RAKAI HEALTH SCIENCES PROGRAM
(RHSP)

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY
2020
1. **Background**
   Rakai Health Sciences program is a collaborative health research and service initiative. It strives to improve the quality of life through a combination of community-based research, curative services and prevention strategies.

2. **Policy statement.**
   Rakai Health Sciences Program considers child abuse an unacceptable practice that hinders chances for children to achieve their full potentials for their growth and development. RHSP is committed to ensure that in all its activities and those of its partners, all necessary steps are taken to protect the rights of the child and to ensure their well being.

   The code of conduct and the underlying principals are to be respected by all RHSP staff, partners, donors and those visiting projects for whatever reasons including volunteers, consultants, journalists and parent representatives.

   The child protection policy takes into account local concepts of normal adult-child interaction, culture, religion, and local laws except in case where these are deemed to be contrary to the best interest of the child.

3. **Purpose of the policy**
   This policy has been developed to provide a guide to prevent child abuse in RHSP’s programs and to provide guidance on how to respond to concerns and allegations of child abuse.

   This policy applies to all staff including full time, part time, national and international. Others include board members, trustees, visitors, volunteers, consultants and any other persons or groups that may have contact with the organization.

4. **Definitions**
   
   a. **Child:** according to the constitution of the republic of Uganda 1995 is one who is below the age of 18 years.
   
   b. **Child abuse:** the universal categories of child abuse (see the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, Ugandan constitution, and children’s Act CAP 59
   
   c. **Sexual abuse:** actual or threatened sexual exploitation of a child including all forms of sexual activity such as rape, defilement, pornography, and incest.
   
   d. **Physical injury:** Actual or physical harm to any child or a failure to prevent physical harm or suffering.
   
   e. **Neglect:** The failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger including cold, starvation, locking up, failure to carry out important aspects of care resulting in impairment of the child’s health, growth, and development.
f. **Emotional abuse:** Persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection. All abuse involves emotional ill treatment.

g. **Exploitation:** Using a child for economic gain, or performing work that may be hazardous, or that interferes with the child’s growth and development. This includes educational programs that are focused on production rather than acquisition of skills, asking child to perform excessive chores and tasks, asking children under the minimum labour age to perform paid labour, and keeping a child out of an educational facility to perform other tasks

5. **Aims of the child protection policy**
   RHSP is committed to reducing the risk of child abuse through;
   i. Creating awareness to children, staff, contractors, partners, communities and other stakeholders on the rights of the children in all our interventions
   ii. Protecting RHSP from infiltration by people who do not respect children’s rights
   iii. Protecting children from abuse in our areas of interventions
   iv. Empowering our staff with knowledge and skills of avoiding and preventing child abuse
   v. Creating a good public image and communicating our stance as far as child abuse is concerned

6. **Guiding Principles**
   6.1. RHSP believes that any form of child abuse and exploitation is unacceptable and will not be tolerated

   6.2. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC) 1989, provides the basis for child protection. RHSP is committed to adhering to all the rights spelt out in the UNCRC.

   6.3. This Policy shall be applied together with the Uganda National Child Policy and other legislation that relates and effects issues of children. The Uganda National Child Policy will take precedence over RHSP Policy whenever in conflict.

   6.4. RHSP is committed to creating child safe programs

   6.5. Reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that children are safe from harm.

   6.6. Children’s best interests will form the basis of all decisions regarding children’s welfare.

   6.7. RHSP believes that all children regardless of their age, gender, nationality, language, sexual identity, religious background, physical or mental health have a right to protection from abuse.
6.8. Staff and other people that may have contact with the organization are required to adhere to this child protection policy.

7. **Statement of RHSP’s commitment to children**
RHSP is committed to protecting and respecting children’s rights through the prevention of abuse, neglect, discrimination, exploitation, and other forms of violence

RHSP is committed to ensuring that, in executing the Child Protection Policy, all actions and decisions in response to the child protection concerns will be guided by the principle of the best interest of the children during the time when RHSP will interact with children

RHSP will identify a child protection officer (CPO) and a child protection committee (CPC) that are committed to dealing with any cases of abuse that RHSP is made aware of. The CPO will act as chairperson for the CPC.

