



African Gifted Foundation Ghana

African Science Academy

Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy

Strategy:

- Protecting children and young adults
 - Preventing abuse
- Promoting ethical behaviour

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	3
1.1	Summary / Purpose.....	3
1.2	Definitions	3
1.2.1	Child	3
1.2.2	Child abuse	3
1.2.3	Child protection	4
1.2.4	Direct contact with children.....	4
1.2.5	Indirect contact with children	4
1.3	Why do we need a Child Protection Policy?	4
2	Child Protection Policy Overview	5
2.1	AGF’s core child protection principles and values.....	5
2.1.1	The legal basis:	5
2.1.2	The moral basis – a non-negotiable duty:.....	5
2.1.3	An end to silence:	5
2.1.4	Children’s participation – a space and a voice:	6
2.1.5	Taking it further:.....	6
2.1.6	Capacity building:.....	6
2.1.7	Challenging complacency:.....	6
3	Who is bound by this Policy?	6
3.1	Scope of the Child Protection Policy	7
3.2	Responsibilities under the Child Protection Policy	7
4	Criminal Records Check.....	9
5	Personal Conduct outside work	9
6	Partner Organisations’ Agreements	9
7	Consequences of Misconduct (direct abuse of a child)	9
	Appendix 1	10
	Appendix 2	11
	Appendix 3	13
	Appendix 4	15
	Appendix 5	16
8	About your Concern	17

1 Introduction¹

1.1 Summary / Purpose

As an international development organisation, committed to offering the highest quality STEM education to gifted African girls at the African Science Academy, African Gifted Foundation Ghana (AGFG) is committed to promoting the rights of children and young adults including their right to be protected from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation. AGFG takes active measures to ensure children's rights to protection are fully realised.

African Gifted Foundation Ghana acknowledges its expectation that its employees and others who work with AGFG have children's and young adults' best interests at the heart of their involvement.

This Child Protection Policy is AGFG's statement of intent that demonstrates our commitment to safeguarding children and all of our students from harm and makes clear to all in the organisation and who come into contact with us what is required in relation to the protection of children, and that child abuse in any form is unacceptable to African Gifted Foundation Ghana.

1.2 Definitions

1.2.1 Child

A *child* is anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children Act 2001.

1.2.2 Child abuse

- The **NSPCC** (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, a UK organisation) cites *child abuse* or cruelty to children as 'behaviour that causes significant harm to a child. It also includes when someone knowingly fails to prevent serious harm to a child. All forms of cruelty are damaging – it can be harder to recover from the emotional impact than from the physical effects.'²
- According to the **World Health Organisation**, *child abuse* or *maltreatment* includes 'all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development or dignity'.
- Together, these organisations highlight **five types of cruelty**:
 - **Physical abuse**: including hurting or injuring a child, inflicting pain, poisoning, drowning, or smothering.
 - **Sexual abuse**: including direct or indirect sexual exploitation or corruption of children by involving them (or threatening to involve them) in inappropriate sexual activities.
 - **Emotional abuse**: repeatedly rejecting children, humiliating them or denying their worth and rights as human beings.
 - **Neglect and negligent treatment**: the persistent lack of appropriate care of children, including love, stimulation, safety, nourishment, warmth, education, and medical attention.

- **Exploitation:** this can occur in many forms, including sexual exploitation, economic exploitation (using children for labour e.g. working in the fields or selling drugs) or using children to fight (child soldiers).
- A child who is being abused may experience more than one type of cruelty.
- Discrimination, harassment and bullying are also abusive and can harm a child, both physically and emotionally.

1.2.3 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 AGFG - and individuals associated with AGGF - towards children in their care.

1.2.4 Direct contact with children

Being in the physical presence of a child or children in the context of AGFG's work, whether contact is occasional or regular, short or long term. A non-exhaustive list includes delivering talks to schools, churches and youth groups, project / site visits or attending conferences at which children are also present.

