



# CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Creating a safe and positive environment for  
the children

## CONTENT

This publication emphasizes our values and standards of professional conduct in working with children for our employees, associates and volunteers

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## ABOUT US

Centre Sirius is a centre for psychological counseling, educational training and research. It was founded on 27 July 2006 with the goal of promoting, implementing and advancing psychological and psychosocial assistance and support in order to prevent risky behaviour and improve quality of life for individuals, families, groups and society at large.

The Centre provides counselling and education to children, youth, adults, families and organisations faced with everyday problems and to improve their quality of life. Moreover, the Centre organises expert seminars, lectures, courses and workshops.

The Sirius Centre comprises of a team of experts from the field of psychology and sociology who work closely with psychiatrists, social educators, speech therapists, social workers and art educators. Business experts run programs for establishing entrepreneurship.

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### SCOPE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Since one part of Sirius' activities is aimed at providing services of individual and group psychological interventions to children and youth, it is necessary to establish code of ethic and to adopt standards of professional conduct in working with children at the organization level.

The child protection policy refers to common values, principles and beliefs, as well as the practical rules of conduct when working with children. It contains the concrete steps to be taken in fulfilling our child protection obligations.

Sirius is dedicated to preserving the best interests of the children we work with, what we achieve by creating and implementing programs that promote their physical and mental health. By adopting this document, we want to ensure that the employees, associates and volunteers of Sirius know the values that lead us in working with children and that our behavior protects the dignity of the children we work with.

The document cites standards defining the ways in which Sirius' employees, associates and volunteers proceed in taking measures to protect children's rights and the obligation to report any breach of these rights to the legal authorities.

The terms used in this document, which have gender significance, regardless of whether they are used in male or female genera, cover equally men and women.

Adhering to these standards ensures the protection of the child and encourages the creation of conditions for the best development of the child.

## LEGISLATION FRAMEWORK

The Sirius Center's child protection policy has been developed in accordance with the legal guidelines for the protection of children's rights:

- ❖ United Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1989
- ❖ Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, 2012
- ❖ Law of personal data protection, 2003 (NN 103/03, 118/06, 41/08, 130/11, 106/12)
- ❖ Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, 1990 (NN 56/90, 135/97, 8/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10, 05/14)
- ❖ The Law on Protection from Domestic Violence (NN 137/09, 14/10, 60/10)
- ❖ Protocol on the Treatment of Sexual Violence, 2014
- ❖ Protocol on Treatment of Domestic Violence, 2004
- ❖ Protocol on the Treatment of Violence between Children and Youth, 2004
- ❖ Protocol on the Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014
- ❖ Ethical code of research with children, 2003
- ❖ Code of ethics of psychological activity, 2005

## DEFINITIONS

**Child** is any person under the age of 18, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Child abuse or maltreatment** includes, according to the World Health Organisation (1999), “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”.

**Child protection** is a broad term used to describe principles, policies, standards, guidelines and procedures designed to protect children from intentional and unintentional harm. In the context of this document, it particularly concerns the responsibilities of the organisations and staff, regarding the children they work with.

**Child Protection Policy**, in its simplified form, is a statement of intent that shows a commitment to protect children from harm, making clear to everyone involved what is required in terms of the children’s protection. It is an instrument to promote a safer environment for children and to state the organisations’ commitment to take care of them.

**Informed consent** is the ability to give consent in a free and informed way, always taking into account the age and the level of development of the child. For the purposes of using a child’s photograph (e.g. for advertisement), the person responsible for said child must consent; however, the child should also be informed and understand in what he/she will be involved, so he/she can give their “informed consent”.

**Direct contact** with children means being in the physical presence of children while the organisation’s work is being developed. It includes occasional or frequent contact, as well as the short or long term contact.

**Indirect contact** with children includes all the situations when a person has access to children’s personal information, such as names and addresses, photographs or any other personal content, in the context of the organisation’s work. Indirect contact should also be considered for funding entities that support projects aimed at children, since this has an impact on them (therefore requiring responsibilities in terms child protection).

