

Guidelines for working with children



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Definitions¹

Child: Equitas uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) definition of a child, which is any person under the age of 18.

Child protection: The term used to describe the responsibilities and activities undertaken to prevent or stop children from being abused or neglected.

Staff: This includes all Equitas employees.

Partners: Organizations that have signed memoranda of understanding with Equitas and who are directly involved in implementing projects with Equitas.

Participation: Participation is a fundamental right recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The concept of participation is implicit in Article 3 (Right to life, freedom, personal security), Article 18 (Right of belief and religion), Article 20 (Right to peaceful assembly and association), Article 21 (Right to participate in public affairs and elections), and article 27 (Right to participate in a community's cultural life). The right to participation is guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25). It is also implicit in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Articles 8 (on freedom of association), 13 (on education), and 15 (on cultural life). In the Convention on the Rights of the Child the right to participate is expressed in Article 12 (the right to express themselves and to be heard).

Child abuse: Child abuse includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect, bullying, child labour, domestic violence and exploitation including commercial sexual exploitation. Both boys and girls can be the victims of child abuse. Child abuse can be inflicted on a child by men or women, or by children themselves, and, in some cases, by professionals and other adults working with children in positions of trust abuse children.

Working with children: Being in a position that involves regular contact with children, either as part of the person's position description or due to the context of the work that brings the person into regular contact with children.

¹ Adapted from 's Child Protection Policy. (2010). Retrieved Online:
http://www.savethechildren.org.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/5761/Child-Protection_Policy-and-Code_JAN2011-2.pdf

1. Introduction

1.1 Equitas—International Centre for Human Rights Education

Equitas—International Centre for Human Rights Education is a non-profit organization that works for the advancement of equality, social justice and respect for human dignity in Canada and around the world through transformative human rights education programs.

We equip local human rights defenders and educators to build more inclusive communities and to contribute to social and economic development goals through democratic participation.

1.2 Equitas' values

Our name, Equitas, is inspired from the Latin word for *justice, equity and fairness*. In addition to the inspiration we take from the principles and values of human rights, all our work and interaction with stakeholders are guided by the following organizational values:

- Integrity
- Focus and Direction
- Trust and Mutual Respect
- Openness
- Partnership
- Innovation

1.3 Equitas' commitment to protect children

Equitas is committed to protecting children's rights regardless of sex, social status, language, religion, political beliefs, civil status, disability, sexual orientation, ethic or nation origin.

Equitas' work with children is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which states

- Children should be protected from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation, including sexual abuse (Article 19).
- Children have the right to participate and be heard in matters that concern them (Article 12).

1.4 The purpose of the guidelines for working with children

The purpose of this document is to provide Equitas staff, board, volunteers and interns, as well as partners, with clear guidance on what we expect of each other in terms of behaviour, as well as providing examples of acceptable and unacceptable conduct when interacting with children in our work. It is the responsibility of Equitas staff, board, volunteers and interns to think about and manage our behaviour to reflect the values and principles of Equitas and the expectations set out in the guidelines for working with children.

2. Human rights framework for working with children

Equitas' commitment to child protection is based on the four "General Principles," identified by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The guiding principles of the Convention, which include non-discrimination; adherence to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and the right to be heard and participate. They represent the underlying requirements for any and all rights to be realized. These principles underpin the guidelines for working with children.²

- **Article 2--Non-discrimination**, requires the application of all the rights in the CRC to all children at all times and identification of children who may require special measures for the full implementation of their rights
- **Article 3.1 --The best interests of the child**, states that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children
- **Article 6—Right to life, survival and development**, requires that children receive the care necessary to ensure their physical, mental and emotional health as well as their intellectual, social and cultural development
- **Article 12--The right to be heard**, states that children's opinions must be sought in matters that affect them, and that their views must be given due weight.

² UNICEF. 2015. Rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved Online: http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30177.html

3. Guidelines for working with children

Equitas staff, board, volunteers, interns and partners recognize there is a critical responsibility to “do no harm” in our interactions with children. Moving beyond the “do no harm” principle, we also seek to bolster resilience and promote growth.

When interacting with children in our programs and in all of Equitas’ work, we remain committed to implementing the following practices, which are based on the four guiding principles of the CRC.

All Equitas staff, board, volunteers, interns and potentially partners³ must abide by these guidelines when working with children.

We will:

- Treat all children with respect regardless of sex, social status, language, religion, political beliefs, civil status, disability, sexual orientation, ethic or nation origin
- Provide a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for all children
- Encourage children to speak up about issues that affect them
- Ensure that, whenever possible, another adult is present when working with children, or in the proximity of children
- Comply with local, national and international child protection laws
- Advise Equitas supervisor/manager and or appropriate authorities if a child reports abuse
- Advise Equitas supervisor/manager of involvement in any situation where actions could be misinterpreted
- Advise supervisor/manager if involved in any situation which would be likely to bring the organization into disrepute
- Advise supervisor/manager if investigated for any crime or charged with any criminal offence
- Treat any information disclosed by a child as confidential unless the safety or security of the child is at risk

We will not:

- Use inappropriate language – whether of an offensive, discriminatory, demeaning, abusive or sexual nature – when speaking with or whilst in the presence of a child Engage in behaviour to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade a child, or otherwise emotionally abuse a child
- Marry a person under the age of 18
- Act in a sexually provocative manner or engage children in any form of sexual activity, including paying for sexual services
- Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch a child in an inappropriate, unnecessary or culturally insensitive way
- Condone or participate in, behaviour with children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive
- Discriminate against or in favour of particular children to the exclusion of others
- Hire children for domestic or any other labour which is inappropriate for their age or development, interferes with their education or play, or places them at risk of injury

³ See Section 3. *Sharing the guidelines with partners.*

- Do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves such as toileting them or changing their clothes
- Sleep in close proximity to any children unless it is absolutely necessary, in which case staff will keep their supervisor/manager informed and ensure another adult is present, where possible (noting that this does not apply to children of staff)
- Access or create sexually abusive images of children
- Use computers, mobile phones, video or digital cameras or any other technology for the purpose of exploiting or harassing children.

Use of children's images

Before taking a picture or filming a child for work related purposes, we will:

- Assess and comply with local traditions or restrictions on reproducing personal images
- At a minimum, obtain and document verbal consent from children and/or their parent or guardian and explain how the picture or film will be used. Written consent should be obtained, where possible
- Ensure pictures, films, videos and DVDs present children in a dignified and respectful manner and not in a vulnerable or submissive manner
- Children should be adequately clothed and not in poses that could be perceived as sexually suggestive
- Ensure images are honest representations of the situations and the facts
- Ensure the identities of children in pictures and electronic images are not disclosed
- Ensure these files are stored securely and access is limited on a needs basis to relevant staff only

4. Sharing the guidelines with partners

In order to ensure children's rights are protected and promoted in all contexts where Equitas works, it is important to engage partner organizations in a discussion about our guidelines for working with children.

Each community in which we work may be different. Below are some steps you can follow to mitigate the risks and challenges of working with children.

1. Make available copies of these guidelines in the language of the staff of the partner organization
2. Ask partner organizations for their feedback using the questions below:
 - Do you have guidelines in place for working with children?
 - Are there local resources or services for children that you can access? If so, what are they?
 - Would the Equitas guidelines be useful in the context of your work? Why or why not?
 - Would you add and/or take out anything?
 - Would you implement and share these guidelines with other organizations? Partners?
3. Organize a meeting with the partner to discuss the guidelines, as well as local resources and services available for children.
4. Agree on a process for following up on any issues that may arise when working with children, such as reports of abuse or neglect. Ensure the process is integrated into the guidelines.
5. Produce an adapted version of the guidelines for local use, if applicable.