1.2.5 Indirect contact with children

A broad concept, but may include:

1. Having access to information on children in the context of AGFG's work, such as children's names, locations (addresses of individuals or projects), photographs and case studies.
2. Providing funding for organisations/individuals that work 'directly' with children. Albeit indirectly, this nonetheless has an impact on children, and therefore confers upon the donor ar

1.3 Why do we need a Child Protection Policy?

- Any NGO which works with children (directly or indirectly) should have a child protection policy.
- Children are especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and ill-treatment at the hands of carers, other project workers, and those with access to their personal information. Some of the students attending our school may have already experienced ruptured relationships of trust or abuse of an adult-child relationship in the form of physical, psychological or sexual abuse.
- Organisations working with vulnerable children have been, are and will continue to be vulnerable to harbouring abuse until the issues are brought into the open.
- Organisations without protection policies, guidelines and systems are more vulnerable to false or malicious accusations of abuse.

¹ This policy has been written with the aid of AfCiC and iPartner India's Child Protection Policies and Procedures Toolkit

² Worried about a child? How you can protect children from abuse, NSPCC

- Without proper policies, guidelines and procedures in place, allegations of abuse, whether founded or unfounded, can destroy an organisation's reputation. This will have serious implications for fundraising (thus undermining AGFG's entire portfolio of work, even beyond the scope of the particular project concerned) as well as damaging the reputation of the other similar NGOs.

2 Child Protection Policy Overview

AGFG's commitment to promoting awareness and standards of child protection extends to all AGF UK and AGF Ghana directly employed staff, together with all volunteers, interns, contractors and trustees.

This document is required to be reviewed and updated one year after entering into force and thereafter a minimum of once every two years or whenever there is a major change in AGFG or in relevant legislation, to guarantee the best available policies for child protection. This policy is accompanied by a series of appended documents to assist employees, volunteers, interns, contractors, trustees, funders and other stakeholders in the understanding and implementation of the standards contained in this policy.

2.1 AGF's core child protection principles and values

2.1.1 The legal basis:

AGFG's Child Protection Policy is firmly based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ('CRC') and the Children Act 2001. The CRC 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. The CRC must be read as a whole. Ghana has incorporated some of the ideas of the CRC into national legislation through the Children Act 2001.

2.1.2 The moral basis – a non-negotiable duty:

AGFG believes that NGOs have an absolute duty to protect this already vulnerable group from abuse, mistreatment and exploitation from within organisations intended for their benefit. *This duty is imperative and non-negotiable. Without adequate standards and mechanisms of protection in place, an organisation is not only failing in its primary duty of care, but may also be negligently or recklessly fostering an environment of abuse.*

2.1.3 An end to silence:

Silence breeds abuse and exploitation of children. Paedophiles (a person who is sexually interested in children) will seek out organisations with weak communication structures and thrive where secrecy and shame prevail. Furthermore, without proper policies and specific procedures in place, NGOs are extremely vulnerable to false allegations of child abuse. AGFG therefore believes in:

- creating an environment where issues of child protection are discussed openly and are understood between children and adults;

- promoting open lines of communication both internally and externally within and between organisations to improve awareness and implementation of child protection policies and practices;
- creating a framework to deal openly, consistently and fairly with allegations concerning both direct and indirect abuse.

2.1.4 Children’s participation – a space and a voice:

“In any matters of procedure affecting a child, the child shall be accorded an opportunity to express his opinion, and that opinion shall be taken into account”³. Creating a space where children feel able and willing to speak out about abuse, free from abusers, empowers them to become actors in their own protection without further discrimination or shame. AGFG believes 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.*

2.1.5 Taking it further:

Child protection is not just about reading and signing a piece of paper: the policy sets out guidelines and standards that must be put into practice. *‘Above all, it must be remembered that it is the children, not the standards, that are sacrosanct; and although abuse must never be tolerated, the standards are no more than a tool in the service of promoting the welfare of children.’*⁴

2.1.6 Capacity building:

AGFG understands the need for capacity building on issues of child protection and appreciates the constraints and conditions under which organisations operate. AGFG is committed to undertake such capacity building as appropriate.

