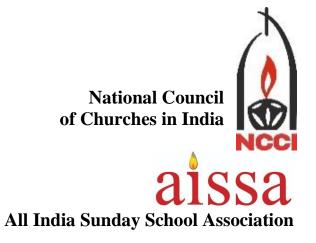
Child Safeguarding (Care & Protection) Policy 2023



NCCI Child Safeguarding (Care & Protection) Policy

Approved by the General Assembly, Hyderabad on April 2023

A. PREAMBLE

We, the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), an ecumenical expression of about 14 million members from 30 different Protestant and Orthodox church confessions, 17 Regional Councils, and 25 other churches related and ecumenical bodies rooted in the gospel

as revealed in the person, life and work of Jesus Christ, strongly believe that human beings, including children, derive dignity and worth from the creation of humans in God's own image and likeness. We firmly believe that all individuals are equally valuable to God and that the natural dignity and worth endowed in each one has to be protected and preserved. They have the right to be treated fairly and properly and to be given the options to develop to their full ability.



More importantly, NCCI affirms and acknowledges that children are bestowed with special rights due to their special and unique needs. We realise our responsibility to uphold their rights, especially their undeniable right to safeguarding, peace, justice, and harmonious environment. Out of our deep theological convictions and spiritual reflections, we understand that it is our calling to build safe environments in our families, churches, communities, and institutions, where men, women, LGBTQI, specially abled, children and adults, including those who are hurt and suffering, may find love, care, justice, healing, and wholeness.

B. SOCIAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ECUMENICAL IMPERATIVES

a. Social Imperatives

We are pained and moved when we hear reports of millions of children becoming helpless victims of violence and atrocities of all kinds. They are ill-treated due to caste, class, exploited, forced into trafficking and prostitution rackets, kidnapped from their homes and schools for high ransom, forced into military service in regions of conflict, sold into bonded labour, and in some extreme cases, into slavery and many more adversaries.

While accounts of children being discriminated against on the basis of their caste, nationality, religion, ethnic origins, disabilities, health and socio-economic conditions are quite disturbing, the plight of children suffering in refugee camps both due to war and internal displacement are equally pathetic. Violence and brutality, both domestic and otherwise,

commonly occur in all strata of the community. The consequences of child abuse are overwhelmingly disturbing! Not only do these endanger their lives, but they also have deep,

long-lasting, adverse, and distressing effects on their mental, emotional, and physical health.

Though several international and our country laws and acts have been created and enforced for the protection of children, massive loopholes still exist in their practical implementation, thus perpetuating and

worsening the suffering of children. Growing incidences of brutality and cruelty result in the violation of the dignity of children in India.

Shocked and dismayed at the status of God's children, irrespective of their colour, caste, religion, physical state, and nationality, it is felt that churches should take their calling seriously.

They should acknowledge the fact that the best interests of children are a growing concern, and that the character and psychological frame of mind of the children today, will form the warp and the make of the fabric of life of the future communities, both religious and secular. They should therefore lose no time in concentrating on the task of addressing and alleviating the pain and trauma inflicted upon children by a cruel society and aggravated by the indifference within our own.

At the same time, there is also the need to confess that in many instances the church and its related bodies are also content to be a mute witnesses.

b. Theological Imperatives

We, as the church, are called to be witnesses to God's transforming qualities of love, justice, peace, and reconciliation. The Prophet Micah reminds us that the Lord requires us, "To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God". (Micah 6:8)

a) According to the scriptures, all children are given by **God and created in the image of God. God cares for them** all (Isaiah 49:16). Harm done to children, being precious members of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12) harms the whole community and breaks communion within the whole body of Christ. Those especially responsible to exemplify love and making misuse of their position face grave consequences (Matthew 18:6).

b) The church, therefore, welcomes children through baptism or blessing (Mark 10:13-16). Moreover, Christ upholds children as examples of salvation (Matthew 18:4-5). Children are given an active and distinctive role among the

believers and among those who hear and proclaim the word of God (e.g. I Samuel 3). Scripture

reminds us to listen to children, nurture their spiritual journey, and be perceptive of signs of danger (II Samuel 13).

c) It is the duty and commitment of the church to safeguard and respect all children, not only those inside our church community without any discrimination or distinction. Our personal authority and responsibility in relation to children is expressed in diakonia, which means self-sacrificial care for their spiritual and physical well-being, following the example of Christ (Philippians 2:5-8; Matthew 25).

