



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



DFAT CHILD PROTECTION GUIDANCE NOTE RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING

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DFAT CHILD PROTECTION GUIDANCE NOTE

CHILD PROTECTION IN RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING

PURPOSE

This Guidance Note offers guidance on how to ensure an organisation recruits and engages with the safest and most suitable staff, volunteers and partners to work with or have contact with children. These people always act in the best interests of children, protect children from all forms of abuse and share an organisation's values. Organisations with weak child-safe recruitment and screening procedures greatly increase the risk of engaging someone who may pose an unacceptable risk of harm (physical, sexual or emotional) to children.

BACKGROUND

Unfortunately, some staff and volunteers do harm children, whether deliberately or through a lack of understanding of how to interact safely with children. Children trust and depend on adults, but some people in positions of trust and authority will exploit this to harm children. Communities and parents trust development organisations, but some people will exploit this to gain access to children and communities.

By **promoting** your child-safe recruitment and screening procedures, you can attract the best people to work with children, and deter those (some of whom may be child sex offenders) who seek to join your organisation because they want to harm children.

By **implementing** child-safe recruitment and screening procedures, an organisation can create and maintain a child-safe environment, to keep all children safe in the delivery of programs and organisational activities.

Children rarely speak up when they feel unsafe or are being harmed, especially within organisational or institutional settings. While it is important to encourage children to speak up, an organisation cannot rely on children to let an organisation know if a staff member, volunteer or consultant is harming them or makes them feel unsafe. It is not the child's responsibility to disclose such information. The organisation must take preventative steps to reduce the risk of engaging a person who may be unsafe or unsuitable to work with, or be in contact with, children.

We highly recommended that organisations use a number of different recruitment and screening measures to assess the safety and suitability of a person to work with children. Relying only on a criminal record check is not enough information to assess that risk.

It is important to be aware that as a child-safe organisation, assessing the safety of staff, volunteers and partners does not stop after recruitment. Warning signs that a person is not safe or suitable to work with or be in contact with children may be revealed after recruitment. Ongoing performance review, supervision, and responding to any concerns in a person's behaviour or actions (including a possible breach of an organisation's code of conduct) are vital to keeping children safe.

Please read this guidance note in conjunction with:

- DFAT's Child Protection Policy (<http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/child-protection-policy.aspx>)
- DFAT's Establishing Child Protection Risk Context Guidance Note (<http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/child-protection-risk-assessment-guidance.pdf>).

RISK IN RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING

This table outlines some common child protection risks during recruitment and screening of staff and volunteers. You'll find practical information and recommended procedures for organisations to strengthen their approach to child safe-recruitment and screening. These apply to new and existing staff and volunteers, and others representing an organisation (such as consultants and contractors).

Risk

1. Employing or engaging a person who exploits or abuses a child

- Child-safe recruitment and screening policies and procedures are inadequate.
- Recruitment and screening processes are not adequate; they do not follow policies.
- Criminal record checks are ineffectual or non-existent, or the organisation relies solely on criminal record checks.
- Consultants, contractors and volunteers are not covered by the organisation's child protection policy.
- Policies and procedures are not followed during an emergency.

2. Employing or engaging a person who is not safe or suitable to work with or be in contact with children, leading to harm to a child or an undesired outcome to program

- The person lacks experience in working with vulnerable children in complex situations.
- The person does not have the right experience, attitude, motivations or values to be working with children.

3. Having no mechanism to terminate the employment of a person who is found to pose a risk to children

MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Implement policies and procedures

- Comply with, or build on, the compliance standards within DFAT's Child Protection Policy.
- Develop recruitment and screening procedures that must be adhered to for all staff, volunteers, consultants and contractors.

Analyse the job role to decide upon the level of contact with children

- Understand:
 - how much contact with children the job will involve
 - whether the candidate will be working directly with children
 - whether the nature of the job will place them in contact with children, including children in the community or contact via phone, letter, email, and social media.

- If the job is mainly office based, will the job sometimes involve travel to other remote or overseas offices or in small communities? Will this mean they have contact with children?
- Will the job involve work with children with disabilities or particularly vulnerable children in complex situations? What particular skills and experience are required for this role?
- Will the job involve working in an unsupervised environment, or require overnight care of children?
- See *DFAT Establishing Child Protection Risk Context Guidance Note* to help determine the level of contact with children.

Develop clear job descriptions

- Develop clear job descriptions for all jobs. Make sure they include an organisation's child-safe message and expectations under the organisation's child protection policy and code of conduct.
- Make sure that:
 - the selection criteria outline the relevant experience needed if the job involves working with children
 - the job description informs candidates of the child-safe recruitment screening practices that will apply to positions that require contact with children and working with children.