RHSP shall take every possible effort and measures to raise stakeholders awareness about children’s rights, concerns and risks via training and sensitization as appropriate and necessary.

8. **Children and Media**
RHSP recognizes the media and technology as a necessary component in raising awareness and reporting, these include photography, video coverage/film, internet.

RHSP shall undertake:

a. To seek consent of a child or her parents before taking any coverage or photograph

b. Not to promise returns for coverage of images

c. Take images of children that are dignified and respectful

d. Ensure that images of children could not be interpreted as sexual or condone any other situation of abuse.

e. Protect the safety and privacy of children and their families by not using identifiable images

f. The images and messages may only be used with consent of child and RHSP.

9. **Guidelines for interviewing children.**
The following guidelines shall always apply when interviewing a child:

a. Avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgmental, insensitive to cultural values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation or that re activate a Childs’ pain and grief from traumatic events.

b. Do not discriminate in choosing children to interview because of sex, age, religion, status, educational back ground or physical abilities.
c. Ensure that the child or guardian knows that the reporters are talking to them.

d. Obtain permission from the child and his or her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and when possible for documentary photographs when possible and appropriate, this permission should be in writing.

10. Dealing with alleged child abuse

10.1. Reporting

a. RHSP shall work with all levels of government structures that are already in place to ensure that local stakeholders are informed of RHSP’s commitment to the protection of children

b. All cases of abuse reported to RHSP will be immediately and confidentially referred to the Child Protection Officer (CPO). The CPO is to record all cases that are brought to his or her attention

c. The CPO will make an initial assessment of the case to determine whether there is any immediate course of action that needs to take place.

d. The CPO will determine the level of seriousness of the case and whether the case should be referred to the child protection committee (CPC). If the case is not referred to the CPC, the CPO will deal directly with the claimants to resolve the issue, recording the resolutions as they occur.

e. In reporting cases of child abuse, the person reporting can report through whistle blowing as per RHSP whistle blowing policy.

10.2. Child Protection Committee

Once referred to the CPC, the CPC’s role is to;

a. Investigate each case and decide on the course of action to be taken

b. Depending on the course of action, the CPC will make referrals to partner NGOs working in the field of child protection

c. Escalate the case to police if necessary

d. Monitor each case and follow up with the child and/or family

e. Settle any minor grievances

10.3. In some very serious cases, the CPC may determine that it should be referred to RHSP management. If the matter is beyond management resolution, the case should be referred directly to the police for further action.
10.4. The CPO and CPC are expected to treat all reported cases with objectivity, transparency, sensitivity, confidentiality and honesty. In addition, the confidentiality of the victim is to be protected.

10.5. Actions to be taken

a. If following an investigation, allegations prove to be true, the case shall be referred to the police or similar governing body

b. If following an investigation, allegations prove to be unfounded, no measure will be taken against the accused and appropriate steps to reverse damage will be taken.

c. In cases where any staff, contractor, board member has been caught red handed in any form of child abuse, whether at home or work, he/she must be immediately reported to police and suspended until conclusions are drawn by the investigating body

d. If any board member, management team member, core or support staff or volunteer has been found guilty to have engaged in any acts of child abuse, he or she will be expelled from RHSP.

e. If any board member, management team member, core or support staff or volunteer is suspected to have been involved in any act of child abuse, he or she will be suspended from his or her duties to pave way for investigations with half the payment and if found guilty, he or she will be expelled from RHSP and if not found guilty, he or she will be reinstated and all his or her salary paid

f. If a development partner, contractor and any other stakeholder is found to promote or engage in any child abuse related acts, RHSP shall terminate its partnership immediately and also its officers will not conduct any business with it

g. Any staff or associate who makes false and/or malicious accusations about suspected child abuse, which are unfounded, will face disciplinary action and/or legal action

10.6. Preventing child abuse

a. RHSP will endeavor to empower its staff on techniques of preventing and detecting child abuse in all its areas of intervention through training from time to time.

b. All recruited staff will be required to read and understand the child protection policy and acknowledge abiding by the code of conduct by appending their signatures to the effect.
c. RHSP will appropriately incorporate child protection components in its trainings and programme design

d. Every member shall be held personally liable in case convicted of child abuse and not at one time shall RHSP be party to violations of child abuse

e. Appropriate supervision will be carried out for all those coming in contact with children

11. Employment of staff and volunteers

All staff and volunteers working with children will be properly selected, recruited and trained.
Applicants will be required to provide an enhanced criminal record check from the criminal records department of their country of origin.
A minimum of two referees will be contacted for each applicant prior to employment.

