

## **Child Protection Policy**

as adopted by SECS General Assembly on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010

### **1. Introduction**

SECS formulated as its Mission to be an NGO acting as an advocate and resource for universal and non-discriminatory access to high-quality and comprehensive reproductive health and sexuality information, education and services. SECS advocates for national strategies, policies and regulations respecting sexual and reproductive rights as human rights. Our mission is to encourage and enable children and young people to promote the holistic health, well-being and development of themselves, their families and their communities. We believe in children's active participation and in respecting their freedom of expression and communication. We believe that child protection is crucial to ensuring that children under 18 years of age have the rights, confidence and environment in which they can make choices, express their views and communicate effectively with other children and adults. Children cannot become empowered change agents to improve their lives and that of their families and communities if they are not safeguarded from abuse, discrimination and harm of any kind, be it physical, sexual, emotional or neglect.

### **2. Definitions**

#### ***Child***

For the purposes of this policy, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a "child" is defined as anyone under the age of 18.

#### ***Child abuse***

The present Child Protection Policy uses World Health Organization, definitions for child abuse. According to this definition "child abuse" or "maltreatment" constitutes "all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival,

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development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power”. Child abuse include several types of abuses. Physical abuse includes hurting or injuring a child, inflicting pain, poisoning, drowning or smothering. Sexual abuse includes direct or indirect sexual exploitation or corruption of children by involving them (or threatening to involve them) in inappropriate sexual activities. Emotional abuse includes repeatedly rejecting children, humiliating them or denying their worth and rights as human beings. Neglect represents the persistent lack of appropriate care of children, including love, stimulation, safety, nourishment, warmth, education, and medical attention. Discrimination, harassment and bullying are also abusive and can harm a child, both physically and emotionally

### ***Child protection***

A broad term to describe philosophies, policies, standards, guidelines and procedures to protect children from both intentional and unintentional harm. In the current context, it applies particularly to the duty of SECS and individuals associated with SECS towards children in their care.

### ***Direct contact with children***

Being in the physical presence of a child or children in the context of SECS’s work, whether contact is occasional or regular, short or long term. Under SECS’s portfolio of activities this could involve delivering talks to schools and youth groups, training persons to provide sexual and reproductive health information, education and services, involve children in activities, supporting their participation in workshops, conferences etc. [N.B. this list of examples is not exhaustive].

### ***Indirect contact with children***

- 1) Having access to information on children in the context of SECS’s work, such as children’s names, locations (addresses of individuals or projects), photographs and case studies.
- 2) Providing support and partnering with organizations that work ‘directly’ with children.

### ***Policy***

A statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to safeguard children from harm and makes

clear to all what is required in relation to the protection of children. It helps to create a safe and positive environment for children and to show that the SECS is taking its duty and responsibility of care seriously.

### **3. Core child protection principles and values**

#### **The legal basis**

The present Child Protection Policy is developed in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by Romania. This document provides a comprehensive framework for the protection, provision and participation of all children without discrimination to ensure their survival and development to the maximum extent possible. On the understanding that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child must be read as a whole, the following articles nevertheless form the specific basis of child protection:

- Art. 1 - definition of ‘child’,
- Art. 2 - nondiscrimination,
- Art. 3.1 - the best interests of the child,
- Art. 3.2 - duty of care and protection,
- Art. 3.3 - standards of care,
- Art. 6 - survival and development,
- Art. 12 - participation
- Art. 13 - freedom of expression,
- Art. 19 - protection from violence,
- Art. 25 - periodic review of placements,
- Art. 32, 33, 34, 36, 37(a) - protection from economic exploitation, substance abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, ‘all other forms of exploitation’; torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment),
- Art. 39 - physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration.

#### **Children’s participation**

SECS will advocate and work for creating a space where children learn, feel and able will be willing to speak out about sexual and reproductive rights and that will empower them to become actors in their own protection without further discrimination or shame. Children have the right to communication – to enable them to receive information, to ask questions, to make choices, and to make decisions. SECS believe that helping children to find a voice is an essential step to

helping them to claim their individual rights. Children will only benefit from this policy if they are aware of their rights and are given the proper environment in which to exercise them.

### **Taking it further**

The principles promoted by the present Child Protection Policy should be reflected in the recruitment procedures, management structures, creation of a space for children to speak out, staff and volunteers training. Abuse must never be tolerated. All suspicions and allegations of abuse and poor practice will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately. Volunteers and staff (employed and external consultants) have a responsibility to report concerns according to approved protocols. Staff/volunteers are not trained to deal with situations of abuse or to decide if abuse has occurred.

