

1 Introduction

1.1 What is a Child Protection Policy?

A child protection policy is an organization's commitment to protect children from abuse, exploitation, and organizational negligence. This is reflected in the way an organization conducts its activities and the way staff and other representatives behave.

This policy establishes a framework for child protection and outlines minimum expectations for all Micronutrient Forum (MNF) staff and representatives. MNF leadership should determine how to implement the policy to take into account local operating conditions, cultural differences, and applicable local laws. MNF draws a clear distinction between acceptable cultural differences and behavior which harms, abuses, or exploits children – this is never to be tolerated.

We are obliged to protect individuals below 18 years of age (“Minors”) from all types of abuse and maintain an environment that prevents such conduct occurring during the course of MNF's activities. Abuse includes all physical and mental abuse, violence, offensive behavior, sexual activity, neglect and sexual exploitation. MNF representatives are prohibited from engaging in sexual activity of any kind with Minors or anyone below the local age of consent. Mistaken belief of age will not be a defense.

1.2 Purpose of a Child Protection Policy

The purpose of this Child Protection Policy is to:

- Establish a common understanding of child protection issues
- Establish good practices of protecting children across the diverse and complex areas in which MNF operates
- Provide guidelines on how to protect children in the course of our work
- Ensure that MNF staff and other representatives are protected from unfair practices and processes; and
- Provide a framework to ensure all reasonable steps are taken to protect children from abuse, exploitation, and harm.

Although MNF staff typically do not work directly with children, because MNF engages with partners or representatives that may work with children directly or indirectly as part of their programming activities, it is essential to have a policy to ensure that the children with whom MNF staff and partners may engage are adequately protected. The risk of abuse of children can arise from unintentional acts or deliberate actions

Unintentional acts can happen due to a lack of ‘due diligence’ and/or organizational negligence. It can lead to acts of harm such as child injury or abduction due to inadequate care and supervision or lack of policies and procedures to inform staff planning and practice.

Deliberate actions are taken by people with intent to abuse children. Research shows that predatory offenders with the intent to abuse children sometimes deliberately place themselves in an organization and/or job that gives them access to children.



1.3 Scope of the Child Protection Policy

This policy applies to all MNF staff worldwide. For the purposes of this policy, ‘staff’ is defined as anyone who works for MNF, either in a paid or unpaid, full- or part-time capacity. This includes directly employed staff, contractors, Board of Directors, volunteers and implementing partners.

Everyone shares the responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, irrespective of individual roles. All MNF staff members will be responsible for implementing this policy.

Definitions:

1.3.1 Who is a Child?

For the purpose of this policy, the definition of a child is “every human being below the age of 18 years.”

1.3.2 What is Child Abuse?

The definition of abuse commonly used by the World Health Organization is the following: ‘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, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power (see **Appendix 1 – Forms of Child Abuse**).

1.4 Principles Behind MNF’s Child Protection Policy

MNF’s Child Protection Policy is based on the following principles:

Child abuse is never acceptable. All child abuse involves the abuse of children’s rights. **Best interests of the child are paramount** and shall be the primary consideration when making decisions.

Taking responsibility in order to meet our obligations regarding our duty of care towards children and taking action where we believe that a child is at risk or is actually harmed.

Being honest and transparent by informing those we work with, including children, about our Child Protection Policy, and the way we work to try to protect children.

Maintaining confidentiality to protect sensitive personal data. Information should only be shared and handled on a need-to-know basis; access to the information must be necessary for the conduct of one’s official duties.

Working with others to protect children. This includes involving law enforcement and specialist child welfare agencies where necessary.

When we work through partners, they have a responsibility to meet minimum standards of protection for children in their programs.

Monitoring the implementation of the Child Protection Policy. The Child Protection Policy should be reviewed every three years.



1.5 MNF's Commitment to Child Protection

MNF is committed to child protection and the welfare and safety of children. MNF will meet its commitment to protect children from abuse through the following means:

Awareness: we will ensure that all staff and others are aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children.

Prevention: we will ensure, through awareness and good practice, that staff and others minimize the risks to children.

Reporting: we will ensure that staff and others are clear about which steps to take when concerns arise regarding the safety of children.

Responding: we will ensure that action is taken to support and protect children when concerns arise regarding possible abuse, to put an end to any abuse that comes to our attention, and to alleviate the immediate effects.

2 Preventative Actions

2.1 Standards for Staff Behavior

MNF staff must **never**:

- Allow staff to work alone with a child somewhere which is secluded or where they cannot be observed.
- Use physical punishment or chastisement, however acceptable or moderate it may seem.
- Use language intended to belittle, humiliate, or degrade children. Act in ways that may place a child at risk of abuse.
- Abuse children in any way (including not engaging in any sexual activity with anyone below the legal age of sexual consent or 18, depending upon which is higher).
- Have a child/children with whom they are working to stay overnight in their living quarters unsupervised.
- Sleep in the same room or bed as a child with whom they are working.
- Discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favor particular children to the exclusion of others.
- Pay for sexual services of any kind.