2.1.7 Challenging complacency:

Resistance to addressing child protection issues may come from lack of understanding of the nature of child abuse, lack of commitment to the organisation / programme, and a sense that child abuse happens elsewhere. AGFG should ask itself: “If safety and well-being of children are not at the centre of our programmes / activities, then why not?” AGFG will challenge complacency as a matter of course.

These principles underlie all of the following standards set out in this document.

3 Who is bound by this Policy?

Each individual and organisation associated with AGFG in any way is held accountable for good practice while working either ‘directly’ or ‘indirectly’ with children (see ‘definitions’, Section 1.1). Each will be informed of the policy and asked to sign a ‘Statement of Commitment’ to the principles contained herein.

³ S4(4) Children Act 2001

⁴ Setting the Standard: a common approach to child protection for International NGOs, anonymous quote

Volunteers, interns, contractors and visitors shall receive a specific briefing - in relation to the exact circumstances of the visit/ contract work - from the organisation's designated Child Protection Officer; this briefing should include training on AGFG's Code of Behaviour and AGFG's guidelines on communications about children (including use of images).

3.1 Scope of the Child Protection Policy

The Child Protection Policy applies to everyone working for or associated with AGFG. It encompasses the whole of AGF and includes without limitation:

1. Staff at all levels

2. Partners and Associates – these include board members, volunteers, sponsors, consultants and contractors. Also the staff and/or representatives of partner organisations who have been brought into contact with children

3. Visitors – (e.g. donors, journalists, media, researchers, celebrities etc) who may come into contact with children through AGFG.

There is a **mandatory requirement** of all AGFG Staff, Partners and Associates and visitors to report any witnessed, suspected or alleged incident of child abuse or violation of the child protection policy. **Failure to report may result in disciplinary action being taken and/or other action being taken which may be appropriate to the circumstances.**

3.2 Responsibilities under the Child Protection Policy

1. Clear code of conduct for all staff and associates:

This code of conduct needs to be followed by all staff, partners and associates at all times. The code of conduct is designed to keep both children and adults safe and protected. Following the code of conduct ensures that staff, partners and associates will also protect themselves from any false accusation of abuse that might be made against them.

- Recognize that as an adult you exercise greater power over children all the time. The onus of showing fair and sensitive behaviour lies on you.
- While working with children keep away from, drugs, alcohol and tobacco of any form.
- Use appropriate and respectful forms of communication and discipline. Corporal punishment of any kind cannot be used.
- Do not favour one child over another or discriminate against children on basis of age, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, belief etc.
- Use physical contact only when necessary and avoid physical contact while alone with the child.
- Do not take a child to your house.
- Children especially adolescent might be attracted to you, handle such situations sensitively.
- Be aware of your actions, good intentioned actions can be intrusive and intimidating towards the child.
- Refrain from using child labour in any form which is detrimental to the health of the child and hampers his or her growth and development.

2. Roles and Responsibilities for all staff and associates:

Roles and responsibilities of AGFG Staff, Partners, Associates and Visitors towards ensuring a safe and protective environment are based on the following but not limited to:

