



## WORKING WITH CHILDREN ONLINE GUIDELINES

<b>APPLICABILITY:</b>	Board Members & Management  Staff (Full time, part time, contractual, consultants)  Community - Interns, Champions & Representatives  Partner Organizations, Donors, Volunteers or Guest Speakers
<b>AUTHORISED BY:</b>	Leadership
<b>REVIEW DATE:</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> October 2020

# INTRODUCTION

## PREAMBLE

As we navigate this digital age and work to stay connected through online platforms, it is important to consider best practices to keep people safe online, especially the vulnerable. This includes children, as well as other vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities.

We are aware that the online spaces can be filled with some dangers, as well as great advantages. Therefore, we must have clear guidelines in place to protect children and other vulnerable people.

### Definitions:

Children: Anyone under the age of 18.

Online Communication: communicating through the internet. This includes, but is not limited to, social media platforms, messaging applications, email and video calling.

Examples: Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Line, Zoom, Skype, FaceTime

Digital Communication: Communicating through any digital form of technology.

Examples: Phone calls, text messaging, online communication, radio, television.

Online Bullying: Using online communication to bully someone.

Examples: Sending intimidating or threatening messages, posting rumours, sharing contact details without permission, hate speech.

Online Exploitation: Using online communication to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into sexual or criminal activity.

Example: An adult may pretend to be a girl to convince a boy to send sexual photos to them. The adult may then use these photos to blackmail the child into sending more pornographic material.

Online Grooming: Using online communication to build trust and prepare a child for sexual exploitation.

*Note: Throughout these guidelines we will refer to online communication, however these guidelines also apply more broadly to all forms of digital communication, including phone calls.*

## OUR COMMITMENT

We are committed to:

- working together with our partners and all field workers to ensure that all our online communication with children is safe and appropriate; and
- helping educate children and families around the dangers of being online and to help them develop the skills to protect themselves online.

## PURPOSE

These guidelines aim to:

1. demonstrate VISION RESCUE's commitment to ensuring safe online communication with children;
2. outline the expectations and responsibilities of any VISION RESCUE's stakeholders; and
3. provide guidance to stakeholders on how to meet good practice standards.

## STANDARDS & GUIDANCE

VISION RESCUE have an obligation to act within the laws of the countries wherein we operate, as well as to hold duty-bearers within those countries accountable for communicating safely and appropriately with children online. Partners are also strongly encouraged to follow all the company standards and guidelines of any online platform they are using (see below for more details).

Please also refer to:

- Child Protection Policy
- Policy on Code of Conduct
- Policy on POSH
- POCSO Act

## SCOPE

### **Stakeholders not permitted to interact with children online**

All stakeholders listed below **SHOULD NOT** be interacting online with children who are a part of any VISION RESCUE programs, including programs run by strategic partners:

- All VISION RESCUE Board members, Management, Staff, Interns, contract employees, consultants, champions, representatives, who have not been granted permission to communicate with children online.
- All the volunteers, partners or partner organizations and stakeholders, who are not involved in providing education (Academic, Health, livelihood, rights based, Life skills, etc), and who have not been granted permission to communicate with children online in writing.

### **Stakeholders permitted to interact with children online**

*Those who fall within the scope below are required to read and adhere to these guidelines before any interaction with children online. Strongly recommended that interaction with children online be kept at a minimum, with staff who are social workers, case managers or health care workers.*

- All designated VISION RESCUE Staff, Community Champions, Teaching Representatives & Interns from community as per work allocation by Community Managers, but strictly in the presence of an adult family member.

## FOCAL PERSON

**OPERATIONS HEAD** is the designated focal person with the responsibility of helping the organisation to adhere to these standards.

# PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS

*This section outlines the proactive measures and strategies needed to ensure VISION RESCUE's staff, operations and programs not only protect children and avoid harm online, but also promote the wellbeing and best interests of children.*

## COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN ONLINE

VISION RESCUE is committed to **helping stakeholders** ensure that appropriate preventative measures are in place to:

- ensure online communication within programs is child safe and appropriate;
- prevent child abusers, sex offenders or scammers from seeking to harm the children within our programs using online platforms.
- educate children in our programs around cyberbullying, image-based abuse and the distribution of harmful content
- specifically consider the needs of children more susceptible to online harms., including those with disability.

