

Introduction

No child should ever experience violence, but the reality is different. Many children around the world are at risk and suffer violence on a daily basis. As they grow and learn, it is our role as adults and organizations to ensure they feel safe and protected, taking into account their unique needs and differences. This is not only a responsibility, but a vital role we all play in safeguarding our children.

The purpose of this policy statement is:

- to protect children and young people who receive Rare Diseases Croatia's services from harm, and to mitigate the potential risks.
- to provide staff and volunteers, as well as children and young people and their families, with the overarching principles that guide our approach to child protection.

This policy applies to anyone working on behalf of Rare Diseases Croatia including managers and the board of trustees, paid staff, volunteers, external associates, and students.

Our principles

We believe that children and young people should never experience any form of abuse. We have a responsibility to promote the well-being of all children and young people, ensure their safety, and act in ways that protect them. The well-being of children is a top priority in all our activities and decisions. All children, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation, have an equal right to protection from all forms of harm or abuse.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



Rare Diseases Croatia





Due to the field in which we work, we are aware that children are particularly vulnerable because of the impact of past experiences, their level of dependency, health issues, communication needs, or other challenges.

Definition of violence

Violence is the **intentional** use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. (WHO, 2002)

We can distinguish the following type of violence against children and youth:

- **Physical abuse:** intentional use of physical force against a child that results in, or has a high likelihood of resulting in, harm for the child's health, survival, development or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, , poisoning and suffocating.
- **Bullying** is characterized by aggressive behaviour that involves unwanted, negative actions, is repeated over time, and an imbalance of power or strength between the perpetrator or perpetrators and the victim.
- **Cyberbullying** is the repetitive aggression, hostility and other attempts to cause harm in online communications such as threats, distributing defamatory information, hate speech, including homophobic and sexist content mostly perpetrated by peers.



- **Psychological abuse:** the failure of a caregiver to provide an appropriate and supportive environment, including acts that have an adverse effect on the emotional health and development of a child. Such acts can include restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other nonphysical forms of hostile treatment. It can also be referred to as emotional, mental or verbal abuse.
- **Sexual abuse:** the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Where known, sexual abuse is subdivided into contact, non-contact and penetrative sexual abuse.
- **Physical fighting:** an assaultive behaviour, with or without the use of weapons, which can lead to serious injury. It is distinguishable from physical bullying, as it typically involves two individuals of about the same strength, both motivated to engage in a fight, as opposed to one individual physically assaulting another without significant retaliation. (WHO, 2022)
- **Neglect:** the failure of a caregiver to provide for the development of the child in one or more of the following areas: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions.



Standard 1: Policy

This policy has been drawn up on the basis of legislation, policy and guidance that seeks to protect children in Croatia.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, available from https://www.unicef.hr/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Konvencija_20o_20pravi_ma_20djeteta_full.pdf

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22010A0127\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22010A0127(01)&from=EN)

The Family Act, available from https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2003_07_116_1583.html

The Primary and Secondary School Education Act, available from <https://www.zakon.hr/z/317/zakon-o-odgoju-i-obrazovanju-u-osnovnoj-i-srednjoj-%C5%A1koli>

- Protocol on the Procedure in Cases of Domestic Violence, available from <https://dijete.hr/hr/download/protokol-o-postupanju-u-slucaju-nasilja-u-obitelji-2019/>
- Protocol on the Procedure in Cases of Sexual Violence, <https://dijete.hr/hr/download/protokol-o-postupanju-u-slucaju-seksualnog-nasilja/>
- Protocol on the Procedure in Cases of Violence amongst Children and Youth, available from <https://dijete.hr/hr/download/protokol-o-postupanju-u-slucaju-nasilja-medu-djecom-i-mladima-2024/>

Based on our principles and the listed legislation, we will seek to keep children and young people safe by:

- valuing, listening to and respecting them
- voluntary membership in our organization approved and signed by their parents as they legal representatives
- informing the families about the services they can receive in our organization and persons who provide services



- considering children's participation in our activities carefully, valuing potential benefits and risks for children
- recording, storing, and using information professionally and securely, in line with data protection legislation and guidance [more information https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2012_09_106_2300.html]
- immediately reaction if there is any suspicion of violence.