- All staff, associates and volunteers of AGFG will undergo mandatory training in Child Protection principles, procedures and reporting mechanisms.
- Never abuse and/or exploit a child or act/ behave in any way that places a child at risk of harm.
- Report any child abuse and protection concerns they have in accordance with applicable local office procedures. **This is a mandatory requirement for Staff. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.**
- Respond to a child who may have been abused or exploited in accordance with applicable local office procedures.
- Cooperate fully and confidentially in any investigation of concerns and allegations.
- Contribute to an environment where children are respected and encouraged to discuss their concerns and rights.
- Always ask permission from children (or, in the case of young children, their parent or guardian) before taking images (e.g. photographs, videos) of them. Ensure that any images taken of children are respectful. Stories and images of children should be based on the child's best interest.
- Be aware that where concerns exist about the conduct of Staff or Partners and Associates in relation to child protection and/or where there has been a breach of the Child Protection Policy, this will be investigated under this policy. This may result in disciplinary sanctions and/or dismissal for Staff.
- Be aware that, if a legitimate concern about suspected child abuse is raised, which proves to be unfounded on investigation, no action will be taken against the reporter. However, any employee who makes false and malicious accusations will face disciplinary action.
- AGFG staff must not disclose information that identifies sponsored families or children or make it available to the general public unless that disclosure is in accordance with standard AGFG policies and procedures.
- AGFG partners, visitors, donors, consultants, volunteers and others must not disclose information that identifies sponsored families or children or make it available to the general public without explicit consent from AGFG.

3. Reporting procedures:

AGFG must have a Child Protection Committees which will be involved in addressing the issues of child abuse. The Headteacher and the Finance and Admin Manager need to be a part of the Child Protection Committees if s/he is not the suspected abuser. If a staff reporting abuse feels that reporting to immediate supervisor will not ensure justice for the child, they can jump reporting lines and report to their contact person within AGFG or the chair of AGFG.

Principles of safe reporting: The following principles will be necessarily followed while reporting abuse:

- Staff will report immediately.
- Management will act swiftly
- Report even suspected cases of abuse, do not wait for evidence.
- Ensure that the child is in a safe environment. Address immediate needs of the child like getting medical help, counselling support.
- Maintain confidentiality at all stages when the issue is being addressed and resolved.
- Ensure the comfort, safety and dignity of the child while investigation of the case is being done in-house.

- Remove the child from the presence of the suspected abuser.
- Remove the suspected abuser from any contact with children till he/she has been proved to be innocent.
- Maintain proper and clear documentation of proceedings of both in-house and local investigation clearly. Share this with the children's group without revealing the name of the child who has been abused.
- Ensure that local law enforcement agencies are informed as soon as possible.

It is extremely important that child protection issues are reported **immediately** in order to protect the child victim from further abuse, secure evidence and so that action can be taken in relation to the alleged perpetrator as appropriate. Reporting a child protection concern is mandatory.

The exception to this is where the child victim has urgent medical and/or safety needs which have to be attended to before a formal report is made.

4 Criminal Records Check

In line with our Criminal Practices Policy, AGFG will seek to obtain mandatory criminal record checks on all staff and volunteers who may have access to children.

AGFG will also ensure that its partner organisations and associates practice mandatory criminal record checks for all staff and volunteers who may have direct access to children.

5 Personal Conduct outside work

We are committed to ensuring that our Staff and representatives apply high standards of behaviour towards children within both their professional and their private lives.

Staff, Partners and Associates are required to bear in mind the principles of the Child Protection Policy and heighten their awareness of how their behaviour may be perceived both at work and outside work.

6 Partner Organisations' Agreements

AGFG will ensure all written agreements with partner organisations include a clause referring to child protection and the expectation that the partner organisation will have a child protection policy of its own or agree that its staff will abide by AGFG's child protection policy.

AGFG will initiate action to any Non-compliance of Child Protection Policy that will lead to AGFG terminating the agreement.

7 Consequences of Misconduct (direct abuse of a child)

If an allegation of a violation of the policies, guidelines, principles or practice of child protection is made concerning a named individual from a verifiable source against any employee, contractor, trustee, intern or

volunteer, they may be suspended from all activity / association with AGFG pending the outcome of an independent investigation, on the authority of the Director based either on the advice of the Child Protection Officer or reported to him/her. Employees will continue to receive full pay during this time.

