

Child safeguarding FAQs

Below are a list of frequently asked questions. If you are a partner of Oak Foundation and your question is not listed below, please get in touch with us and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

What is a child safeguarding policy?

A child safeguarding policy represents an organisational commitment to ensure that children are treated with respect, do not face abusive or demeaning language or behaviour, are protected from physical and sexual violence and abuse and are not exploited in domestic work or other labour, among other key priorities.

Oak Foundation believes that safeguarding children is 'everybody's business'. There is an obligation on all organisations and professionals working or in contact with children to strive to ensure their operations are 'child safe'. This means that staff and contractors do not represent a risk to children and that programmes, policies and practices are designed and developed in ways that promote the protection of children.

To have an idea what a child safeguarding policy looks like, you can have a look at Oak Foundation's own policy, available on our website.

What is the value of a child safeguarding policy?

It is hard to quantify the value of a policy which protects children from violence, abuse and violations of human rights, but in the words of the Autonomous Women's Center, one of Oak's first partners to implement a child safeguarding policy, "a child safeguarding policy helps in raising awareness of unacceptable behaviour regarding child welfare and details responsibilities of all for the child welfare and protection. It also contributes to changing the culture of tolerance for the disrespect of children, their neglect and abuse."

A policy communicates the intention of an organisation to protect children. It helps to lay down standards of conduct and behaviour, provides a clear overview of what is acceptable and not as well as giving a clear pathway to follow if there are breaches of the policy.

What does 'contact with children and working with children' mean?

Contact with children means working on an activity or in a position that involves or may involve contact with children, either under the position description or due to the nature of the work environment. This includes indirect contact with children in the community.

Working with children means being engaged in an activity with a child where the contact would reasonably be expected as a normal part of the activity and the contact is not incidental to the activity. Working includes volunteering or other unpaid work.

Oak grantees that are in contact with children or working with children need to put in place safeguarding measures. This could include the development of a child safeguarding policy.

Who is considered a 'child'?

A 'child' refers to all human beings under the age of 18. This is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the world's most widely ratified convention.

Does my organisation need a child safeguarding policy?

All grantee partners coming into contact with children need to assess the risks their programming, operations and services potentially have on children. Depending on the level of contact, your organisation might need to develop a policy or put in place other safeguarding measures such as a code of conduct, media policies, human resource measures or risk assessments.

If your organisation works directly with children, you need a safeguarding policy. The first step is to discuss with your programme officer and fill out Oak's self-audit, which is provided when you apply for a grant.

What is the process for developing the policy?

The child safeguarding policy development process is tailored to suit the needs of individual grantees and will differ across and within Oak Foundation programme areas; however, the process will follow this basic path:

Initial assessment: prospective grantee completes self-audit and submits it with supporting evidence (this includes existing policies, procedures and guidelines on the topic).

Review of self-audit: Oak Foundation and partners review the self-audit and materials provided.

Outcomes and actions: Oak and prospective grantee discuss outcomes and agree on next steps. Grantees are provided technical support by one of our expert service provider organisations in their region.

Implementation and monitoring: Grantee develops an implementation and monitoring plan that is reported on in progress reports to Oak Foundation.

How long does it take for the policy to be developed?

The time it takes to develop a policy depends on: the size of the organisation; the number of branch or country offices; existing policies and guidance on the topic; and the ability to dedicate staff time and the organisation's commitment to the process, among others.

What happens once the policy is in place?

A child safeguarding policy is a living document. It needs to be brought to life through an implementation plan outlining the action the organisation is taking to adhere to the commitments outlined in the policy. This includes how often the policy is revised, how staff will be kept informed and trained, as well as how the organisation keeps itself accountable to its board and management.

What support can we expect from Oak Foundation?

Oak Foundation supports its partners in all aspects of the safeguarding children policy development. Oak has contracted a number of expert service providers around the world to help develop quality child safeguarding policies and implementation plans that are in line with both your national standards as well as international standards.

Support from Oak Foundation and service providers can include, but is not limited to: providing toolkits, basic structures and sample documents; organising workshops, online webinars; introducing you to consultants when needed; and being available for questions that you might have throughout the process.

Is there any funding available for the development of safeguarding policies and implementation plans?

As mentioned above, we are keen to support our partners to become child-safe organisations. The best thing to do is to raise this with your Oak programme officer. With the knowledge they have of your organisation as well as our offer of safeguarding support, they will be able to support you and direct you towards appropriate support.

Does Oak Foundation have its own child safeguarding policy?

Yes. Oak Foundation holds itself as a Foundation and all its employees accountable to a high standard of child protection. Oak Foundation has had a child safeguarding policy in place since 2013. The policy stemmed from Oak's commitment to a world in which all children and adults are protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

Oak's policy can be found on our website and applies to all staff employed by Oak Foundation, as well as Trustees and Advisors to the Board, volunteers and visitors sent by Oak to Oak-funded programmes, interns and other contracted personnel, including consultants.

We review our policy every two years. The last revision was in 2018 and we are currently reviewing it with the objective of approval from our Board of Trustees in 2020.

How many Oak Foundation partners have a child safeguarding policy in place?

Since 2015, over 350 grantees have received support to develop or implement a child safeguarding policy.

How do you respond to allegations of violations of the child safeguarding policy?

Any breach of the Oak child safeguarding policy needs to be reported on our report a concern webpage. Oak has designated officers based in Geneva that receive and deal with all concerns in a discreet manner.

For Oak grantees, we ask that you include a reporting procedure in your child safeguarding policy that outlines who to report to and how concerns will be dealt with. Although we do not require grantee partners to inform us of a breach of their child safeguarding policy, we encourage you to get in touch if you need support.