

The VSN Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

PURPOSE

Volunteer Society Nepal (VSN) is committed to upholding the security, rights and freedoms of children and vulnerable adults at all times. While assisting developing communities through providing international volunteers to local organizations, the first priority of VSN is the safety and protection of the children and vulnerable people they are working alongside. VSN is committed to ensuring that the children and vulnerable adults are not exposed to abuse, exploitation, violence or neglect.

As a responsible volunteer travel operator, we understand the importance of having effective policies and processes in place to protect the welfare and interests of the communities and individuals that our operations interact with. We know that particular risks exist in relation how we interact with children and vulnerable adults and we're focused on ensuring that those risks are mitigated through the effective implementation of this policy.

SCOPE

The Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy is an organization-wide policy and statement of intent. It applies to all VSN staff members and our operations, the operations of our partner organizations and also the actions of our volunteers. The policy is written with the acknowledgement that every VSN volunteer and every member of our organization has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children and vulnerable adults.

It also considers that VSN does not hold sole responsibility for protecting these members of society and identifies that their protection is also incumbent upon other stakeholders such as government agencies, families groups and non-government organizations.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, a child is considered to be any person who is under 16 years of age. A vulnerable adult is considered to be someone who may be in need of additional community support for reasons of disability, illness or socio-economic conditions. This includes older adults suffering from dementia, or adults who through poverty are unable to care for themselves and avoid exploitation.

When this policy refers to placement participants the conditions are related to any individual or group of individuals who are the recipient of the placement's services. This can include children, vulnerable adults or any other individual who volunteers interact with on their placement.

When this policy refers to abuse the primary interpretation is sexual abuse or other physical or mental harm deliberately caused to a person. Similarly, exploitation refers to an act of treating a person unfairly in order to gain some kind of benefit.

BEST INTERESTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

All decisions and actions concerning a child or vulnerable adult will take the best interest of the individual as the most important consideration. It will be the policy of VSN that decisions or actions regarding any child, vulnerable adult, or groups of either, should ensure that the positive impact of the decision or action will outweigh any negative impact.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

VSN is committed to enforcing a policy of non-discrimination at all times. All children and vulnerable adults who have an interaction with VSN and our volunteers will be treated with respect and equal consideration.

The guidelines set out in the Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy aim to protect both children and vulnerable adults from abuse, and also volunteers from false accusation of abuse.

It is the policy of VSN to:

- Respect the rights and dignity of the children, vulnerable adults, families and communities with whom VSN works, and always act according to the best interest of the community.
- Demonstrate a commitment to actively preventing the abuse of children and vulnerable adults.
- Take positive action to prevent abusers becoming involved with VSN, and enforce stringent measures against any associate of VSN who commits abuse.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Senior management and staff

Senior managers at VSN are responsible for the development and implementation of this policy. They ensure that its content and the procedures that support its implementation are fit for purpose. They ensure partners understand and support the policy, and adhere to them at all times. They also ensure it is communicated appropriately with volunteers and other relevant stakeholders.

All VSN volunteers will receive a copy of the Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy during their program orientation and must acknowledge, in writing, their receipt and understanding of their responsibilities under the policy. They are made aware of the policy and the Code of Conduct within it throughout their engagement with VSN and any failure to

meet the requirements of the policy is considered a breach of VSN's Terms and Conditions of Service.

VSN VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, SCREENING AND ORIENTATION

- All VSN staff and volunteers will be informed of the Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy.
- VSN reserves the right to terminate a volunteer's program if a criminal background check or reference check reveals that the volunteer is not suitable to work with children or vulnerable adults, for any reason..
- The Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy will be reviewed by local staff and volunteers during the program orientation. The local Program Coordinator shall ensure that all new volunteers acknowledge their receipt and understanding of the policy in writing, with signed copies of their acknowledgement kept on file.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR VSN VOLUNTEERS

This Code of Conduct provides guidelines deemed to be appropriate and proper behavior for VSN volunteers when interacting with children and vulnerable adults. These guidelines are primarily designed to protect the individuals that volunteers work with, but are also intended to protect volunteers from false accusations of inappropriate behavior or abuse.

- No child or vulnerable adult is to be taken outside of the placement site, without making prior arrangements with the placement staff.
- No child or vulnerable adult is to be taken to any volunteer's homestay, guesthouse, hotel or accommodation.
- VSN volunteers are not permitted to take any child or vulnerable adult to a cafe, restaurant or buy them food, unless permission has been given by the placement staff.
- VSN volunteers are not permitted to share a bed or room with any children or vulnerable adult while participating on an VSN program.
- No presents are to be bought for placement participants without prior approval from the placement staff.
- Photography and videography of children or vulnerable adults is only permitted with permission from the placement staff and photos/videos should not be taken in a way intended to belittle or degrade any placement participant.
- VSN volunteers should not act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children or vulnerable adults or perpetrate any form of emotional abuse.
- VSN volunteers must display appropriate language, actions and relationships with children at all times.
- VSN volunteers must take extreme care when interacting physically with placement participants. Under no circumstance should any physical contact be, or have the appearance of being sexual in any way.

- VSN volunteers must not exert inappropriate physical force when dealing with children or vulnerable adults. This includes pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping or any other action that could cause fear, intimidation or distress.
- VSN volunteers must not discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favor particular individual to the exclusion of others.
- VSN volunteers are responsible for their actions and reactions to children and vulnerable adults at all times. Volunteers are always considered to be responsible for their actions regardless of how a child or vulnerable adult behaves towards them.
- Where possible and practical, VSN volunteers should implement the 'two person' rule, whereby two or more responsible adults supervise all activities with children and vulnerable adults.
- Inappropriate conduct toward children and vulnerable adults including failure to follow the behavior standards stated above is grounds for discipline including dismissal from the VSN program. Extreme breaches of policy may result in law enforcement notification and legal action.

Please note, this is not an exhaustive or exclusive list. The principle underlying this policy is that volunteers and staff should avoid actions or behavior which may constitute poor practice or potential abuse and exploitation.

VSN VOLUNTEER COMPLIANCE

I have read the complete Child Protection Policy. I fully understand and agree to follow all procedures contained within. If at any time I fail to follow the guidelines set forth by the Child Protection Policy, I understand that my volunteer program may be terminated by VSN and appropriate action will be taken.