VISION RESCUE is committed to **helping stakeholders** meet these expectations through:

- providing training and capacity building opportunities, esp for child's family;
- information sharing; and
- ongoing coaching and support.

## VISION RESCUE POLICIES & STRATEGIES

The following commitments directly relate to all those who are working directly with children online. VISION RESCUE stakeholders have a duty of care when working online to take reasonable steps to protect children from any harm that should have reasonably been foreseen

In order to prevent harm, VISION RESCUE is committed to:

- ensuring that all staff read, and adhere to the standards outlined in these guidelines;
- including online risks in ongoing child protection risk management processes;
- training staff about appropriately communicate with children online;

## PERMISSION / CONSENT

**Before communicating** with a child online, staff must:

- receive formal permission from their Community Manager. The reporting manager must be given a plan about what communication the staff member will be having with children online; and
- receive written consent from parents/guardians at all times and VISION RESCUE staff must regularly keep parents/guardians informed about any online communication with their child.

## APPROVED PLATFORMS

- WhatsApp
- Google Meet
- ZOOM

*Note: All above platforms are approved if only used in the presence of the parents / supervision of adult from child's family*

## BEHAVIOURAL GUIDELINES

**When communicating** online with children, staff must:

- never use online or digital platforms to harass, abuse or exploit any child, including accessing child pornography;
- maintain a safe and professional environment to the best of their ability;
- Receive permission from reporting manager before communicating with child online and gain necessary permissions from guardians;
- avoid personal conversation about themselves that go deeper than initial rapport building or ice breakers;
- not talk or message with children outside of program activities unless in rare emergency situations. In these emergency situations reporting managers should be informed immediately;
- never provide personal images to a child, apart from recorded sessions as required by the in the program activities to attain project objectives;
- only store images of, or information about, students on approved platforms (google drive) and delete from the personal devices after uploading data to the google drive or forwarding to reporting manager;
- Never interact with children on their social media feeds;
- consider privacy/confidentiality when communicating online (e.g. making sure that no one is overhearing confidential conversations);
- write detailed case notes each time they communicate with a child, which will be overseen by reporting manager;
- agree to allow reporting manager to do spot check on staff's interaction with children online to ensure boundaries are being kept; and
- end all future communication and delete child details when they no longer need to communicate with the child as part of their role.

When working in a **group call setting**, staff must:

- have two team members to host and moderate the group:
- ensure that links to any online meetings be not posted anywhere publicly, but sent only to those invited to the group;
- educate the children at the beginning of a session around online etiquette and expectations;
  - Including how to treat each other during the call and what information is appropriate to share.

- disable any private chat functions;
- ensure that all children have left the group call before they leave so that children cannot stay on the call and communicate unsupervised with each other.

VISION RESCUE staff will not engage groups of children in group messaging as children can continue to message each other unsupervised.

## SUPPORTING CHILDREN ONLINE

It is important to educate children to prevent child abusers, sex offenders or scammers from seeking to harm children online. We can also educate children in our programs around cyberbullying, image-based abuse and the distribution of harmful content. The following guidelines directly relate to how we can best educate children and parents/guardians.

### Online Grooming:

Encourage parents/guardian (or other duty bearers) to:

- to delete contacts they don't talk to or don't trust;
- stay involved in the child's digital world;
- establish safety rules for meeting online 'friends';

Encourage children to:

- report and block/delete requests from strangers;
- tell their parent/guardian if an adult is messaging them;
- be alert to signs of inappropriate contact;
- seek help and support from a trusted adult immediately if a problem arises which could be their parent/guardian, teacher, social worker or a support hotline.

### Online Pornography:

Encourage parents/guardian (or other duty bearers) to:

- stay engaged and talk regularly with their children about what they are doing online;
- have an age-appropriate discussion about the issue with their children;
- respond calmly if their child has found pornography;
  - listen, assess and be sensitive to the child's feelings
- connect children to counselling and support services if needed.

Encourage children to:

Talk to a trusted adult immediately if a problem arises which could be their parent/guardian, teacher, social worker.