- e) Each person within the community should be aware of and should carry its personal responsibility to exercise their authority and responsibility in the right way and to hold each other accountable.
- f) Where abuse is discovered, the legal system takes its own course and the church must co-operate with it. At the same time, as the body of Christ we have a responsibility to:
- accompany victims, placing them at the centre of our compassion and healing care, and
- accompany perpetrators towards repentance and restoration.
- g) In the context of our calling, as a member of the body of Christ, we need a safeguarding policy to assist us in fulfilling our responsibilities towards children.

We encourage the member churches of NCCI to receive, adopt, and implement this child safeguarding policy, and to share your reflections and experiences with us. Our theological understanding, therefore, adds impetus to the call for a collective and concerted effort to create an environment that is safe, just, and peaceful, that will give children the freedom to grow in the wisdom of God, to its full potential, physically, mentally and spiritually.

c. Ecumenical Imperatives

The Vision, Mission, and Goals of the NCCI, particularly for the years ahead, the hour has come let us keep going should be the motivating factor for transforming mission, and engaging in prophetic, compassionate, healing, and reconciling ministries for the realization of justice and equality for all. It is only right that the churches and their related bodies, in an ecumenical spirit, address this issue to liberate the children from their evil clutches. Children are part of the global family and therefore the preservation of children's dignity will undoubtedly contribute to global welfare, justice, and peace.

We, at NCCI and all its constituent members, are therefore bound to promote, advocate, and uphold the rights of the children that safeguard them from all forms of harm and ill-treatment. This can be facilitated through enhanced education and training which leads to awareness building, prevention of abuse, and the protection of the dignity of children; creating

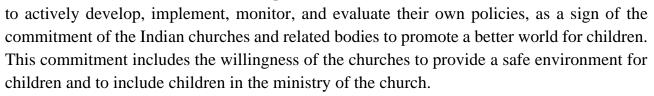
ecumenical and interfaith networks of people and organisations that share this common concern at the local, national, regional, and global levels. This broad-based cooperation and interconnectedness will add motivation and momentum to this noble cause.

C. STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

We are therefore committed to the cause of protecting children, and at the same time, urge and continue to encourage our member churches and related bodies and councils across India to promote the safety and well-being of children and to dedicate ourselves to:

- i. Safeguard, protect, respect, and value all children regardless of caste, religion, gender, disabilities, or nationalities;
- ii. Actively engage in the care, nurture of, and pastoral ministry with all children;
- iii. Establish safe communities where children are cared for, nurtured and sustained;
- iv. Provide a peaceful and just environment for children, to build relations and fully participate in the life of the communities where they belong, to encounter God to grow in faith and wisdom;
- v. Prevent, oppose any harmful influence, abuse, and exploitation that children are subjected to;
- vi. Respect the privacy and confidence of children so that they are not exploited, stigmatized or exposed by the media; and,
- vii. Network, share, and learn the best practices in childcare from ecumenical counterparts, churches and councils, and state agencies.

This Child Protection Policy is prepared by NCCI & ASSIA as a study material for NCCI member churches and related bodies. We urge the churches to commit themselves to raise awareness of child protection issues and



The guidelines and responses to key issues relating to this policy are clarified in the Appendices to the policy and also the law of India stated in https://www.india.gov.in/national-policy-children.

APPENDIX A – DEFINITIONS

This policy is firmly based on Biblical principles, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the WCC Child Safeguarding Policy, and other child rights conventions, the international standards of good practice, and the CPP of India. The terms used, therefore,

connote the same meanings in which they are used in these accepted conventions and standards. However, a few of them are defined for clarity:

Wherever the following words appear in this policy they shall be defined as:

- Adult: An 'adult' is a person aged 18 years and older.
- *Care*: 'Care' is a positive concern for a child which may be expressed through direct and active responsibility for a child's wellbeing and development, including education, guidance and counselling, and enrichment of faith and spirituality.
- *Child:* In this policy, a 'child' is defined as a person under the age of 18 years.
- Harm: A source of 'harm' is something that may hurt or cause trauma to a child, or otherwise have a negative impact on the happiness, security, and development of a child. They may be physical, emotional, social, intellectual or spiritual.



- *Protection*: In this policy, 'Protection' relates to an active and continuous process of preventing harm to children. It includes implementing preventive programs, interventions, training, involves identifying and eliminating risks to children.
- *Safe*: To be 'safe' is to be free from the risk of harm. For children, a safe place may be a community with people who care for and protect children, and whom children feel they can trust.
- *Abuse*: Child abuse and neglect is defined as all forms of action or inaction resulting in harm or risk of harm to children. The six key types of abuse include:
 - o *Physical Abuse* results in actual or potential physical harm which is reasonably in the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power, or trust. Examples include hitting, poisoning, burning, slapping, violent shaking, drowning, suffocating, or deliberately making a child ill.
 - Sexual Abuse is when a child is used by an adult or young person (in a physical, visual, verbal, psychological or another way) for that person's sexual gratification. Any sexual involvement with a
 - child, with or without their consent, is also considered abuse.
 - Emotional Abuse includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, including the availability of a primary attachment figure, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies. Acts of emotional abuse may include restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, denigrating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing, or other non-physical forms of hostility or rejecting

treatment.

- o *Exploitation* refers to the use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labour and child prostitution. These activities are detrimental to the child's physical or mental health, education, moral or social-emotional development.
- Neglect or negligent treatment is the inattention or omission on the part of the caregiver to provide for the development of the child in all spheres, such as health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions. This also includes the failure to properly protect children from harm.



- O Spiritual Abuse occurs when someone in a position of spiritual power or authority in a faith-based environment, misuses their power and the trust placed in them, with the intention of controlling, coercing, manipulating or dominating a child.
- Other specific considerations that constitute child abuse include:
- Sexual or Child Grooming refers to actions or behaviours designed to entice, encourage, or persuade a child into inappropriate and/or unlawful sexual activity.
- *Child Pornography* is the viewing, use, abuse, trade, transmittal, and transference of abusive sexual images of children. Abuse through child pornography also includes the involvement of children in making child pornography and showing any pornography to children.
- *Sexual Exploitation* includes profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the exploitation of a child through prostitution and trafficking of children for sexual abuse and exploitation.
- *Traditional Harmful Practices* are cultural practices which may put the child at risk of harm. Examples are child marriage, where the child is under the legal age of consent, and female/male genital mutilation.
- Bullying takes the form of physical intimidation; verbal intimidation, which includes racist and sexist remarks; or emotional intimidation, such as isolating or excluding a child whereby they experience deliberate hostility.
- Witchcraft/Ritualistic Abuse



occurs within some communities that believe strongly that children may be possessed by evil spirits. Children may be abused through ritualistic practices and ceremonies, in the form of beating, maining, rape, and even used as sacrifices.

• *Historical Abuse* is any type of abuse that may have occurred several years before it is disclosed.

APPENDIX B – CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN FAMILIES, CHURCHES, AND COMMUNITIES

The primary responsibility for the protection of children lies within families, and in a wider context within communities both religious and social, and finally the state. The change in the structure of the family, which is the fundamental social unit, has had ripple effects on the care and protection of children.

The NCCI affirms that creating safe and nurturing spaces of love, warmth, appreciation, and peace in families, churches and communities will give children a stable and positive attitude towards life, and also give them the gift of a happy childhood worth cherishing.

