

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Creating a safe and healthy environment for each child to Thrive.

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INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Every child has the right to a quality lifestyle and are significant to social growth and development. It is imperative to ensure the provision of a safe and conducive environment free of all forms of abuse, violence and exploitation for all children. With recent trends on the safety, welfare and security of children, it is even more important we evaluate the security, safety and welfare of children living with Disabilities.
- ▶ Nearly 240 million children worldwide, or one in 10, live with disabilities and experience deprivation in indicators such as health, education and protection, according to UNICEF. With an estimated 25 million disabled persons in Nigeria, about one in every eight Nigerians live with at least one form of disability. Children living with Disabilities often face discrimination in their society. This discrimination and lack of care exposes children with disabilities to all forms of abuse and neglect which hinders their development as a child. Children with disabilities are up to four times more likely to experience violence, with girls being the most at risk, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

INTRODUCTION CONT'D

- ▶ This Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy is a move to redirect the attention of organizations, parents, schools and communities to the need for child protection especially children living with Disabilities. It is crucial to understand the fact that children are not responsible for their safety, they are dependent on adults to support them hence the need for all hands to be on deck in the protection of children.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

1. Protect children who receive services from The Autism Awareness Foundation and Theraconnect.
2. Provide staff and volunteers within the Organization with the overarching principles that guide our approach to safety, safeguarding and protection.
3. For individuals, organizations and parents to understand how to appropriately safeguard and protect children in their care.

The Autism Awareness Foundation and Theraconnect acknowledges the duty of care to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and is committed to ensuring safeguarding practice reflects statutory responsibilities, government guidance, best practices and requirements.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- ▶ **Child** – any person under 18 years as provided by the Child's Rights Law 2007 Laws of Lagos State of Nigeria
- ▶ **Disability**- any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions).
- ▶ **Special Needs**- It is a clinical diagnostic and functional development term used to describe individuals who need help and support for any kind of disabilities
- ▶ **Child protection** – Child protection is the process of protecting individual children identified as either suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect. It involves measures and structures designed to prevent and respond to abuse and neglect.
- ▶ **Safeguarding** - Safeguarding is a term which is broader than 'child protection' and relates to the action taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.
- ▶ **Safeguarding is:** protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's health and development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

DEFINITIONS

- **Designated Person for Child Protection-** the manager/supervisor or designated person responsible for providing advice and support to staff where they have a concern about an individual child or who want advice about child protection policy.
- **Disclosure** – information given to a staff member by a child, parent or caregiver or a third party in relation to abuse or neglect.
- **Social Worker-** Social care qualified professionals with case responsibility including receiving and responding to child concerns/referrals.
- **Physical abuse** includes acts of violence such as punching (hitting with a fist), kicking, whipping, beating with an object, choking, smothering, trying to drown, burning intentionally, or using or threatening to use a gun, knife or other weapon, regardless of whether or not it resulted in obvious physical or mental injury. It is not focused on acts of discipline, although many of those perpetrating the violence may be doing so in the name of “discipline”
- **Significant Harm** - Some children are in need of help and intervention because they are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. This is the threshold that justifies compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests and promotion of the welfare of a child. Significant harm can be considered as the severity of maltreatment, the degree, extent, duration and frequency of abuse and neglect; the extent of premeditation, presence or degree of threat, coercion, sadism and bizarre or unusual elements.

DEFINITIONS

- ▶ **Sexual abuse** includes any act that involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. It is not necessary for the child to be aware that the activity is sexual and the apparent consent of the child is irrelevant. Sexual abuse can be, but is not limited to:

Contact abuse: touching breasts, genital/anal fondling, masturbation, oral sex, penetrative or non-penetrative contact with the anus or genitals, encouraging the child to perform such acts on the perpetrator or another, involvement of the child in activities for the purposes of pornography or prostitution.

Non-contact abuse: exhibitionism, exposure to pornographic or sexual imagery, inappropriate photography or depictions of sexual or suggestive behaviours or comments.

- ❖ **Emotional abuse** – any act or omission that results in adverse or impaired psychological, social, intellectual and emotional functioning or development. This can include: Patterns of isolation, degradation, constant criticism or negative comparison to others. Isolating, corrupting, exploiting or terrorizing a child can also be emotional abuse. Exposure to family or intimate partner violence.

DEFINITIONS

- ▶ **Neglect** –is the most common form of abuse and it has the potential of seriously impair the child's health or development. Forms of Neglect include

Physical- Looking rough and uncared for, dirty, without appropriate clothing, underweight), not providing the necessities of life like a warm place, food and clothing.

Emotional- Not providing comfort, attention and love Neglectful supervision- Leaving children without someone safe looking after them, no safe home to return to.

