

# Help a Child Code of Conduct

The Help a Child Code of Conduct constitutes annex 1 of the Help a Child Integrity Policy and covers the following components:

- Expected behavior and prohibited misconduct, which includes rules around e.g. the use of alcohol, drugs and weapons as well as dos and don'ts around social media.
- Expected behavior and prohibited misconduct regarding vulnerable groups.
- Minimum standards for the protection of all vulnerable groups against sexual abuse and exploitation.
- An explanation on the duty to report and the use of reporting mechanisms.
- Consequences of a breach of the Help a Child Code of Conduct
- Procedures on the review of the Help a Child Code of Conduct

## 1. Expected behavior and prohibited misconduct

This section sets out general categories of expected behavior and specifies prohibited acts.

### 1.1 *Expected behavior and prohibited misconduct - general*

**We treat everybody equally and with dignity:**

- ✓ Our representatives will not discriminate based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, political convictions, religion, or for any other reason, in any way. Common forms of discrimination may include making employment or programming decisions based on family status, race, gender, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, language, marital status, birth, sexual orientation, age, disability or political conviction.
- ✓ Our representatives stay away from behavior and actions that show a lack of respect for the dignity of others, e.g. bullying, verbal or physical harassment<sup>1</sup>, exploitation, intimidation and victimization.

**We are well-clothed and show respect for religious and cultural sensitive issues.** Our representatives:

- ✓ maintain a representative and well-groomed appearance.
- ✓ will treat religious and cultural sensitive issues with respect and tact.
- ✓ will be dressed representative, fitting the cultural setting, which means at least keeping the norms and codes set by our local office<sup>2</sup>.
- ✓ will not engage into situations that our local office<sup>3</sup> does not consider fitting.

**We avoid conflict of interest.** Our representatives:

- ✓ act in full compliance with all applicable laws and observe the highest standards of honesty and integrity by not abusing their position for personal gain. This means that Help a Child condemns all forms of fraud, bribery, corruption and theft. Help a Child

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<sup>1</sup> Harassment is any act or conduct including spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material, if the action or conduct is unwelcome to the recipient and could reasonably be regarded as offensive, humiliating or intimidating.

<sup>2</sup> In case the country has no Help a Child office, the International office determines this norm/code on the basis of consultations with partner organizations. The norm will be shared with travelers during their travel briefing.

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

representatives should not make any contributions to political organizations or individuals as means of obtaining an advantage. Only when our representative is able to explain that his/her behavior was aimed at protecting him/herself or others in life-threatening danger by, for example, refusing to bribe, Help a Child is able to tolerate this behavior. Such decision needs to be reported as soon as possible, preferable before it is carried out.

- ✓ should conduct themselves in a manner that avoids suspicion of such behavior.
- ✓ should avoid situations in which their personal interest may conflict, or appear to conflict, with the interests of Help a Child or its project participants.
- ✓ are committed to implement and enforce effective systems to counter bribery and corruption.

**We use the property of Help a Child with care:**

- ✓ Our representatives will handle the property of Help a Child, such as mobile phones, computers, laptops, tablets, presentation equipment and printers, with care and attention. This also means that such equipment cannot be left unattended in a vehicle. After work, laptops and tablets are taken home or stored in a cabinet. The users of equipment and keys that are property of Help a Child have to sign a declaration.

**We use alcohol properly:**

- ✓ On duty and/or whilst on Help a Child premises our representatives will not be under the influence of alcohol except for use of alcoholic beverages served and consumed in connection with an authorized event to the extent such use does not impair your job performance and ability to properly represent our organization, does not place yourself and/or others at health and safety risks, and is cultural fitting.
- ✓ You should make sure that if you drink any alcohol when you are not working, it will not affect your performance when being on duty again and damage the reputation of Help a Child. For example, if you have alcohol on your breath when you need to attend meetings with people from outside Help a Child.
- ✓ Apart from using alcohol oneself, our representatives are only allowed to be in the possession of alcohol - e.g. a bottle of wine to be given away as present - if the possession of alcohol fits the cultural setting of the country.

**We stay away from drugs:**

- ✓ On duty and/or whilst on Help a Child premises our representatives will not be under the influence of drugs not medically prescribed.
- ✓ Our representatives will also not be in the possession of drugs not medically prescribed.

**We stay away from use of fire arms:**

- ✓ Our representatives do not use or have in their possession fire arms at any time.

**We use internet (incl. email) properly and do not use illegal software.** Our representatives:

- ✓ will not visit pornographic, racist, discriminating, or abusive internet sites and/or chat rooms or download offensive material or visit sites of which the content is against the law, unethical or threatening.
- ✓ are not permitted to install software from Help a Child illegally on their own computer or computers of third parties.
- ✓ will handle business email messages correctly regardless of whether they are sent from the office, home or another place: emails should not be offensive or controversial, not contain information too sensitive for this medium and should be used for business only.