**Physical abuse:** actual or potential physical harm perpetrated by another person, adult or child. it may involve hitting, shaking, poisoning, drowning and burning. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

**Emotional abuse:** persistent emotional maltreatment that impacts on a child’s emotional development. Emotionally abusive acts include restriction of

movement, degrading, humiliating, bullying (including cyber bullying), and threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

**Sexual abuse:** forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities that he or she does not fully understand and has little choice in consenting to. This may include, but is not limited to, rape, oral sex, penetration, or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching. It may also include involving children in looking at, or producing sexual images, watching sexual activities and encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

**Child sexual exploitation:** a form of sexual abuse that involves children being engaged in any sexual activity in exchange for money, gifts, food, accommodation, affection, status, or anything else that they or their family needs. It usually involves a child being manipulated or coerced, which may involve befriending children, gaining their trust, and subjecting them to drugs and alcohol. The abusive relationship between victim and perpetrator involves an imbalance of power where the victim's options are limited. It is a form of abuse that can be misunderstood by children and adults as consensual. Child sexual exploitation manifests in different ways. It can involve an older perpetrator exercising financial, emotional or physical control over a young person. It can involve peers manipulating or forcing victims into sexual activity, sometimes within gangs and in gang-affected neighbourhoods. It may also involve opportunistic or organised networks of perpetrators who profit financially from trafficking young victims between different locations to engage in sexual activity with multiple men.

**Neglect and negligent treatment:** allowing for context, resources and circumstances, neglect and negligent treatment refers to a persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, which is likely to result in serious impairment of a child's healthy physical, spiritual, moral and mental development. It includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm and provide for nutrition, shelter and safe living/working conditions. It may also involve maternal neglect during pregnancy as a result of drug or alcohol misuse and the neglect and ill treatment of a disabled child.

## OUR VALUES AND PRICIPLES IN WORK WITH CHILDREN

- Health, safety and well-being of children are our organization's priorities.
- By our activity, we are aiming to improve the psychological and emotional development of children to reach their full potential.

- We listen and carefully consider the child's attitudes. We encourage children to express their needs and advocate for their own rights.
- We appreciate, respect and understand the children within their own culture, religion and ethnicity. Differences are being accessed as the wealth and prerequisite for building a human and democratic society. Through the interaction of diversity we develop new forms of action based on equality of dignity and rights for all members of society.
- Abuse of children in any circumstances is not acceptable.
- Employees, associates and volunteers of Sirius are obliged to protect the children they work with. We work with users accountable and professionally, respecting the ethical principles and standards of the profession and the services provided. We base our work on high ethical and legal standards.
- Partners with whom we collaborate in projects aimed at children are also obliged to meet the legal standards of child protection in their programs. Building a human society and cultivating the values on which it is based is possible only by the cooperation of all those who strive for the same goal.

**IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT THESE VALUES, IN CONTACT WITH CHILDREN, EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES AND VOLUNTEERS ARE OBLIGED TO:**

- Recognize and appreciate the attitudes that children express;
- Work with children in a way that strengthens their capacities and ability and develops their skills and potentials;
- Work with children in the spirit of cooperation with mutual trust and respect;
- Accepting children within the context in which they live;
- Work in partnership with parents/guardians, foster parents and other professionals to ensure the protection of children;
- Make all programs and workshops in accordance with the best interests of children.
- Develop these standards in a language acceptable to children.

# STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT OF EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES AND VOLUNTEERS IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN

EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES AND VOLUNTEERS OF SIRIUS ARE OBLIGED TO ASSURE THE FOLLOWING TO THE CHILDREN THEY WORK WITH:

- Protection of rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, conventions, laws, implementing regulations;
- Implementation of programs that promote the protection of child rights, safety and health;
- A safe and reliable way of recording violations of the standards outlined in this document, providing mechanisms for collecting complaints in a confidential and safe manner, providing support to victims and informing institutions responsible for violating the rights of the children.

EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES AND VOLUNTEERS OF SIRIUS WHO ARE IN DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONTACT WITH CHILDREN IN THEIR WORK SHOULD:

- Be aware of situations that may pose a risk to children and know how to react properly in such situations;
- Plan and organize work and workplace so that all potential risks are minimized;
- Enable children to talk openly about any problem;
- Report to the legal institutions any misconduct on children, which rises a justified suspicion of abuse and / or neglect;
- Talk to children about their contact with Sirius employees, volunteers and associates, and encourage them to express themselves freely if they are concerned or worried; (create an environment in which children will feel safe and respected);
- Teach children about their rights and the way they can deal with the violation of these rights. Empower the children to talk about the problems they are facing;
- Use a child-centred and participative approach, where children are treated as an active citizen with rights; respect their integrity and dignity

and allow them to be actively involved in the decision-making processes concerning their own lives;