We, therefore, call for serious action by members of the family, churches, and communities to care for children. The following points on 'child care' are included as guidelines:

WITHIN THE FAMILY

- Caring for children in an atmosphere of love, trust, and warmth, so that they are assured that they are loved and valued by their own parents or primary caregivers.
- Providing a peaceful and just environment for children, to build relations and fully participate in the life of the family where they belong.
- Nurturing them spiritually so that they may grow in the wisdom of God.
- Striving to know, understand, accept and respond to their special needs: physical, emotional, and psychological, as part of parenting responsibilities.
- Investing time, money, and human resources to develop children physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.
- Trying to identify special skills of children and strengthening their interests. (e.g. music, arts, games, etc.).
- Nurturing Children in a gender-neutral environment in every home so that they feel equity among siblings. Respecting each child's dignity means valuing their unique potential and not discouraging them based solely on their academic performance.

WITHIN THE CHURCH

- Caring for children in an atmosphere of love, trust, and warmth, so that they are assured that they are loved and valued as part of the body of Christ, just as Jesus loves and values the children.
- Providing a peaceful and just environment for children, to build relations and fully participate in the life of the faith community to which they belong, to encounter God, and to grow in faith and wisdom;
- Involving children in the ministry of the church and making them feel that they are an integral and valuable part of the faith community.



- Helping children to realise that they are living in a pluralistic society that is vibrant and interconnected, where interpersonal relationships contribute a lot to common peace, justice, and development.
- When making decisions involving children, it is important to take the children's opinions and suggestions into account. Children should be provided interactive leadership opportunities throughout Sunday School activities.
- Every church should make sure that there is no discrimination among children based on gender, class, caste, colour, disability, or childhood gender nonconformity (CGN), particularly when it comes to academic activities and also in the organisation and execution of Sunday School arts & sports or cultural programmes.
- Being aware that body shaming and colourism will negatively impact children's morale and mental health, such remarks should be avoided in whatever form.

WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

- Developing relationships and networks of support with communities that are trustworthy and reliable and have the same values and principles of child safety and welfare.
- Strengthening these relationships and networks of support, enabling them to come together to prevent crisis situations in the lives of children.
- Sharing and learning best practices in the care and protection of children and the sustenance of the faith and confidence of parents, caregivers, churches, and communities.



- Encouraging all church-run educational institutions both formal and informal, like prayer groups, Sunday schools, schools, and colleges, to actively nurture a culture of peace.
- Striving to know, understand, accept, and respond to the special needs of the children—physical, emotional, and psychological.
- Investing time, money, and human resources in developing children physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.
- Trying to identify special skills of children and strengthening their interests. (e.g. music, arts, games, etc.).
- Engaging all church-run educational institutions to include in their curriculum the training in life skills to respond appropriately to dangerous and exploitative overtures from unscrupulous people.

APPENDIX C – RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Even though it is conventional to think that family members and close relatives are extremely fond of their children and are trustworthy with the safety of their children, there are occasions when these accepted norms are deviated from. Abuse of children by the members of the clergy, by teachers or by very friendly adults, is also quite common. In such circumstances, whenever family members, close relatives, or church leaders and friends are seen having difficulty coping with children, or if they show a tendency to be abusive, help and timely

counselling should be offered by reliable and trusted community leaders such as pastors or professional counsellors.

Whenever voluntary workers or regular employees are appointed, the recruitment should go through a good recruitment and selection process, backed by a sound recruitment policy, which thoroughly checks and double checks on the previous records of the applicant likely to be selected. Care should be taken to recruit after the proper screening:



- People who have a genuine liking for children, with a caring and empathetic nature.
- Those who respect and value children.
- Those who are skilled in handling children, are sensitive to their special needs and are conscious of their innocence and vulnerability.
- Those who do not have a criminal record and do not behave in a suspicious or furtive manner when they are around children.
- Signing of a consent/ CPP by the person to hold accountable.

APPENDIX D – EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The adoption of a Child Protection Policy in every institution at every level is proof in itself that the institution is serious about the safety, protection, and welfare of the children placed in its trust. It also creates awareness about the many nuances of child safety, protection, and care. The NCCI recognises the need to spread awareness and educate a larger and wider audience in order to empower more people to spread the message. The NCCI therefore advocates:

- Raising awareness of child protection issues through the education and training of volunteers, staff, interns, partners, guardians, caregivers, and others working with children in churches and church communities.
- Providing opportunities for parents and caregivers to be trained and equipped so that they can in turn train others on child protection issues.
- Providing an increased awareness of child protection policies and encouraging improved adaptations of the same, with reference to specific and special needs of countries, societies, and cultures across Asia.



APPENDIX E - CODE OF CONDUCT

The Code of Conduct lays down the actual stated policy of the NCCI, with regard to acceptable norms of behaviour, with a view to safeguarding the welfare of children and young people. This is applicable to all workers in voluntary organizations, including the churches, whether paid or voluntary staff.

It encourages the development of best practices to prevent the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children and young people while they are in their care, so that children can experience a safe, positive, and encouraging environment. It seeks to minimize opportunities for the abuse of children, and at the same time, protects those who work with children and young people from unfounded accusations or from behaving in ways which may be well-intentioned but inadvisable.

1. ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

1.1 SAFE SPACE

Caregivers, whatever level or position they may be, are encouraged to:

- a. Treat all children fairly with respect and dignity, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, nationality, ethnicity, or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
- b. Be committed to creating a culture of openness and mutual accountability, where child protection issues can be openly discussed and abusive behaviour is challenged.
- c. Refrain from condoning, or participating in behaviour with children which is illegal, unsafe, or abusive.
- d. Prevent, oppose, and combat all exploitation and abuse of children.
- e. Report to the authorities concerned if any incident(s) of child abuse come to notice.

1.2 PERSONAL ETHICS

- a. Refrain from any involvement in criminal or unethical activities that violate human rights, and can harm the interests of the institution employed in.
- b. Always be honest and accountable, with a high sense of moral integrity.

1.3 WORKING WITH CHILDREN

- a. Refrain from taking any advantage of the power balance between an adult and child.
- b. Refrain from developing physical or sexual relationships with children.
- c. Be conscious of the fact that at times they may work with children who, because of the circumstances and abuses they have experienced, may use a relationship to obtain
 - 'special attention'. The adult is always considered responsible even if a child behaves seductively and should avoid being placed in a compromising or vulnerable position.
- d. Avoid the use of language that will mentally or emotionally harm a child.
- e. Desist from acting in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse.
- f. Refrain from acting in any way that intends to shame, humiliate, or degrade a child.
- g. Desist from conducting or being part of harmful traditional practices, such as the spiritual or ritualistic abuse of children.



a. Take steps to help train and inform children of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.



- b. Use positive and non-violent methods to manage children's behaviour.
- c. Refrain from hitting or smacking children or otherwise physically assaulting or abusing children, during training, even where this may be culturally acceptable.
- d. Listen to children and encourage them to raise their concerns about matters regarding their safety.
- e. Ensure that the risks of being alone with children are minimized by having at least two
 - adults supervising whenever possible, and always being visible to others when with children.
- f. Care while on off-site overnight trips, include ensuring separate sleeping accommodations for male and female children, with appropriate supervision.



2. CHILD LABOUR

Resist from employing and exploiting children for their labour (for e.g. domestic servants) or for sexual purposes.

APPENDIX F – CHILDREN AND COMMUNICATIONS

The NCCI is committed to ensuring that all photos, videos, and other visual images of children, as well as information from interviews, is obtained and used in communications with sensitivity in order to safeguard the child's right to dignity, confidentiality, and privacy.