MNF staff in contact with children must **always**:

- Create and foster a climate where complacency is not tolerated and every staff member, no matter how trusted, is held to account.
- Be aware of situations that may present risks to children and try to manage them. Plan and organize the work and the workplace so as to minimize risks.
- As much as possible, be visible while working with children and never alone.
- Ensure that a culture of openness exists to enable any issues or concerns to be raised and discussed.
- Ensure that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that poor practice or potentially abusive behavior does not go unchallenged.



- Report any concerns about the protection of children in accordance with this policy. Observe confidentiality and not talk about any situations of actual or suspected abuse that occurs, except in accordance with this policy.

There may be occasions when a staff member has suspicions about an individual or situation that they are unable to verify. In such circumstances, MNF encourages the use of undisclosed protective measures to safeguard those involved.

2.2 Recruitment and Employment

MNF will take all reasonable measures to prevent unsuitable individuals from working with children. Although the majority of people who want to work with MNF are motivated by altruistic values, some individuals may use the organization to gain access to children for abusive and exploitative motives.

MNF will take the following measures so that all MNF staff members are properly screened prior to beginning any work with children:

All job, contract and service advertisements must state that MNF works to protect children and that those seeking work will be assessed regarding their suitability to work with children.

Before employing any staff, appropriate due diligence should be conducted to ensure their suitability.

When hired, MNF staff members will be given a copy of the Child Protection Policy and the Code of Conduct and asked to sign MNF's Child Protection Declaration. By signing the declaration, staff members confirm that they do not have any criminal convictions or convictions for any offence involving any type of harm to a child or children. Staff will also have to declare anything that may affect their suitability to work with children. A false declaration that results in employment will render the person liable to immediate dismissal.

Staff working directly with children should go through a second level of screening that includes, to the extent possible and useful, checking of identification, qualifications, criminal records and obtaining references from previous employers.

Where allegations are made about staff, there should be careful consideration about the appropriateness of the person continuing to work with MNF. This may include suspension during any internal or external investigation and dismissal if the allegation is proved. Human Resources should be consulted and involved in all processes concerning directly employed staff to ensure that workers' employment rights are respected. It is particularly important that such investigations remain confidential.

2.3 Training, Supervision, and Support

Once a staff member has been hired, all new staff members:

- Are informed about the Child Protection Policy and given the opportunity to discuss its implications for them with both their line manager and the CPS as part of their induction/orientation
- Sign MNF's Child Protection Declaration



- Have access to supervision, support, and training regarding child protection and the implementation of the Child Protection Policy
- Are informed about MNF's policy on the use of computers and mobile phones and understand that they must not use this technology for the purpose of accessing, producing, or distributing any information or violent or sexual images that are harmful for children. This includes adult pornography.

3 ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS

When an individual wishes to make a complaint or provide feedback related to this policy but does not wish to approach the management team to do so, an individual has the option of sending an email to notify@micronutrientforum.org.

This email account is administered through the Chair of the Governance Committee of the Board of Directors and handled confidentially so that the complaint or feedback can be investigated and responded to appropriately.

Complaints will be investigated promptly as outlined in MNF's Complaint Investigation Procedure.

Roles and Responsibilities

All MNF representatives are expected to:

- Comply with this and all MNF policies, procedures, and guidelines
- Be alert for situations that violate this Code and report concerns to their supervisor or send an email to notify@micronutrientforum.org
- Assist and support investigations by providing all requested and relevant information

MNF leadership is responsible for:

- Identifying risks and performing risk assessments
- Developing and maintaining effective procedures and controls specific to their area of responsibility, including delegation of roles and responsibilities
- Ensuring that controls are implemented, and procedures are followed
- Ensuring that their staff are aware of and have been trained on this policy

Disciplinary Actions

Anyone who has been found to have violated any part of this policy may be subject to the following disciplinary actions based upon the severity of the violation:

- Verbal or written warning
- Negative performance evaluation
- Suspension
- Dismissal (Immediate termination of employment)
- Legal action

Appendix 1 – Forms of Child Abuse

Forms of Child Abuse

Physical Abuse: This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or caregiver feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes, ill health to a child who they are looking after.

Emotional Abuse: This is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and long-lasting effects on the child’s emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless and unloved, inadequate, or valued only so far as they meet the needs of another person. It can also involve age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children or causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Neglect: This is the persistent failure to meet the child’s basic physical and / or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s physical or cognitive development. For example, inadequate care and supervision, which leaves a child in a dangerous situation where they could be harmed (but only where this can be avoided).

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). Protecting vulnerable persons from sexual exploitation and abuse by our own employees and associated personnel.

Sexual Abuse. Any sexual assault or threat of sexual assault committed with fore coercion, or in the course of an unequal relationship. Any sexual activity with a child is considered to be sexual abuse.

Sexual exploitation. Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically.

Child Protection Declaration

Employee or Representative

I, _____ have read and understood the Child Protection policy. I declare that I will abide by the specified regulations and honor the procedures which are outlined in this Policy.

Signature

Date