Standard 2: People

Since our principles derive from international and national legislation that recognizes any inappropriate behavior toward children, we will ensure that our managers, board members, employees, volunteers, partners, collaborators, and other persons who are in contact with our organization understand them.

To facilitate the understanding of our principles and commitment to the children's safety, we will take the following measures:

- appointing a nominated child protection lead for children and young people, and a deputy for safeguarding
- providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support, training and quality assurance measures so that all staff and volunteers know about and follow our policies, procedures and behaviour codes confidently and competently



- safe recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers by conducting all necessary checks
- building a safeguarding culture where staff and volunteers, children, young people and their families, treat each other with respect and are comfortable about sharing concerns.

Designated child protection person

Name: Ivana Hrastar, social worker

Email: ivana.hsrb@gmail.com

Designated child protection person deputy

Name: Nikolina Čović, social worker

Email: nikolina.hsrb@gmail.com

The designated child protection person or their deputy must be informed of any form of violence against children. This is a responsibility of every person who comes into contact with our organization, as well as a legal obligation. The appointed child protection officer or deputy will report the case to the competent Social Welfare Centre, which will take all necessary measures.

Standard 3: Procedures

Our commitment to children's welfare is evident in every aspect of our work, even when counseling their parents. This commitment is the cornerstone of our mission and guides all our actions.

- If we learn that a child is suffering from violence, discrimination, or any negative behavior, we immediately report it to the social welfare center. This engagement ensures the child's safety and reassures our stakeholders of our commitment.
- If a child needs support that is outside our scope of work, we will inform the family where the required support is available.
- All personal data are stored according to GDPR regulation.



- When parents ask us to organize an education in their child's school, we do so with the school staff. However, we do not share specific information about the child or the parents' request. That is to respect the privacy of the child and the family, avoid potential negative consequences, and maintain a trustful relationship with them.

- When we forward medical inquiries from our members to medical student volunteers, we always anonymize the inquiries. That means only the facts about the diagnosis and medical condition are available, not personal data. We have strict procedures in place to ensure this, especially when it comes to children, to protect their privacy and personal information.
- When families of children with the same diagnoses want to connect, it is possible if both families are members of our organization and signatories to the GDPR.
- When we develop activities for children, they are always carefully carried out. We engage only persons with relevant education and expertise in these activities, ensuring that our staff is highly qualified and competent. Everyone who is in direct contact with children will have their criminal record checked.



- Each activity is voluntary and open to children, regardless of differences (disabilities, gender, race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or any other). Child participants are free to withdraw their participation at any time, without any explanations or justification.
- While working with children, we ensure a safe space physically and emotionally without using a raised tone, insults, physical punishment, etc. On the contrary, our approach is friendly and encouraging and directs the children to use their potential.

- When the children's involvement is a part of the project we conduct, child participants and their families will be made aware of the purpose of the project and its activities, so that the child participant is able to make an informed decision as to whether they will participate in it or not. Additional information (including about national referral services) will also be provided if a child participant becomes distressed in any way during their participation.
- Participation in project activities includes informed consent. Children and their families will be made aware of the purpose of the project and its activities, so that the child participant is able to make an informed decision as to whether they will participate in it or not. Additional information (including about national referral services) will also be provided if a child participant becomes distressed in any way during their participation. Parents whose children participate in project activities should give written consent that their children may be photographed or filmed.



- We are open to hearing children's suggestions on how to improve our work and upgrade our services.
- As we educate others, our staff must attend education and enhance its capacity, especially in supporting child protection and developing services that can significantly improve their quality of life.

Standard 4: Accountability

Our organization collects evidence of its daily work, including activities related to children. We analyze our work at least once a year, including the effectiveness of measures related to child protection, and revise and improve them if necessary.

Through the analysis, we evaluate the following aspects:

- feedback received from our members, relating to children, their rights, and protection
- data protection
- clarity in presenting our rules and procedures to everyone who had contact with our organization
- cases of violence we reported to Social Welfare Center



- collaboration with other organizations and institutions to ensure more inclusive environment to our youngest members
- inclusiveness for children from a minority groups
- inform consent for activities within our projects
- our contribution to the development of a safer environment for children

Are there any steps we have missed to take?

We invite all partners, parents, and professionals to share their suggestions for additional steps we can take to further improve child protection. Our Child Protection Policy is a living document and is regularly updated based on feedback, legal changes, and emerging community needs.