## **Media, Misinformation and Scams:**

Encourage parents/guardian (or other duty bearers) to:

- use safety, security and privacy settings on devices, games and apps at an age-appropriate level;
- teach children around how to spot and avoid online scams; and
- ensure that children know where they can turn to for help.

## **Cyberbullying:**

### Signs of cyberbullying

Child appears to be:

- Emotional and upset during or after using the internet/phone
- Very secretive or protective of one's digital life
- Withdrawn from family members, friends, and activities
- avoiding school or group gatherings
- Not doing well in class and is "acting out" in anger at home
- Shows changes in mood, behaviour, sleep, or appetite
- wanting to stop using the internet
- being nervous or jumpy when getting an instant message, text, or email
- avoiding discussions about online activities

Encourage parents/guardian (or other duty bearers) to:

- talk to their child about cyberbullying before it happens;
- listen, think and stay calm if their child is facing cyberbullying;
- talk to the child gently and help them to understand the situation and what is best to do; and
- ensure that their child knows where they can turn to for help.

## **Sending sexual photos and content**

Encourage parents/guardian (or other duty bearers) to:

- talk to the child about how to stay connected with friends and loved ones in safe and age-appropriate ways;
- talk about the risks including what can go wrong and the legal issues;
- promote self-confidence and that it is OK to say 'no';
- teach children about consent and respectful relationships

# RESPONSIVE ACTIONS

*This section outlines VISION RESCUE's process and procedures for responding to child safeguarding reports, incidents and allegations that occur online.*

## REPORTING PROCEDURES

### What do I need to report?

VISION RESCUE expects that all stakeholders will report the following:

1. **Any belief or suspicion of abuse or exploitation:**
  - If you have reasonable grounds for belief or suspicion that a child has been abused, exploited or exposed to image-based abuse, cyberbullying or illegal and harmful content.
  - If anyone in your organisation, or one of your partner organisations, are accused of, charged with, arrested for, or convicted of criminal offences relating to child abuse or exploitation. This includes if they are accused of acting inappropriately with a child online.
  
2. **Non-compliance or failure to safeguard children:**
  - Non-compliance with these guidelines and/or the VISION RESCUE Child Safeguarding Policy, by someone covered under the scope of these policies.
  - Activities or practices, including online, in VISION RESCUE activities that do not protect the best interests of the child (fail to implement reasonable child safeguards) or do not meet applicable local laws or standards.
  
3. **Concerns regarding the safety and wellbeing of a child:**

When there are serious concerns about the wellbeing of a child which may warrant intervention or support from child protection or social service providers. This includes if a child discloses harm during online communication.
  
4. **Concerns specifically around a child's behaviour during online communication with a staff member:**
  - When a child sends an inappropriate message or makes inappropriate comments during your online communication.
    - This includes sending or saying things that may have a sexually connotation.
  - Evidence that cyber bullying has occurred during a group call or as a result of a group call.

### Who needs to report?

Every VISION RESCUE stakeholder is required to report incidents, beliefs or suspicions that they become aware of as described above.

### How and who do I need to report to?

Reports should be made to **designated VR Staff** or **Reporting Manager**. If you are unsure if to report, please speak to respective **COMMUNITY MANAGER**, who will be able to advise you.



If the allegation is against the VISION RESCUE's staff or community champions or community representatives, or interns or partner organisations reports can be directed towards the **OPERATIONS HEAD**.

### RESPONDING TO CYBER ABUSE DIRECTED AT STAFF

We are also aware that our staff may also experience cyber abuse during online communication. Less respect may be shown during online communication due to online frustrations and potential misunderstandings. People may also feel more confident to be abusive online than they would otherwise be face to face.

Managers should:

- respond promptly and seriously to all allegations of cyber abuse directed at staff;
- support staff who have faced abuse:
  - This could include providing supervision, counselling and/or strategies for future online communication.
  - if necessary, re-arrange workloads so that staff member does not need to communicate with the child who has been abusive.
- encourage all staff to maintain their privacy online:
  - This could include having separate accounts so that abuse does not occur on private accounts and so staff can switch off work account outside of work hours.