Depending on the outcome of the independent investigation, if it comes to light that anyone associated with AGF commits acts in relation to children – whether within or outside the context of AGFG’s work – which are criminal, grossly infringe children’s rights, or contravene the principles and standards contained in this policy, AGFG will take immediate disciplinary action and any other action which may be appropriate to the circumstances. This may mean, for example, for:

- Employees – disciplinary action / dismissal
- Volunteers, trustees, officers and interns – ending the relationship with the organisation
- Contractors – termination of contract

Depending on the nature, circumstances and location of the case, AGFG will also consider involving authorities such as the police to ensure the protection of children and criminal prosecution where this is appropriate.

The decision to suspend is not subject to challenge. When investigating and determining the concerns or complaints, the process should always be fair and any adverse determination should be open to challenge through an appeals process. The Chairman of AGFG and the Manager of the individual concerned will form the appeals panel.

Appendix 1

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT to African Gifted Foundation’s Child Protection Policy

“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 working with African Gifted Foundation Ghana .

(Print name)

(Job title / role)

(Signature)

(Date)

Appendix 2

Code of Conduct: Behaviour Protocols

Always act in the best interests of the child.

Sexual behaviour	
<p>DO NOT:</p> <p>engage in or allow sexually provocative games with children to take place;</p> <p>kiss, hug, fondle, rub, or touch a child in an inappropriate or culturally insensitive way;</p> <p>sleep in the same bed as a child;</p> <p>do things of a personal nature that a child could do for him/herself, including dressing, bathing, and grooming;</p> <p>encourage any crushes by a child;</p> <p>develop a sexual relationship with anyone under the age of 18 years</p> <p>develop a sexual relationship with any beneficiary of AGFG's work.</p>	
Physical behaviour	
<p>DO NOT:</p> <p>ever hit or otherwise physically assault a child.</p>	<p>DO:</p> <p>wait for appropriate physical contact, such as holding hands, to be initiated by the child.</p>

Psychosocial behaviour

DO NOT:

use language that will mentally or emotionally harm any child;

suggest inappropriate behaviour or relations of any kind;

act in any way that intends to embarrass, shame, humiliate, or degrade a child;

encourage any inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour, such as tantrums, by a child;

- show discrimination of origin, language, race, tribe, culture, age, gender, disability, HIV status, religion, sexuality, or political persuasion;
- do not show favouritism or spend excessive amounts of time with one child.

DO:

be aware of the power balance between an adult and child, and avoid taking any advantage this may provide.

Peer abuse

DO NOT:

allow children to engage in sexually provocative games with each other.

DO:

be aware of the potential for peer abuse;

develop special measures / supervision to protect younger and especially vulnerable children;

avoid placing children in high-risk peer situations (e.g. unsupervised mixing of older and younger children).

Physical environment	
	<p style="text-align: center;">DO:</p> <p>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)</p> <p>dress in a modest style.</p>

Minimising risk situations:

- **Try to** avoid placing yourself in a compromising or vulnerable position.
- You should only be in a one-to-one situation with a child if there a justifiable professional reason. **Try to**, where or when appropriate, be accompanied by a second adult; meet with a child in a designated or central, location whenever possible.
- **Try not to** be alone with a single child, including in the following situations: in a car (no matter how short the journey); in the dorm rooms.
- If you are concerned about a situation regarding a child, speak to your Manager or the Child Protection Officer immediately so that the issue can be addressed.

Appendix 3

Recognizing Signs of Abuse

- This checklist is indicative only – indications of potential abuse are complex
- Do not automatically assume that abuse is occurring; there may be an innocent explanation. However, do listen to the child and do not dismiss significant changes in behaviour, fears, worries, and physical indicators a child is exhibiting.
- Report any concerns to the appropriate person (see the reporting flowchart in Appendix 4); it is not your responsibility to try and resolve the situation.