Medical Neglect- Failure to present child for timely immunization, persistent nappy rash or skin disorders or not taking care of health needs.

Educational or Vocational Neglect- Allowing chronic truancy, failure to enroll in school or vocational training centers or inattention to education needs.

- ❖ **Facilitator**- A learning facilitator is an active and direct learning helper whose roles are to create an atmosphere for study, to help learners get to their goals, and to encourage social interaction among students and Teachers.
- ❖ **Volunteer** -a person who does something, especially helping other people, willingly and without being forced or paid to do it.

GENERAL POLICY STATEMENT

The Autism Awareness Foundation and Theraconnect RECOGNISES THAT:

1. The welfare of the child is paramount as enshrined by the Child's Rights Law, 2007
2. All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, religious beliefs, ethnicity, disability or socio-economic background has a right to equal protection from all types of abuse.
3. Some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact Of previous experiences, dependency, communication needs or other issues
4. Working in partnership with children, young people, their parents, caregivers and other relevant agencies is essential in promoting children's welfare.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- ▶ Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
- ▶ African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1999
- ▶ Child's Rights Act, 2003
- ▶ Lagos State Child's Rights Law, 2007
- ▶ Prevention Against Domestic Violence Law, 2007
- ▶ Criminal Law of Lagos State 2011
- ▶ The Family Court of Lagos State (Civil Procedure) Rules 2012
- ▶ EO/BRF/005OF2014, Lagos State Sex Offenders Monitoring Programme And Mandated Reporting, 2014

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION

- ▶ THE AUTISM AWARENESS FOUNDATION AND THERACONNECT WILL SEEK TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE BY:
 - a) Protecting and valuing them, listening to and hearing them,
 - b) Creating an environment to encourage children to develop a positive self image,
 - c) Encouraging children to develop a sense of independence and autonomy in a way that is appropriate to their age and stage of development,
 - d) Providing a safe and secure environment for all children,
 - e) Sharing information about child protection and good practice with children, parents, staff and volunteers,
 - f) Sharing concerns with relevant agencies and involving parents and children appropriately.
 - g) Promote and priorities the safety and wellbeing of children and young people
 - h) Ensure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in respect of safeguarding and is provided with appropriate learning opportunities to recognize, identify and respond to signs of abuse, neglect and other safeguarding concerns relating to children and young People.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION CONT'D

- ▶ i) Ensure appropriate action is taken in the event of incidents/concerns of abuse and support provided to the individual/s who raise or disclose the concern.
- ▶ j) Ensure that confidential, detailed and accurate records of all safeguarding concerns are maintained and securely stored.
- ▶ k) Prevent the employment/deployment of unsuitable individuals.
- ▶ l) Ensure robust safeguarding arrangements and procedures are in operation

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

- **Teach them to differentiate between a 'good' touch and a 'bad' touch:** In today's world, with children interacting with a lot of people from a very young age, learning to understand the difference between a good touch and a bad touch is crucial for your little one. Once that differentiation has been understood, it is important that your child can approach you if they feel uncomfortable with the way they were touched.
- **Personal Space and Boundaries:** Teach your little one the importance of setting personal boundaries. They need to understand the concept of personal space from a very young age. If they feel like someone is invading their space, they shouldn't be afraid to yell out. Think of a phrase or a code word together, which they can yell, in case they feel like they're in danger. Choose something that will catch the attention of passers-by!
- **Talk to your child, and don't forget to listen!:** Talking to your child about their day, the happy moments and not so happy moments in their day, their friends, and their lives not only keeps them connected but also helps them feel safer. The most important balance to strike here is between talking and listening. The more you actually listen to what they have to say, the safer and more comfortable they will feel talking to you about anything.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS CONT'D

- ▶ **Make sure websites are secure:** You can instantly tell if any website is safe by looking for one letter: “s.” Every website address starts with the letters “http,” but you know a site is secure when you see “https.” That means the website itself is taking measures to keep users and their information secure while they use the site.
- ▶ **Information is Priceless:** Ensure your children know their home address – at least the locality they stay in, mum’s and dad’s full name and phone numbers (at least one phone number!) This will come in-hand if they are in trouble and need to reach out to you.
- ▶ **Child’s Medication Safety:** If your child takes any medication ensure they carry it in their backpack, along with dosage and information, at all times. Also if they are allergic to any food or medication, ensure they carry a note stating the same. Further, it is necessary to educate them about medical problems that they face, if any so, that your child’s medical safety is ensured at all times even in your absence.
- ▶ **Strangers Are a No-No:** Teach children to be cautious of strangers. Teach them to walk away if any strangers approach them and ask for directions or offer them food. Kids should learn to trust their gut instinct and try to have drills or practices which would help them identify potential danger.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES

FOR PARENTS CONT'D

- ▶ **Road Safety Rules:** Teaching your child road safety rules should be a part of your routine to keep them safe. Teach them the right way of crossing a road – ‘Find a zebra crossing, look left, look right, look left again! All clear? Go!’ Make it a habit to practice this sequence every time you are out together. Also, encourage your child to walk on the side of the road where they can see the on-coming traffic!
- ▶ **No ‘Body Secrets:** Ensure your children don’t keep any ‘body secrets’- i.e. secrets about having been inappropriately touched or made to feel uncomfortable – and come straight to you, especially if someone tells them to ‘keep it a secret’, or ‘play a game and not tell mum and dad’. Having them talk about such experiences is a healthy practice that will help them cope with and process what happened, and make sure that your child safety is ensured .
- ▶ **Practice makes perfect:** Spend time on the weekends and in the evenings verbally creating various virtual situations for your child to think about how they would respond if faced with a challenge. ‘What would you do if I’m late to pick you up, and (familiar person) aunty offered to drop you home?’ This gives them the space to think of and tell you how they would respond to different situations. It also gives you the opportunity to correct them or suggest a safer alternative (if you’re uncomfortable with the solution they came up with) and ensure your child safety at school or in any place in your absence.)

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR THERAPISTS

- ▶ **Ensure that the child wants the physical contact you are offering:** Where possible make eye contact with the child and indicate with gestures or verbally what you propose, waiting for the child's clear agreement. This is whether you are offering a hug, touching a shoulder, holding a hand, tickling or play fighting. If you believe a child may have been abused, it is important to avoid hugging, tickling and play fighting until they have learned the difference between 'good' and 'bad' touching.
- ▶ **Touch in appropriate areas only:** Consciously avoid touching the child in areas of the body that would be covered by a swimming costume. The only exceptions are when changing or washing a baby or a very small child or helping a disabled child in the toilet or washing themselves. Touching the leg above the knee is generally not acceptable.
- ▶ **Treat the child in an empathic manner:** Remember that the information you might be hearing may be very difficult for them to talk about and it will have taken a lot of courage for them to disclose it, so it is imperative that you treat the person in an empathic manner with a great sense of integrity, authenticity and respect.
- ▶ **Establish a working relationship with the child:** This means developing rapport and a trusting relationship with the child. This working relationship will provide a container and a secure safe space for the child to feel more able to disclose important information with regards to what they are presenting.
- ▶ **Make Sure the Focus is on the Child:** The beginning, middle and end of every session should be about the client's thoughts, feelings and actions. Keep the spotlight on the child. You accomplish this by honing your listening ear and being very careful about the few words you say. Be sure to clear your own head before a session to stay focused and give the child the attention they deserve.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR THERAPISTS CONT'D

- ▶ **NO EXCEPTIONS TO CONFIDENTIALITY RULES:** A therapist may also be required to break client confidentiality if they believe a child or disabled person is being abused. For example, if a child has unexplained injuries and acts frightened of their parent, a therapist may have reasonable suspicion of abuse. As a mandated reporter, they have a legal duty to report their suspicions to authorities.
- ▶ **No profanity:** It's pretty simple. Don't do it. The last thing you want is for the child to go home with a new word in the vocabulary to share with Mum. It is so important not to swear in front of the kids. If you accidentally swear, try to cover it up by turning it into a sentence. The less you accentuate the word, the less likely they'll notice.
- ▶ **Always Dress appropriately:** Some center's will provide you with a uniform. However if not it's important that you dress appropriately. Try casual jeans or track pants, combined with a loose fitting top. You want to be practical and wear comfortable clothing that you don't mind getting dirty. You will be participating in a range of messy activities – i.e. painting and playing in sand. Leave your best outfits for the weekend. It's also important to consider how parents may perceive you, and should avoid anything provocative.
- ▶ **Work efficiently:** Working at a childcare Centre involves dabbling in a lot of different tasks. There is a lot to get done so it's essential that you work efficiently. If there are toys on the floor then help the kids tidy it up. If there is paint on the table, clean it up. Don't just leave it for somebody else. You should always be moving and thinking about what to do next. There is no time for sitting down. Being efficient is a great personal quality to develop.
- ▶ **Health & safety:** Working as a child therapist will mean regular contact with a large number of children. So it's important that you remain safe and health. If you're not feeling well, take the day off. Bugs are easily spread, and what comes around goes around. Lastly, keep an eye out for hazards. Accidents occur everyday, so remember to clean up any dangerous scenes before someone hurts themselves.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS

- ▶ **Always Dress appropriately:** Some organisation will provide you with a uniform. However if not it's important that you dress appropriately. Try casual jeans or track pants, combined with a loose fitting top. You want to be practical and wear comfortable clothing that you don't mind getting dirty. You will be participating in a range of messy activities – i.e. painting and playing in sand. Leave your best outfits for the weekend. It's also important to consider how parents may perceive you, and should avoid anything provocative.
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- ▶ **Treat the child in an empathic manner:** Remember that the information you might be hearing may be very difficult for them to talk about and it will have taken a lot of courage for them to disclose it, so it is imperative that you treat the person in an empathic manner with a great sense of integrity, authenticity and respect.



SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS CONT'D

- ▶ **Do not hit any child:** When the child misbehaves, restrain yourself from hitting the child. Instead, use another non-physical means to discipline the child or report to the management.
- ▶ **Do not leave any child unattended to:** Children often love to play around and might seem to remain in a place at time but this is not an opportunity to neglect the child. Ensure to always keep an eye.
- ▶ **No bad words:** It's pretty simple. Don't do it. The last thing you want is for the child to go home with a new word in the vocabulary to share with Mum. It is so important not to swear in front of the kids. If you accidentally swear, try to cover it up by turning it into a sentence. The less you accentuate the word, the less likely they'll notice.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS

- ▶ **Open Communication:** Take steps to ensure that all staff and volunteers feel comfortable enough to raise concerns about poor or unsafe practices with you in regards to children. An example might be to hold regular one-to-one sessions with staff to see if they have any safeguarding concerns they wish to raise. Or, they might offer feedback on the safeguarding process itself.
- ▶ **Definitions:** Provide a definition of all forms of abuse so staff are aware. This also includes information about the signs and indicators of abuse and what staff and volunteers should do if they have concerns about a child.
- ▶ **Safety:** Ensure the school environment is safe by reading and understanding the national and local guidance about preventing and responding to abuse.
- ▶ **Support Systems:** Put support systems in place for children who have experienced abuse including school counselling if available or by contacting external support services. For example, council-provided support services who can assist via consultations, assessments and coaching.
- ▶ **Provide Information to Parents:** Distribute information to parents regarding abuse, including the actions your school is taking to prevent it and support available for children. Regular transparent communication ensures that any issues can be addressed at home, as well as at school.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS CONT'D

- ▶ **Neglect:** The persistent failure to meet a child's basic needs can have damaging effects. You need to be aware of the signs of neglect as this can have serious impairment on a child's health or development. These can include dirty clothes, poor hygiene and malnourishment.
- ▶ **Grooming:** In some cases, older children might behave in a way which can be considered 'normal' to mask underlying problems. It's your responsibility to look out for such signs, including noticing secretive behavior, being upset, withdrawn or distressed, going missing for periods of time and more.
- ▶ **Provide Enough Time and Resources to Staff:** Dealing with top-level tasks, such as budgets, you need to ensure the staffs have enough time and resources to monitor and act on their responsibilities. This includes monitoring safeguarding activities, participating in strategy discussions, getting involved in inter-agency meetings and contributing to the overall assessment of children.
- ▶ **Provide Information to Parents:** Distribute information to parents regarding abuse, including the actions your school is taking to prevent it and support available for children. Regular transparent communication ensures that any issues can be addressed at home, as well as at school.
- ▶ **Facilitators and Guardians:** The school's staff should work with the facilitators handling a child in the school to ensure the child's safety and schools should have a guardian counselor to aid the development of the children.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY

- ▶ **Invest in kids.** Encourage leaders in the community to be supportive of children and families. Ask employers to provide family-friendly work environments. Ask your local and national lawmakers to support legislation to better protect children and to improve their lives.
- ▶ **Volunteer your time.** Get involved with other parents in your community. Help vulnerable children and their families. Start a playgroup.
- ▶ **Information:** Gather information about community resources such as local advocacy groups, community and faith groups, or organise children's activities which could support the child safeguarding work.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY CONT'D

- ▶ **NO DISCRIMINATION:** Communities should not promote discrimination but promote unity among the people living in the community. People living with Disabilities should be encourage and supported.
- ▶ **Support prevention programs.** Too often, intervention occurs only after abuse is reported. Greater investments are needed in programs that have been proven to stop the abuse before it occurs - such as family counseling and home visits by nurses who provide assistance for newborns and their parents.
- ▶ **Report abuse:** If you witness a child being harmed or see evidence of abuse, make a report to your state's child protective services department or local police. When talking to a child about abuse, listen carefully, assure the child that he or she did the right thing by telling an adult, and affirm that he or she is not responsible for what happened.

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Thank you