12. How the child protection policy will work

12.1. The CPO will be assigned the task of overseeing this child protection policy in RHSP. All field officers and RHSP partners will be responsible for implementing this policy in the different districts or areas of operation. Upholding the child protection policy will be one of the terms of engagement.

12.2. RHSP shall develop a log that will document the different incidences of child abuse in their areas of operation. This will capture;

a. The date of the incidence

b. The officer involved

c. The status of the case (suspected or confirmed)

d. The number of children involved, and their details (age, gender etc)

e. The place where the crime was committed

f. The immediate course of action to be taken

g. Follow up of procedures

h. Any other information that is deemed necessary

12.3. RHSP management shall create an environment to ensure that all personnel and children feel confident and comfortable speaking out and implementing child protection safeguards
12.4. RHSP management shall ensure that the child protection policies and procedures are understood and are being implemented and that any problems or queries are dealt with as soon as they arise.

12.5. This policy shall apply in all operational areas by all those in direct contact with children. However, the guidelines must be applied in ways that are sensitive to different cultures and dynamics but without upholding practices that are harmful to children.

12.6. In all RHSP's operational areas, the UNCRC and National Child Policy is applicable as a basis of child protection. RHSP shall deploy a participatory approach to dialogue and discussion where differences between what is unacceptable behaviour locally and what is acceptable under a child protection policy and theses shall be resolved amicably.

13. Implementing parties
It is the responsibility of RHSP management team to ensure that all staff, associates, consultants and development partners are aware of and abide by the policy and code of conduct while working with/for RHSP.

RHSP shall institute a participatory community based monitoring system that shall be mandated to monitor and record all incidences and allegations of child abuse and complaints.

14. Review of the policy
This policy will be reviewed once a year to cater for any new child related challenges as far as RHSP operations are concerned. However, the board can incorporate any changes when it deems necessary to cater for the prevailing conditions.

15. Implementation of the policy
RHSP management and all line Department heads will be responsible for implementation of this Policy.

16. Policy Version History
This document has been approved by

[Signature]  4th Aug 2020

RHSP Executive Director  Date Approved
SCHEDULE ONE

Child Code of Conduct

This code of conduct is a set of behavioural guidelines and expectations to be adhered to by all staff and people or groups that may come in contact with RHSP. It has been developed to protect children, staff and the organization. This code of conduct must be read and understood, adopted, consented to and abided by all stakeholders through signing to acknowledge the conditions herein.

RHSP child code of conduct

All staff, partners, volunteers and parent representatives will do the following:

a. Report any concerns of child abuse to RHSP management, police or child protection unit.
b. Respect all children and young people that RHSP is involved with.
c. Assess my behaviour, language, actions and relationships with the children and young people under RHSP.
d. Conduct him or herself in a manner consistent with his/her position as a positive role model to children and RHSP staff member/associate.
e. Ensure that a practice of openness exists to allow any issues or concerns of child abuse to be discussed.
f. Encourage children and young people to participate in the decisions that affect them.
g. Respect different cultures and backgrounds.

All RHSP staff will not:

a. Physically assault a child.
b. Seek to contact a child or young person and spend time with him or her outside of the program time.
c. Hire children as workers.
d. Photograph or video a child or young person without his or her consent and permission from his or her parent/guardian.
e. Present degrading images of children through the organization’s publications or website.
f. Use inappropriate or offensive language when speaking with a child or young person.
g. Act in a way intended to shame, humiliate or belittle children, or otherwise perpetuate any form of emotional abuse.
h. Behave provocatively with a child.
i. Develop sexual relationships with children, or hold, or touch children and young people inappropriately.
j. Make sexually suggestive comments or actions to a child even as a joke.
k. Assist a child in tasks that he or she can do unaided unless requested. These acts include; bathing, changing clothes or toileting.

Acknowledgement.
I acknowledge that I have read and understand the child code of conduct and I agree to abide by its provisions.

Name:  
Designation:

Date:  
Sign:

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