

## **Child Protection Policy of the Sexual Health Research Centre of the Institute of Clinical Medicine of the University of Tartu**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The mission of the Sexual Health Research Centre of the Institute of Clinical Medicine of the University of Tartu (hereinafter: the Centre) is to improve the sexual and reproductive health of Estonian residents through the development and implementation of evidence-based interventions. The Centre's activities include research, development and analysis of indicators in the field, training, development activities, and public awareness campaigns.
- 1.2. The Centre supports children's rights and is committed to their safety and well-being. The formulation and implementation of the Centre's Child Protection Policy is informed by relevant legislation, including the Estonian Child Protection Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 1.3. The Centre's employees and those cooperating with the Centre share a collective responsibility and commitment to raising awareness, preventing, and reporting child maltreatment, and responding to it.
- 1.4. The goal of the Centre's Child Protection Policy is to:
  - 1.4.1. articulate values and principles and describe the measures implemented in the Centre's work to ensure children's well-being and protect them from any maltreatment during the Centre's operations;
  - 1.4.2. provide clear guidelines for the Centre's employees and partners on what to do in case of suspected child maltreatment.
- 1.5. The Centre's Child Protection Policy applies to employees under both employment and civil law contracts, as well as to interns, volunteers, and others who come into contact with children while working at or on behalf of the Centre. The Centre's partners are also expected to adhere to this Child Protection Policy.
- 1.6. The Centre's Child Protection Policy is reviewed and updated as necessary, including when planning new activities and when the relevant legislation changes.

### **2. Definitions**

- 2.1. A child is a person under the age of 18 years. If the age of a person is unknown and there is reason to believe that the person is below the age of 18 years, the person shall be deemed to be a child until proven otherwise.
- 2.2. Child's well-being means the condition supporting the development of the child in which the physical, medical, psychological, emotional, social, cognitive, educational and economic needs of the child are satisfied.
- 2.3. Child maltreatment includes both physical and mental violence; neglect or careless treatment; exploitation, including commercial exploitation or sexual abuse.
- 2.4. A person working with a child is an individual who comes into direct contact with a child in the performance of their duties, including interns or volunteers.

### **3. Principles**

- 3.1. In ensuring the rights and welfare of the child, the Centre adheres to the following principles set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Estonian Child Protection Act:
  - 3.1.1. every child has the inherent right to life, survival and development;
  - 3.1.2. every child has the right to equal treatment without any discrimination;
  - 3.1.3. in all action concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration;

- 3.1.4. every child has the right to independent opinion in all matters affecting the child and the right to express his or her views.
- 3.2. The Centre's positions on the implementation of Child Protection Policy are as follows:
  - 3.2.1. zero tolerance for child maltreatment: the Centre does not tolerate any form of child maltreatment nor the possession or access to materials of child abuse. The Centre will not knowingly involve anyone in its work who poses a direct threat to children;
  - 3.2.2. recognition of children's interests: the Centre acknowledges that some children are at greater risk of maltreatment. Particularly vulnerable are children with disabilities, children in conflict situations, as well as immigrant children or children without parents;
  - 3.2.3. shared responsibility for child protection: in collaborating with partners who have not established a child protection policy, the Centre ensures that partners are aware of the Centre's Child Protection Policy and agree to follow it in their work.

#### **4. