Lifewater International: Child Protection Policy

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# **Policy Statement**

Lifewater International (herein referred to as “Lifewater”) recognizes the dignity and rights of all people, especially children. As a child-focused organization, we believe that every child, regardless of race, gender, religion, disability, or socio-economic status, should have the opportunity to experience a life of health and wholeness. Lifewater and all of its staff, volunteers and other representatives, are committed to creating a safe environment for children and young people. Lifewater does not tolerate abuse, neglect, violence, or exploitation in any form.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Lifewater does everything it can to prevent abuse and neglect of children, including sexual abuse. This policy is intended to provide guidance on how to prevent and how to respond to potential instances of child abuse. With the following guidance, Lifewater offices and management personnel can take actions that help reduce the risk of harm to children as well as learn how to appropriately address concerns that arise.

**Scope**

All Lifewater representatives must comply with the terms of this policy at all times. This policy applies to all Lifewater staff, volunteers, visitors and other representatives involved in Lifewater’s activities that involves or comes into contact with anyone under the age of 18. Lifewater management is responsible for ensuring that this policy is followed throughout the organization, and non-compliance should be reported following the processes detailed in this document.

Any persons being considered for a position or activity that may involve children will be required to review and agree to the Child Protection Policy (or substantially local equivalent summary) prior to participating in the work of Lifewater. All potential staff members who will be involved in work with children must submit to a criminal background check prior to beginning work.

**Definitions**

*Child:* All individuals under the age of 18.

*Child abuse:* All forms of action or inaction resulting in harm (or risk of harm) to children under the age of 18 in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.

*Five Key Sub-types:*

1. Physical abuse: Actual physical injury to a child, such as hitting or kicking that leaves a lasting mark (e.g., bruise, abrasion, burn, or cut) or violent shaking, where there is definite knowledge, or reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented by an adult 18 or over.
2. Emotional abuse: Harm done by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection, such as degrading punishments, threats, bullying, or witholding appropriate care and affection, resulting in adverse effects on the behavior and emotional development of a child or young person.
3. Sexual abuse: Any sexual behavior toward a child, whether consensual or not. In determining whether behavior is of a sexual nature, one should ask whether a reasonable observer, looking at the behavior in cultural context, would conclude that it is. This excludes normal, culturally-appropriate affectionate interactions with children and normal health or hygiene care.
4. Neglect: When basic needs such as food, water, warmth and medical care are not met, or when there is failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, resulting in serious impairment of a child’s or young person’s health or development.
5. Exploitation: Use of the child for someone else’s economic or sexual advantage, gratification or profit. These activities are to the detriment of the child’s physical or mental health, education, or social-emotional development. Child participation in work that does not affect health or personal development (such as a child assisting in the family business) or unnecessarily interfere with schooling is generally not considered exploitation.

# **Code of Conduct**

This Code of Conduct applies to Lifewater staff, volunteers, visitors, and anyone acting as a representative of Lifewater. The primary purpose of this Code of Conduct is to protect children from abuse. However, it also protects people who come into contact with children from false accusations.

Lifewater staff, representatives, and visitors should:

1. Strive to create a culture of mutual accountability and openness at work so all child protection issues or concerns can be raised and abusive behavior can be challenged.
2. Be aware of situations that may put children at risk and takes steps to mitigate the risk.
3. Proactively avoid being placed in a compromising or vulnerable position.
4. Ensure physical contact with children is limited, appropriate, generally initiated by the child, and respects the privacy of and boundaries set by the child.
5. Raise any concerns of inappropriate behavior immediately.
6. Encourage children to raise their concerns about staff or others and provide a mechanism for doing so.
7. Take responsibility for monitoring one another and challenge a colleague on his or her behavior if necessary.
8. Ensure two or more adults are present and supervising at all times when children are present. Work with children should be done in a public, visible location whenever possible.
9. Be aware that staff members, representatives, and visitors may interact with minors who, because of circumstances and abuses they have experienced, may use a relationship to seek to obtain “special attention.” The adult is always considered responsible, even if a child behaves inappropriately.
10. Be aware of the power imbalance between an adult and child, and avoid taking any advantage this may provide.

Lifewater staff, representatives, and visitors must not:

1. Develop physical or sexual relationships with children or engage in any sexual activity with a child regardless of the age of consent locally. (Mistaken belief regarding the age of the child is not an acceptable defense.)
2. Touch a child in private areas of the body (breasts, buttocks, or genitals), even if it is culturally acceptable.
3. Spend time with a child unsupervised in their own home, in the home of the child, or in a car. This includes overnight stays in project villages.
4. Sleep in the same bed as a child.
5. Do things of a personal nature that a child could do for him/herself, including dressing, bathing, and grooming (e.g., including the braiding of girls’ hair).
6. Hit or otherwise physically assault or abuse a child, even where this may be culturally acceptable.
7. Use language, make suggestions or offer advice to a child that is inappropriate, offensive, or abusive.
8. Accept, allow or participate in behavior with children that is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
9. Exploit children through child labor, sex work or domestic work.
10. Conduct or be part of harmful traditional practices, including spiritual or ritualistic abuse.
11. Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children.
12. Show favor to particular children to the exclusion of others.
13. Show discrimination of race, culture, age, sex, disability, religion, or political persuasion.

# **Communication Regarding Children**

Lifewater is committed to ensuring all interviews, photos, and video footage of children are undertaken with sensitivity in order to protect the child’s right to dignity, privacy, and confidentiality.

Lifewater staff, representatives, and visitors should:

1. Ensure images are respectful and appropriate, not presenting children as victims.
2. Ensure children are adequately clothed and avoid poses that could be interpreted as sexually suggestive.
3. Obtain permission to use information gathered in interviews and/or images when children are being interviewed or named in a photograph or video footage. Obtain permission from the child’s parents or guardians, as well as from the child him/herself if of an age, understanding and maturity to do so. Consent can also be obtained retrospectively.

# **Hiring**

Any Lifewater staff, volunteers, Board/Advisory Council members, other representatives, or visitors who may interact with children in Lifewater programs are to read, understand, and sign an acknowledgement of the Child Protection Policy or summary prior to participating in any related activities of Lifewater (see Appendix 1 for Child Protection Policy Summary). All independent contractors will have a clause included in their contract that says they have received a copy of Lifewater’s Child Protection Policy and agree to insure their workers abide by the policy.

All individuals hired through Lifewater’s HQ must undergo a criminal background check. All individuals hired through Lifewater’s international field offices who will be involved in work with children must undergo and pass a criminal background check or other screening process as is customary and available in each location.

Individuals with a prior conviction for a crime against children will not be hired or engaged by Lifewater. If such information is discovered after initial hire, Lifewater reserves the right to terminate employment without cause.

# **Reporting and Responses Procedures**

Lifewater will comply with all laws regarding reporting any violation of laws to local or state authorities, including police departments and child protection agencies. When an incident occurs, effort should be made to respect the confidentiality of those involved. Information should be shared only with the appropriate people, and any investigation should be left to the senior management and/or relevant authorities. Moreover, only information directly relevant to the potential abuse situation will be shared.

Any allegation or concern regarding the abuse of a child should be treated seriously. Any Lifewater visitor should report any such concerns to a Lifewater staff member, who will then follow the procedures below. Actions and decisions should always take into consideration the best interest of the child. When a child discloses abuse or makes an allegation of abuse or harm, Lifewater staff must:

1. Reassure the child
2. Listen carefully and calmly, and do not interrupt
3. Ask enough questions to be able to take immediate action
4. Do not promise secrecy or confidentiality
5. Take the child seriously and show acceptance of what is being said, even if there are doubts
6. Take any necessary steps to ensure the safety of the child
7. Inform the child of the next steps in the process
8. Make notes on what was said as soon as possible

When an allegation is made against someone not affiliated with Lifewater, the staff member receiving the report should alert the reporting Vice President and the President/CEO. The Vice President and President/CEO (along with reporting Country Director or Regional Director, if applicable) will then report to necessary authorities.

Protection incidents involving someone affiliated with Lifewater should be managed according to the procedure below:

1. As soon as any Lifewater staff member or representative observes or learns of any incident or allegation of abuse, by someone affiliated with Lifewater, that person is responsible for alerting the reporting Vice President and the President/CEO.
   * Where there are legal obligations and/or in case of strong evidence of illegal activity, Lifewater will engage the government’s child protection department. Where there is a possibility of imminent harm, Lifewater will also immediately involve the local police.
2. Within 24 hours, the reporting person completes and submits an Incident Reporting Form to the reporting Vice President and the President/CEO.
3. The Vice President or President/CEO then informs the reporting Country Director and Regional Director if the incident is in his/her country of operation.
4. Lifewater initiates an internal investigation to clarify what happened and collects necessary evidence (e.g., interviews, reports). When appropriate or necessary, investigations will be performed by an external, independent party.
   * Lifewater will consult legal counsel prior to beginning an investigation.
5. Lifewater will inform the child and his/her family and the alleged perpetrator about their right to ask for an independent investigation. When an investigation is taking place, the individual under investigation will be placed on an administrative leave of absence until the investigation has been completed. Where the individual is a paid staff member, the leave of absence will be paid at the rate of the individual’s regular salary in keeping with local labor law and Lifewater human resources policy.
6. Once the investigation is complete, the reporting Vice President and President/CEO, along with the Country Director and Regional Director, if applicable, will discuss the findings and make a decision.
7. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, immediate disciplinary action and any other action that may be appropriate will be taken. This may mean, for example, dismissal (for staff members) or termination of the contract (for contractors).
   * Lifewater will consult local legal counsel to ensure that the process and decisions are in accordance with national labor laws and regulations. In the event that a Lifewater staff member or representative is charged for suspected abuse, and the allegation is verified, Lifewater will disclose this information if requested through a reference check. Any disclosures will be made in accordance with applicable law and/or customs.

**Incident Reporting Overview**

# **Relevant Contact Numbers**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Title/Affiliation | Contact Details |
|  | Police Department |  |
|  | Social Services Dept/Child Protection Unit |  |
|  | Legal Counsel |  |

# 

# **Appendices**

## **Appendix 1: Child Protection Policy Summary**

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All Lifewater representatives must comply with the terms of the Child Protection Policy and the Code of Conduct at all times. This policy applies to all Lifewater staff, volunteers, visitors and other representatives involved in Lifewater’s work that involves or comes into contact with anyone under the age of 18. A copy of the full policy is posted in the country office and available upon request.

**Reporting and Response**

Any Lifewater visitor who has concerns regarding abuse should report to a Lifewater staff member, who will then follow the procedures below. As soon as any Lifewater staff member or representative observes or learns of any incident or allegation of abuse by someone affiliated with Lifewater or a third party, that staff member is responsible for alerting the reporting Vice-President and President/CEO. The Vice-President and President/CEO will initiate a response in line with the process detailed in the Child Protection Policy. If allegations are verified, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate and in line with the Child Protection Policy. Lifewater will comply with all laws regarding reporting any violation of laws to local or state authorities, including police departments and child protection agencies.

**Code of Conduct**

Lifewater staff, representatives, and visitors should:

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6. Encourage children to raise their concerns about staff or others and provide a mechanism for doing so.
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8. Ensure two or more adults are present and supervising at all times when children are present. Work with children should be done in a public, visible location whenever possible.
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10. Be aware of the power imbalance between an adult and child, and avoid taking any advantage this may provide.

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4. Sleep in the same bed as a child.
5. Do things of a personal nature that a child could do for him/herself, including dressing, bathing, and grooming (e.g., including the braiding of girls’ hair).
6. Hit or otherwise physically assault or abuse a child, even where this may be culturally acceptable.
7. Use language, make suggestions or offer advice to a child that is inappropriate, offensive, or abusive.
8. Accept, allow or participate in behavior with children that is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
9. Exploit children through child labor, sex work or domestic work.
10. Conduct or be part of harmful traditional practices, including spiritual or ritualistic abuse.
11. Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children.
12. Show favor to particular children to the exclusion of others.
13. Show discrimination of race, culture, age, sex, disability, religion, or political persuasion.

## 

## **Appendix 2: Acknowledgement of Receipt**

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ understand and acknowledge that

* I have received and reviewed a copy of the Child Protection Policy (or summary) of Lifewater. I understand that Lifewater International will not tolerate any behavior that commits or condones abuse and/or exploits the children who a part of its programs. I understand that I am required to comply with the policy as stated and I agree to the terms set out in the policy; and
* I am responsible to seek clarification from my supervisor or Vice President or President/CEO on any questions that I have about the policy before signing below; and
* Disciplinary action, in accordance with the Child Protection Policy, will be taken against anyone found guilty of committing abuse or exploitation; and
* I know how to report abuse in accordance with the policy.

Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Applicant Lifewater Signing Authority

## **Appendix 3: Incident Reporting Form**

The information in this form is confidential. It should be submitted to the reporting Vice President and President/CEO, who will then inform the Country Director and Regional Director when appropriate.

*Report Details*

Time

Date

Place

*Person Reporting*

Name

Contact details

Position at Lifewater

Relationship to child

Has the child given permission for completion and submission of this form?

*Child Details* (If more than 1, complete this section for each child)

Name

Age

Gender

Ethnicity

Religion

Physical/developmental disabilities

Names of parents

Address (and who the child lives with)

Other personal information

Any immediate medical or safety issues?

Has the child sought medical care? If yes, where and what treatment was provided?

Where is the child now? Is s/he in a safe situation?

Any cultural or family issues to be aware of?

*Alleged Perpetrator Details*

Name

Job title

Organization

Address

Age

Sex

*Description of Allegation*

Who disclosed the abuse?

Was the abuse observed or suspected by you or by someone else?

What is alleged to have happened?

To the extent possible, exactly what the child said

Date(s), time(s), location(s) of incident(s)

Have any external agencies been contacted? If yes, what advice was given? Were any actions taken? Who else knows?

Any additional information?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature Date