Manage advertising and promotional activities

- Communicate a clear message that the organisation is a child-safe organisation. Use posters, websites, brochures, word of mouth or verbally at community, network or government meetings to spread the message.
- Include child-safe messages when advertising for both paid and voluntary jobs.

Example child-safe messages:

- X is a child-safe organisation.
- The safety and wellbeing of children is a priority of our organisation.
- X provides a child-safe environment in all our programs and our activities.
- We are committed to providing a safe place for all children to learn and have fun.
- We have strong recruitment procedures to make sure the safest and most suitable people work with the children in our programs.
- We provide our staff and volunteers with ongoing supervision and support in their work with children.

Develop appropriate application form

- Include your child-safe message, child protection policy and code of conduct when sending out application forms to candidates.
- Include a couple of child-safe interview questions on the application form (see Interviewing section for examples).
- Include a statement that:
 - lets applicants know that criminal record checks will be undertaken for successful applicants
 - includes details that the criminal record checks cover all countries of citizenship and for each country in which the individual has lived for 12 months or longer over the past five years (or more)
 - states that the requirement for criminal record checks allows people to self-select out of the process.

Manage the interviewing process

- Include child-safe interview questions for all jobs working with children (including existing staff within the organisation who are applying internally, as well as staff and consultants recommended by other organisations).
- Always try to have more than one person conduct interviews.
- Consider including a young person on the interview panel for roles working directly with children.
- Discuss any concerns raised during the interview with others on the panel and follow up with referees.
- Avoid phone and Skype interviews for roles involving direct and ongoing work with children. A face-to-face interview provides a better opportunity to:
 - get to know someone's nature
 - pick up on any red flags or concerns
 - observe their body language, eye contact, interaction with the interviewers, and any hesitations or signs of being uncomfortable with the questions asked.
- Send your child protection policy and code of conduct to candidates before the interview.
- Ask questions that provide you with an insight into a person's attitudes towards children, their values, beliefs and motivations (behaviour-based questions).
- Ask scenario-based questions to look at past behaviours and responses to certain situations (see below for more details).

Example child safe behaviour-based interview questions:

- Have you worked/volunteered with children in a similar position before? What did you like about it? What did you find difficult?
- What strengths in working with children do you bring from your community, family and/or cultural background?
- How have you handled children who did not want to participate in an activity?
- What qualities have you observed in others that you have admired, particularly in regard to their work with or care of children?
- How do you feel about being supervised?
- What motivates you to work with this organisation, in this particular program?
- Please provide me with three examples of how to work safely with children.
- What do you think makes a good community leader or role model for children and young people?
- How would you handle children who were not listening to your instructions?
- How would the children or young people you have worked with previously describe you?
- How would you create a child-safe and friendly space for an activity for young children/ older children/ children with a disability?
- What exists locally that you believe helps protect children from harm in this community?
- What is your understanding of child protection?
- X is a child-safe organisation. What do you think that means?
- We sent you a copy of our code of conduct before this interview. What do you think of the code?
- What boundaries are important when working with children and young people?
- If you were concerned about the actions or behaviour of a co-worker towards children, how would you respond?
- How would you involve children in their own protection as part of our programs?
- How would you involve children's participation and voice in our programs?

Undertake criminal record checks

- Complete a criminal record check before engagement for all candidates working with or in contact with children (including existing staff within the organisation who are applying internally).
- Ensure the criminal record checks cover all countries of citizenship and for each country in which the individual has lived for 12 months or longer over the past five years (or more).
- If a reliable criminal record check cannot be obtained from a particular country, obtain a statutory declaration or local legal equivalent that:
 - outlines efforts made to obtain a foreign police check
 - discloses any charges and spent convictions related to child abuse and exploitation.
- This should not cover all countries, only those where a criminal record check could not be undertaken. Otherwise, all other criminal record checks are to be undertaken.
- Consider how often criminal record checks should be re-assessed in an organisation. Checks are only a 'point in time' check and regular review may be advantageous (suggested every 2 years).
- A candidate poses an unacceptable risk to children and should not be employed or engaged if their criminal record check includes convictions or sentences for:
 - sexual offences against a child or an adult
 - violent offences against a child or an adult
 - any child abuse offence
 - stalking of a child
 - serious drug offences (trafficking a drug or supply of a drug of dependence to a child)
 - family and domestic violence offences.
- If the candidate's criminal record check includes driving offences, review this against the job description to determine whether the candidate will be required to transport children.
- If the candidate's criminal record check includes other offences or sentences, undertake a risk assessment to decide whether the candidate poses an unacceptable risk to children.

