility that allegations of abuse will be made against members of their staff. Urunji is no exception.

Every team leader shall conduct a risk assessment quarterly and to put in place measures aimed at mitigating incidences of child abuse.



ALLEGATIONS MADE AGAINST STAFF OR VOLUNTEERS

Allegations will usually be that some kind of abuse has taken place. They can be made by children and they can be made by other concerned adults. Allegations can be made for a variety of reasons. Some of the most common are:

- Abuse has actually taken place
- Something happens to a child that reminds them of an event that happened in the past – the child is unable to recognise that the situation and the people are different
- Children can misinterpret your language or your actions because they are reminded of something else
- Some children know how powerful an allegation can be; if they are angry with you about something they can make an allegation as a way of hitting out
- An allegation can be a way of seeking attention

All allegations should immediately be brought to the notice of the most senior member of the management team. In cases where the allegation is made against this person, the complainant should approach another board member or take the following action him or herself:

- Make sure that the child in question is safe and away from the alleged abuser
- Irrespective of any investigation by social workers or the police, you should follow the appropriate disciplinary procedure; common practice is for the alleged abuser to be suspended from work until the outcome of any investigation is clear
- Consider whether the person has access to children anywhere else and whether those organizations or groups need to be informed
- Act upon the decisions made in any management meeting
- All incidents should be investigated internally after any external investigation has finished in order to review organisational practice and to put in place any additional measures to prevent a similar thing happening again.
- A child who has been sexually abused must not take a shower or clean up to preserve evidence.

Recognizing signs of abuse

It can often be difficult to recognise abuse. The signs listed in these guidelines are only indicators and many can have reasonable explanations. Children may behave strangely or seem unhappy for many reasons, as they move through the stages of childhood or their families experience changes. It is, however, important to know what could indicate that abuse is taking place and to be alert to the need to consult further.

Someone can abuse a child by actively inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Abuse can take place within a family, in an institutional or community setting. Abuse can be carried out by someone known to a child or by a complete stranger.

If you are worried about a child it is important that you keep a written record of any physical or behavioural signs and symptoms. In this way you can monitor whether or not a pattern emerges and provide evidence to any investigation if required.

1. Physical abuse

Physical abuse is any act which may result in injury to or death of a child. It can involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, and suffocating. Symptoms that indicate physical abuse include:

- Bruising in or around the mouth, on the back, buttocks or rectal area
- Finger mark bruising or grasp marks on the limbs or chest of a small child
- Bites
- Burn and scald marks; small round burns that could be caused by a cigarette
- Fractures to arms, legs or ribs in a small child
- Large numbers of scars of different sizes or ages

Discipline for children shall not include beating, deprivation of food or any other method that constitutes abuse, even though it is culturally acceptable!

2. Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse can be defined as any act, or failure to act, by a parent, guardian, caregiver, young person or adult working with or in contact with a child which results in the impaired psychological, emotional functioning or development of a child.

Symptoms that indicate emotional abuse include:

- Excessively clingy or attention-seeking behaviour
- Very low self esteem or excessive self-criticism
- Excessively withdrawn behaviour or fearfulness
- Despondency
- Lack of appropriate boundaries with strangers; too eager to please
- Eating disorders

3. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is any act which results in the exploitation of a child, whether with their consent or not, for the purpose of sexual or erotic gratification. This may be by adults or other young persons who are intellectually, emotionally, physically or sexually more mature than the child victim. Types of sexual abuse include, but are not limited to, incest, rape, exhibition, sodomy, child prostitution, paedophilia or pornography.

Symptoms of sexual abuse include:

- Allegations or disclosure
- Genital soreness, injuries or discomfort
- Sexually transmitted diseases; urinary infections
- Excessive preoccupation with sexual matters; inappropriately sexualised play, words or drawing
- A child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults
- Repeated sleep disturbances through nightmares and/or bed wetting

Older children and young people may additionally exhibit:

- Depression
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Eating disorders; obsessive behaviours
- Self mutilation; suicide attempts
- School/peer/relationship problems

DECLARATION BY PERSONNEL

I,
..... do solemnly declare that I have read and understood the contents of Urunji Child-Care Trust's Equal Opportunities, Environment Protection, Child Protection and Sexual Harassment Policy and agree to abide by them including local and international legislation pertaining to the same.

Signed by me:

Date:

In the presence of:

Name:

Signature:

Useful Contacts

If you are concerned for the safety of a child, please contact one of the following organisations.

Urunji Child-Care Trust

Phone: +265 997 400 948

Website link: <https://urunjichildcare.org/report-misconduct>

In an emergency, you can contact

Malawi Police Emergency 997 or 990

No matter what position a person holds in society, PLEASE report all cases and suspected cases of abuse.