**We behave properly when it comes to personal use of social media:** our representatives will not harm Help a Child's efforts to position itself as a professional organization off as well as online. Representatives should adhere to the following rules to protect the organization and all its representatives against negative consequences of social media behavior.

- ✓ Respect privacy. Do not place pictures or texts with a reference to a person without his/her consent (or parent consent) and keep (full) names and addresses confidential.
- ✓ When making public statements - whether or not on personal title - consider critically whether these messages are in line with the identity and values of Help a Child.
- ✓ Use a disclaimer when expressing a personal opinion about work-related topics.
- ✓ Be transparent when discussing work-related information and experiences and at the same time keep internal agreements on confidentiality and safety. Add value and refrain from comments on the work of colleagues within this or other organizations.
- ✓ Feel free to respond to critical comments of others on Help a Child or its work, but stay with the facts and react in a respectful way.<sup>4</sup>
- ✓ Be open about a mistake. Correct it visibly and, if needed, explain what went wrong.
- ✓ When receiving a message from Help a Child to remove a picture or message about our work, then the organization expects our representatives to do this as soon as possible.
- ✓ Do not discuss sensitive information or details on your residence if this could lead to security issues for yourself or others. Do not give burglars a chance and do not tell them when you are traveling or when a certain place is unmanned.

## 1.2 *Expected behavior and prohibited misconduct - vulnerable groups*

**We protect vulnerable groups:** our representatives will do their utmost best to protect all vulnerable groups against harassment, exploitation, and sexual abuse or threat of abuse. We stay away from and strongly reject any abuse of power:

- ✓ Any form of violence including, but not limited to: bullying, verbal, physical or sexual harassment<sup>5</sup>, rape, exploitation, intimidation and victimization;
- ✓ Behavior that shows a lack of respect for the dignity of others including breaching of confidentiality;
- ✓ Behaving in a manner which leads to, or could potentially lead to health or security problems for the person themselves or for other people;
- ✓ Exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading, compromising or exploitative behavior.
- ✓ Withholding goods that are due to Help a Child's program participants in order to obtain gifts, payment or sex - including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading, compromising or exploitative behavior - from program participants.

Being a child-focused organization we consider it especially important to safeguard the well-being of children. The remainder of section 1.2 sets out general categories of expected behavior and specifies prohibited acts regarding child safeguarding.

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<sup>4</sup> In many cases it is wise to respond via the organization's own social media channels, so always inform Help a Child's Communication Team when reading messages about the organization on social media.

<sup>5</sup> Sexual harassment is defined as any: act of physical intimacy; request for sexual favors; other act or conduct including spoken words, gestures, or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material that is unwelcome and could reasonably be regarded as sexually offensive, humiliating or intimidating.

**We uphold a safe and open environment for children.** Our representatives:

- ✓ are committed to creating a culture of openness and mutual accountability at workplaces to enable all child protection issues to be raised and discussed.
- ✓ contribute to creating and/or uphold an environment where children are listened to and respected as individuals and what is safe, positive and encouraging to them.

**We pay special attention to the needs of children and our behavior towards children:** We treat all children with respect and we:

- ✓ Take notice of their reactions to our tone of voice and manner.
- ✓ Ensure when making images of children (photos, video etc.) that they are respectful, that the children are adequately clothed and that sexually suggestive poses are avoided.
- ✓ Follow the “two-adult” rule, wherein two or more adults supervise all activities where minors or children are involved and are present at all times.

**We refrain from any behavior that might have a negative impact on the well-being of children:** We acknowledge that our behavior might have (unintended) negative impact on the well-being for children. Therefore we remain from potential harmful behavior. This includes, but is not limited to:

- ✓ Hold, fondle, kiss, cuddle or touch children or other vulnerable persons including care-givers in inappropriate and/or culturally insensitive way.
- ✓ Engage in activities involving close body contact with children or vulnerable persons beyond the professional requirement.
- ✓ Spend time alone with a child, away from others in a secluded area.
- ✓ Use language, make suggestions or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
- ✓ Make sexually suggestive comments or actions to a child, even as a joke.
- ✓ Hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children or vulnerable persons. All disciplinary measures are non-violent and do not humiliate.
- ✓ Act in a way intended to shame, humiliate or belittle children or other vulnerable persons, or otherwise perpetuate any form of emotional abuse.
- ✓ Discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favors particular children or other vulnerable persons to the exclusion of others.
- ✓ Develop relationships with children or other vulnerable persons that could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- ✓ Condone, or participate in behavior with children or other vulnerable persons that is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- ✓ Actively or passively engage children in child labor activities, nor will we condone this in our direct environment.
- ✓ Conduct or be part of harmful traditional practices, spiritual or ritualistic abuse.