## **4. Child Protection Policy**

SECS has a duty of care to safeguard all children involved in its activities from harm. All children have a right to protection and the needs of disabled children and others who may be particularly vulnerable must be taken into account. SECS will ensure the safety and protection of all children involved in activities organized by SECS through adherence to the Child Protection guidelines adopted by SECS General Assembly.

### **Volunteers, Staff and all other Personnel**

As a condition of working with SECS, all volunteers, employees, officers, interns, researchers, consultants, and advisers are required to undergo the following:

1. Both acceptance of and commitment to SECS's Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct for working with children.
2. Providing a criminal record certificate. This document will be treated with the same confidentiality as all other personal documents.
3. Present a valid identification document.

### **Management**

Carmen Suraiianu is SECS designated Child Protection Officer and she is responsible for the day-to-day implementation, supervision and monitoring of the Child Protection Policy in SECS. The disclosure of personal information about children, including legal cases, will be limited to those employees, contractors, Executive Council members, officers, interns and volunteers who need

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to know. The SECS Executive Council will have the overall responsibility to oversee and ensure the policy's implementation.

## **Training and Education**

Training and education are essential to implementing the Child Protection Policy. The Child Protection Officer will ensure that orientation training about the Child Protection Policy is given to all volunteers, staff and personnel, which will include training on behavior guidelines for those in direct contact with children, and guidance on the acceptable and unacceptable sharing of information on children.

## **Behavior Protocols**

Any volunteer, staff member, intern, researcher, consultant or adviser who has direct contact with children in relation with SECS activities will be fully informed of SECS Code of Conduct in relation with children. The Code of Conduct includes guidance on appropriate behavior of adults towards children and of children towards children.

## **Communications about Children**

All publications and the websites that include images and texts related to children will not contain the following:

- Manipulated or sensationalized text and/or images
- Discriminatory and degrading language
- Images in which children are inappropriately clothed
- Information that could be used to identify the location of the child and cause them to be put at risk

Photos of children that will be included on the website or any of our publications must be taken with the child's verbal permission. In addition, all information relating to children is limited to those members of staff who need to know and will be treated as confidential.

## **Reporting Incidents**

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in SECS in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However there is a responsibility to act on any

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concerns by reporting these to the appropriate officer or the appropriate authorities. All witnessed, suspected or alleged violations of the Child Protection Policy will be immediately reported to the designated Child Protection Officer, who will record and act on these in a confidential manner in accordance with the standardized process approved by SECS Executive Council and the best interests of the child. SECS will take appropriate action to protect the child/children in question from further harm and others in the organization during and following an incident or allegation.

Any suspicion that a child has been abused by either a member of staff or a volunteer should be reported to the SECS Child Protection Officer, who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.

The SECS Child Protection Officer will refer the allegation to the social services department who may involve the police.

The parents or carers of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from the social services department.

The relevant contact details for child protection services, local social services department, police, emergency medical help and help lines will also be readily available and easily accessible.

SECS will assure all staff/volunteers that it will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith reports his or her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.

If the allegation is about poor practice by the *SECS* Child Protection Officer, or if the matter has been handled inadequately and concerns remain, it should be reported to the relevant the Executive Director who will decide how to deal with the allegation and whether or not to initiate disciplinary proceedings.

### **Ramifications of Misconduct**

SECS will immediately suspend any volunteers, staff, adviser, consultant, intern who is alleged to have violated the Child Protection Policy, pending the outcome of an investigation. SECS reserves the right to take any disciplinary action against any of the above who have been proven guilty in an investigation, which may include reporting the incident to the police.

### **Confidentiality**

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Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a **need to know** basis only. This includes the following people:

- SECS Child Protection Officer
- the parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused
- the person making the allegation
- social services/police
- SECS Executive Director

Seek social services advice on who should approach the alleged abuser (or parents if the alleged abuser is a child).

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws (e.g. that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

### **Providing information to police or social services**

Information about suspected abuse must be accurate and a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure/concern. It should include the following:

- The child's name, age and date of birth of the child.
- The child's home address and telephone number.
- Whether or not the person making the report is expressing their own concerns or those of someone else.
- The nature of the allegation. Include dates, times, any special factors and other relevant information.
- Make a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
- A description of any visible bruising or other injuries. Also any indirect signs, such as behavioral changes.
- Details of witnesses to the incidents.
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred.
- Have the parents been contacted?
- If so what has been said?
- Has anyone else been consulted? If so record details.