While advocating media reports that are informative and challenging, rather than sensational; and in-depth articles on children's issues, the NCCI calls attention to the privacy and dignity of children, which may be harmed and stigmatized for a lifetime as a result of adverse publicity.

CHILDREN'S PRIVACY AND DIGNITY

To preserve the privacy, innocence, and dignity of children, the NCCI emphasises that all reporting should be done with sensitivity and deep concern for the children.



When visual images are used:

- they should always be respectful and decent;
- the risk of harm or stigma to the child should be assessed;
- the dignity of the subject should be respected;
- the subject should not be exploited;
- there must be a balanced portrayal of reality;

- the images should be used truthfully;
- all standards of decency must be maintained;
- the view of local partners must be respected;

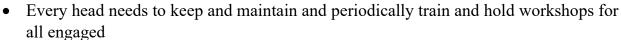
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ACTION TO BE TAKEN IN CASE OF VIOLATION OF CPP

The NCCI calls for strict action to be taken in line with the law of the land if there is a violation in any form of CPP.

The actions required:

- Placing internal committees to have a close look if the churches/institutions that are abiding by CPP.
- If in case there is a violation a written complaint needs to be given to the head of the church/institution.
- Proper unbiased enquiry needs to be conducted
- If found guilty the person needs to be disciplined and educated.
- If there is repeated behaviour of a person to exploit a child in any form
- then a legal action in line with the law of the land needs to be taken.



ACCOMPANIMENT OF NCCI & AISSA.

- We at NCCI & AISSA are ready to accompany in the journey of child safeguarding at various local levels.
- The NCCI & AISSA are available to help you create CPP at your local context in line with the guidelines of NCCI CPP.
- The NCCI & AISSA are ever happy to share the resources of experts in conducting workshops and training of trainers for a better understanding and implementation of CPP at various levels.
- We wish and pray for a more safe and healthy environment for all our children who are the pillars of our churches and society.



APPENDIX G - RESOURCE LIST

- **a.** India Government National Policy for Children stated in https://www.india.gov.in/national-policy-children
- b. India: The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2148/1/a2016-2.pdf
- c. POCSO Act 2012 https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/POCSO%20Act%2C%202012.pdf
- **d.** DFAT Child Protection Policy2017 and DFAT Child Protection Guidance Notes: http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/child-protection-policy.aspx
- **e.** United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: https://www.unicef.org/crc/
- f. Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Child Protection Working Group (2012):https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/CP-Minimum-Standards.pdf
- **g.** World Council of Churches Child Protection Resources(summary table with links to external resources):https://www.oikoumene.org/resources-children 10
- **h.** ECPAT International: http://www.ecpat.org/
- i. IASC Child Protection Thematic area guide for : Integrating gender-based violence interventions in Humanitarian Action: http://gbvguidelines.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/09/TAG-child-protection08 26 2015.pdf
- **j.** Keeping Children Safe A toolkit for child protection: http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/keeping-children-safe-toolkit-child-protection
- **k.** Setting the standard A common approach to Child Protection for international NGOs:
 - https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/documents/1603.pd f
- **l.** United Nations World Report on Violence Against Children: www.unviolencestudy.org
- **m.** ACFID Guidelines for development of a child protection policy: https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/Guidelines-for-the-development-of-a-childprotection-policy.pdf
- n. Keeping Children Safe Online: https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/KCS_Online_Guid ance_2014.pdf
- **o.** UNICEF, Child Protection in the Digital Age: National responses to online child sexual abuse and exploitation in ASEAN Member States (2016): https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Child Protection in the Digital Age.pdf
- **p.** UN Convention on the Rights of the Child In Child Friendly Language: Poster and brochure

- **q.** IAWGCP, Children's Participation in Decision Making: Why do it, when to do it, how to do it (2007)
- Policy on Child Protection in United Nations Peace Operations
 https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/1._protection_ 3 child protection policy 0.pdf
- s. Churches Commitment to Children WCC
 https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/wcc commtmntchildren chfinUNICEF ENG.PDF