<p>Possible signs of physical abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Bruises, burns, sprains, dislocations, bites, cuts · Improbable excuses given to explain injuries · Refusal to discuss injuries · Withdrawal from physical contact · Arms and legs kept covered in hot weather · Fear of returning home or of parents being contacted · Showing wariness or distrust of adults · Self-destructive tendencies · Being aggressive towards others · Being very passive and compliant · Chronic running away 	<p>Possible signs of neglect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Frequent hunger · Poor personal hygiene · Constant tiredness · Inappropriate clothing, e.g. summer clothes in winter · Frequent lateness or non-attendance at school · Untreated medical problems · Low self-esteem · Poor social relationships · Compulsive stealing · Drug or alcohol abuse
<p>Possible signs of emotional abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Physical, mental and emotional development is delayed · Highly anxious · Showing delayed speech or sudden speech disorder · Fear of new situations · Low self-esteem · Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations · Extremes of passivity or aggression · Drug or alcohol abuse · Chronic running away · Compulsive stealing 	<p>Possible signs of sexual abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Age inappropriate sexualised behaviour · Physical indicators (general and in genital and anal areas) · Behavioural indicators (general and sexual) which must be interpreted with regard to the individual child's level of functioning and development stage

Possible signs of concern regarding adult behaviour:

- A child or children becomes unusually distressed or agitated in the presence of a particular person.
- A child is asked to lie about anything (especially if it is about meeting that child) by an employee, contractor, trustee, volunteer, intern, or parent.
- You are asked to lie about a situation involving a child – particularly if that child looks distressed – by any an employee, contractor, trustee, volunteer, intern, or parent.
- Any person who persistently fails to follow AfCiC’s Code of Conduct / behavioural protocols is a cause for concern, particularly if reasons are evasive.
- Private (i.e. outside of work) meetings between a child and an employee, contractor, trustee, volunteer or intern are a cause for concern.

Appendix 4

Child Abuse: Reporting and Reaction Protocol Flowchart

Guiding principle: always act in the best interests of the child

Do you suspect or have you witnessed child abuse and/or a breach of AGFG’s Child Protection Policy by:
· a member or members of staff
· interns, volunteers, contractors or visitors to AGFG
· another child within any of AGFG’s programmes?

YES

You must complete a Report Form for Suspected Abuse IMMEDIATELY, which has to be completed by you **alone**.

It is **YOUR** responsibility to report these suspicions/what you witnessed to your Manager as soon as you have completed the form (and no later than the same working day) and to no one else.

If your report involves your Manager, speak to the Child Protection Officer or the Director instead.

AGFG is obliged to take all appropriate steps within its power to protect the child/children in question from further harm. The information reported will be held in a safe and secure place and treated in the strictest confidence.

Your Manager / the Head teacher will investigate your report, guided by the principles in the Child Protection Policy and may involve external organisations such as the police (as appropriate).

If you would like support following the incident/allegation, please inform your manager.

Appendix 5

Report Form for Suspected Abuse

If you have knowledge that a child's safety might be in danger, please complete this form to the best of your knowledge. Please note that child protection concerns must be reported directly to the designated contact person immediately (preferably within the same working day). You should complete this form *before* contacting the designated person. This report is to be used as a tool to develop the most un-biased information-based report possible. For confidentiality reasons, the report should be written and signed solely by you. It should only be sent *only* to the designated contact person. It will be held in a safe and secure place and treated in the strictest confidence.

1. About You

Your name: _____

Your job title: _____

Workplace: _____

Your relationship to the child: _____

Contact details: _____

2. About the Child

Child's name: _____

Child's gender: _____

Child's age: _____

8 About your Concern

Was the abuse observed or suspected? _____

Is this concern based on first-hand information or information divulged to you by someone else?
(If so, whom?) _____

Did the child disclose abuse to you? _____

Date of the alleged incident: _____

Time of the alleged incident: _____

Location of the alleged incident: _____

Name of the person who allegedly abused the child: _____

Job title: _____

Nature of the allegation: _____

Exactly what the child or other source said to you. How did you respond to him or her: [Do not lead the child. Record actual details]

Your personal observations (*visible injuries, child's emotional state, etc.*) [N.B. Only record what is fact, not opinion or rumour]