- Be aware of the power balance between the adult and the child and avoid taking any advantage of this (abuse of power);
- Avoid being placed in vulnerable or compromising situation; make themselves visible when working with children and try to be accompanied by another adult, except when required in the scope of the intervention (e.g. psychological counselling);
- Analyse and respect the suitability and timing for physical contact with children, namely concerning normal acts, such as holding hands or greeting with a kiss. Children must be comfortable with that;
- Immediately report to coordinators any situation that could be object of misinterpretation by others; avoid behaving in a way that could be misinterpreted by third parties;
- Be caring and responsible; try to be a positive role model;
- Treat children equally, regardless of gender, gender identity and sexual orientation; ethnic background; religious and political options; level of functionality (e.g. cognitive impairment or other disabilities) or life events (e.g. pregnant teenagers). Avoid exercising any type of persuasion regarding the child's options (e.g. religious, political);
- Be aware that child abuse can also be perpetrated by peers; try to avoid putting children in risky situations with their peers, such as mixing older and younger individuals or vulnerable children without supervision;
- Ask permission from the children and their caregivers before taking photographs of them and using their image; be very clear and transparent about the use of those images; make sure the faces or other characteristics aren't visible.

EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES AND VOLUNTEERS OF SIRIUS IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN SHOULD NEVER:

- Strike or otherwise physically hurt or physically abuse children;
- Develop unnecessary physical contact with children;
- Develop sexual contact with children;
- Behave in an inappropriate or sexually provocative way;
- Develop such a relationship with children, which could in any way be considered exploitative or abusive;
- Act in a manner that could increase or cause the risk of the child being abused;

- Use language phrases, make suggestions, or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or otherwise humiliating;
- Avoid responding adequately to illegal, dangerous or violent behavior of children;
- Fail to respond adequately to the illegal, dangerous or violent behavior of parents / guardians towards children;
- Behave in a way that prevents, humiliates, undermines or degrades children, or otherwise uses any form of emotional abuse;
- Discriminate, treat or favor certain children differently, excluding the other;
- Publish photos or videos of children attending workshops to promote Sirius activities without the informed consent of their parents;
- Expose children to inappropriate content that may cause emotional damage such as violence or pornography;
- Expose children to child labour and hazardous work;
- Neglect children, which includes not offering them the adequate care and not meeting their needs;
- Participate in any dangerous, illegal or abusive behavior toward children;
- Do things the children are able to do for themselves (e.g. dressing, writing their homework);
- Ignore or undervalue concerns raised by the children about harm being caused to them;
- Be alone with the children and invisible from others for an excessive amount of time, including in a car, in your home/or the home of a child; make contact with children that is not under supervision/seen by another staff member.

#### THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IS REALIZED THROUGH:

- Preventing violence among children;
- Preventing all forms of violence of adults on children;
- Adequate treatment of Sirius employees towards victims of violence;
- Adequate treatment of Sirius employees against child rights violators;
- Reporting any violation of children's rights to the legal authorities;
- Protecting personal information of children and parents / guardians / foster parents involved in Sirius programs;
- Ensuring adequate assistance to victims of child rights violations within Sirius through professional psychological assistance and / or referral to institutions that enable this and by reporting cases to the legal authorities.

TO ENSURE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILD PROTECTION STANDARDS, IT IS NECESSARY THAT:

- Employees, associates and volunteers of Sirius are introduced to the Child Protection Policy at the organization level;
- Employees, associates and volunteers, by signing the contract (contract of employment, service contract, copyright and / or voluntary agreement), have the obligation to comply with the Standards of Treatment of Children with which they are acquainted when signing the Contract;
- The recruitment process, both for employees and volunteers of Sirius, includes the suitability check for working with children and young people;
- We work in partnership with parents / guardians and / or other specialists to ensure the protection of children;
- In cases of suspected violation of children's rights, physical and emotional violence, sexual abuse, neglect, neglected behavior, abuse or exploitation of the child, Sirius employees are obliged to initiate proceedings to protect the rights of the child;
- The procedure for the protection of the child's rights involves reporting the suspicion to the head of the office and to the program leaders, who then take action under the law and report the case to the legal institutions. If the suspect concerns an employee, associate or volunteer of Sirius, the head of the office and the program leader will investigate, take disciplinary measures and report the case to the legal institutions in accordance with the legal provisions. Until the completion of the internal investigation and / or investigation of the legal authorities, the suspect will not be able to work with the children. Upon completion of the proceedings, if the suspect is not released from suspicion, disciplinary measures will be imposed in accordance with the severity of the offense: the warning or dissolution of the contract with Sirius. In the case of confirmed violation of children's rights of co-operating or partner organizations, Sirius will terminate that co-operation or partnership.
- Sirius employees are obliged to provide documentation to the police and provide information on the violation of the child's rights.
- We will publish the Child Protection Policy on the Sirius web site in a language that is acceptable to children.