**We refrain from misusing our power/position:** We refrain from any form of harassment, discrimination, physical or verbal abuse, intimidation or favoritism. We will never abuse the power and influence that we have by virtue of our position over the lives and well-being of any child, or any other vulnerable person.

### 1.3 Minimum standards for the protection of all vulnerable groups against sexual abuse and exploitation

We acknowledge that sexual abuse and exploitation is a serious breach of our Code of Conduct. We feel a particular duty of care towards vulnerable groups like women and children. Therefore, any proven instances of any forms of harassment or sexual threat or abuse will result in appropriate disciplinary action being taken, up to and including dismissal. Furthermore, we agree with the following principles to prevent any form of sexual abuse and exploitation from happening:

- ✓ Sexual exploitation and abuse by our representatives constitutes acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for contract termination.
- ✓ Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief of the age of a child is not a defense.
- ✓ Exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behavior is prohibited; this includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
- ✓ Sexual relationships between our representatives and target community members is forbidden since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
- ✓ Where a representative of Help a Child develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual or exploitation abuse by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, he/she must report such concern via the established reporting mechanism<sup>6</sup>.
- ✓ Our representatives are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of this Code of Conduct. Managers at all levels have a particular responsibility to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.

## 2. Duty to Report and Reporting Mechanism

### 2.1 Duty to Report

It is the duty of all Help a Child representatives who become aware of any breaches of the Help a Child Code of Conduct to report this immediately to a line manager or a relevant integrity focal person, either through the established reporting mechanism or, if not appropriate, to another senior member of staff.

Management must ensure that all information about breaches of this Code is handled with the utmost discretion. Any concerns or suspicions about a suspected incident of exploitation, harassment or bullying of program participants or colleagues, whether major or minor, should always be discussed with an integrity focal person, line manager or other senior member of staff.

Failure to report concerns of (sexual) abuse and exploitation will constitute misconduct and be considered grounds for disciplinary measures. No action will be taken against a person reporting concerns in good faith. Any of our representatives purposely making false accusations on any action by another representative of Help a Child, which is in breach of the Code of Conduct, will be subject to disciplinary action at the discretion of the employer.

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<sup>6</sup> See annex 4 of the Integrity Policy.

## 2.2 Reporting Mechanism

Breaches or any suspicion of a possible breach to this Code of Conduct should be reported using the Help a Child complaints procedure<sup>7</sup>. The suspected breach will be investigated conform the same complaints procedure.

## 3. Consequence of Breach of Code of the Code of Conduct

Help a Child recognizes the pressure and stress working in relief projects and fragile environments and acknowledges the organizational responsibility when it comes to staff care. Therefore, it supports staff with the staff care measures as mentioned in section 3.5 of the Integrity Policy to minimize stress.

However, Help a Child expects that, when signing an employment contract with Help a Child, our representatives acknowledge their own responsibility towards their behavior and actions. Any proven breach of the Help a Child Code of Conduct and any proven misconduct will result in disciplinary action. Depending on the severity appropriate action might include a written warning, probation or termination of contract and legal action if required, as described in the employment conditions manual.

Furthermore, disciplinary measures will be taken against our representatives

- for retaliating against a colleague who reports concerns or otherwise cooperates with an investigation;
- for maliciously and falsely reporting misconduct; and
- for not cooperating with an investigation.

If the claim is deemed unfounded the representative's record will be cleared.

## 4. Review of the Help a Child Code of Conduct

Help a Child acknowledges that internal and external contexts and environments are subject to change. Such changes may have an impact on the scope and content of the Code of Conduct of Help a Child. For this reason, the Code of Conduct will be reviewed bi-annually by the Coordinator Integrity and the country Integrity Focal Persons.

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<sup>7</sup> See Annex 4 of the Integrity Policy for the Feedback, Complaints and Whistle Blowing Procedure of Help a Child, which can also be found online at [https://www.helpachild.org/documents and on Sharepoint](https://www.helpachild.org/documents_and_on/Sharepoint).

## 5. Signature

I have clearly read and understand the Help a Child Code of Conduct and will adhere at all times to the standards of behavior described in it.

I declare that I have never been convicted of any offence involving any type of harm to a child or children, nor have I ever been warned or cautioned in relation to such a matter. I also declare that there are no civil or criminal proceedings of any nature pending against me at the date of this declaration relating to any allegation concerning any type of harm to a child or children.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_