Complete a Working with Children Check (WWCC)

- A WWCC must be provided by candidates (Australia, UK and NZ) working directly with children, having access to child-sensitive data, or having ongoing contact with children by letter, email, phone or social media.
- Information on Australian state and territory WWCCs can be found at:
<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/pre-employment-screening-working-children-checks-and-police-checks>
- An organisation should be aware that WWCCs differ in their criteria and assessment processes between the Australian states and territories. Organisations should familiarise themselves how each state and territory conducts these checks. This will help in understanding its limitations, and the additional risks not associated with a standard criminal record check.

Include other checks

- Assess the role and undertake a qualification and identity check where the role requires specific skills, knowledge, qualifications or service eligibility requirements.

Verbal Referee Checks are preferable. Written referee reports can be forged and do not allow for deeper questioning if concerns are raised.

- Conduct and document at least two verbal referee checks for all candidates working with or in contact with children. This way, an organisation will be able to ask referees to expand more on their answers and notice any hesitations in responses.
- An organisation can obtain referees from:
 - former or current employers
 - places where a person has volunteered
 - community and church leaders, chiefs, sports coaches
 - others who have knowledge of the candidate's suitability to work with or be in contact with children.
- Always verify the identity of referees and if possible call them at their workplace or organisation.
- If you are not satisfied with the responses provided by referees, ask the candidate to nominate additional referees.

Example referee questions:

- The role involves (type of work or contact with children). Can you tell me about the candidate's work with children? Have you directly observed this work?
- Do you have any concerns about the candidate's work with children or with vulnerable children? If so, please explain.
- The candidate will be working in a remote location with little supervision. Do you have any concerns in this regard?

Produce a contract or agreement

- Employment contracts and human resources policies and procedures must contain provisions for disciplinary sanctions such as:
 - dismissal
 - suspension with or without pay pending outcomes of an investigation
 - suspension or transfer to other duties for any employee who is under investigation for breaching the child protection policy and/or code of conduct.

Example wording in employment contracts:

- X has the right to dismiss you or transfer you if you breach our child protection policy and/or code of conduct.

Require sign-in for core organisational documents

- Have new employees, volunteers and consultants sign onto your child protection policy and code of conduct and other human resource policies and procedures at the commencement of their employment or engagement.

Manage induction and mentoring processes

- Consider the use of probationary periods of employment to assess safety and suitability.
- Assign a mentor for a period of time to provide support, guidance and supervision on working safely with children within the organisation.
- All staff, volunteers and consultants should be provided with an induction on the child protection policy and code of conduct, and how they report any concerns they have for the safety or wellbeing of a child.
- Ensure all staff, volunteers and consultants receive training on the child protection policy and standards.

Manage supervision and performance reviews

- As a rule, organisations should supervise staff when working with children. If supervision cannot be provided, staff should regularly report to a supervisor, and raise any concerns they have about their work with children.
- Staff should at all times supervise volunteers working with children.
- Working safely with children and compliance with the child protection policy and code of conduct should be part of ongoing performance review indicators and discussion.
- Staff or volunteers working in remote locations should be provided with ongoing support and supervision through regular phone or Skype calls, and face-to-face meetings should be provided at agreed intervals.

Pre-screen volunteers

- Pre-screen volunteers who may be required to work with or be in contact with children, at short notice such as in an emergency. Pre-screening procedures include:
 - criminal record checks
 - qualification checks
 - Working with Children Checks
 - interviewing and reference checks (see above for more details).
- Only volunteers who have undergone child-safe recruitment and screening procedures can be engaged to work with or be in contact with children.
- Organisations are not to engage people who 'turn up' and offer to volunteer, or who have not gone through these processes.

Screen consultants and contractors

- Always follow child-safe recruitment and screening procedures for consultants and contractors. Never engage on word of mouth or recommendation alone.
- Provide training on organisation's child protection policy and code of conduct so they are aware of your objectives and their responsibilities.

Screen partner organisations

- Check partner organisations' existing recruitment and screening procedures to determine whether they align with your organisation's standards. Include agreed child-safe recruitment and screening procedures as part of partner agreements or terms of reference and MoUs.

Communicate with the local community

- Have new employees, volunteers and consultants sign onto your child protection policy and code of conduct and other human resource policies and procedures at the commencement of their employment or engagement.
- Many organisations operate in remote or disadvantaged communities. Children from these communities may be more vulnerable because of poverty or lack of child protection and law enforcement systems.
- Where possible, and especially in remote communities, have supervising staff ask the program beneficiaries, community members and leaders for feedback on the staff member or volunteer working in the community, and whether they have any concerns about their behaviour or actions, particularly in relation to children.

Given an organisation's programs and context, it may be necessary to adapt the procedure to be more relevant and appropriate to the organisation and the people that an organisation wants to employ. These procedures will be most effective when put into practice in a way that is meaningful and easy to use by an organisation.