- If the child was not the person who reported the incident, has the child been spoken to? If so what was said?
- Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record details.

Where possible referral to the police or social services should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours and the name of the contact who took the referral should be recorded.

### **Statement of Commitment to the Child-to-Child Child Protection Policy**

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I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understood the standards and guidelines outlined in this Child Protection Policy. I agree with the principles contained therein and accept the importance of implementing child protection policies and practice while associated with the Society for Education on Contraception and Sexuality. I further understand that adherence to SECS Child Protection Policy will involve the following: signing a personal declaration stating any criminal convictions, including those considered 'spent'; declaring any previous investigations oral legations made against me with respect to child protection issues.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Job title/role)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## **SECS Code of Conduct in relation with children**

SECS believes in and advocates children's rights to survival, protection, development and participation. This Code of Conduct includes guidance on appropriate and expected standards of behavior of adults towards children and also of children towards other children. It has been developed with the best interests of the child as the primary consideration and should be interpreted in a spirit of transparency and common sense.

Child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can arouse strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgment about the appropriate action to take.

### **Appropriate Standards of Behavior**

Adults **should**:

- Provide an enabling environment for children's personal, physical, social, emotional, moral and intellectual development.
- Encourage and respect children's voices and views.
- Be inclusive and involve all children without selection or exclusion on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, religion or any other status.
- Be aware of the potential for peer abuse (e.g. children bullying, discriminating against, victimizing or abusing children).
- Develop special measures/supervision to protect younger and especially vulnerable children from peer and adult abuse.
- Be aware of high-risk peer situations (e.g. unsupervised mixing of older and younger children and possibilities of discrimination against minors).
- Develop clear rules to address specific physical safety issues relative to the local physical environment of a project (e.g. for projects based near water, heavy road traffic, railway lines).
- Being an excellent role model - this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of young people.
- Giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Recognizing the developmental needs and capacity of young people and disabled adults - avoiding excessive training or competition and not pushing them against their will.

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- Securing parental consent in writing to act *in loco parentis*, if the need arises to administer emergency first aid and/or other medical treatment.
- Keeping a written record of any injury that occurs, along with the details of any treatment given.
- Requesting written parental consent if adult volunteers or staff are required to transport young people in their cars.
- Avoid placing yourself in a compromising or vulnerable position when meeting with children (e.g. being alone with a child in any circumstances which might potentially be questioned by others).
- Meet with a child in a central, public location whenever possible.
- Immediately report the circumstances of any situation which occurs which may be subject to misinterpretation to the designated Child Protection Officer.
- Report suspected or alleged abuse to the designated Child Protection Officer.

## **Inappropriate Standards of Behavior**

Adults **should not**:

- Hit or otherwise physically assault a child.
- Use language that will mentally or emotionally abuse any child.
- Act in any way that intends to embarrass shame, humiliate or degrade a child.
- Show discrimination of race, culture, age, gender, disability, religion, sexuality, political persuasion or any other status.
- Develop a sexual relationship with a child.
- Kiss, hug, fondle, rub or touch a child in an inappropriate or culturally insensitive way.
- Do things of a personal nature that a child could do for him/herself, including dressing, bathing and grooming.
- Encourage any crushes by a child.
- Initiate physical contact (e.g. holding hands) unless initiated by the child.
- Suggest inappropriate behavior or relations of any kind.
- Allow children to engage in sexually provocative games with each other.
- Stand aside when they see inappropriate actions inflicted by children on other children because it is frequent and commonplace.
- engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- share a room with a child
- allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged

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- make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun
- reduce a child to tears as a form of control
- fail to act upon and record any allegations made by a child
- do things of a personal nature for children or disabled adults, that they can do for themselves
- invite or allow children to stay with you at your home unsupervised.

**N.B.** It may sometimes be necessary for staff or volunteers to do things of a personal nature for children, particularly if they are young or are disabled. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of parents and the players involved. There is a need to be responsive to a person's reactions. If a person is fully dependent on you, talk with him/her about what you are doing and give choices where possible. This is particularly so if you are involved in any dressing or undressing of outer clothing, or where there is physical contact, lifting or assisting a child to carry out particular activities. Avoid taking on the responsibility for tasks for which you are not appropriately trained.

### **Incidents that must be reported/recorded**

If any of the following occur you should report this immediately to the appropriate officer and record the incident. You should also ensure the parents of the child are informed:

- if you accidentally hurt a child involved in an activity
- if a child participating in the activity misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.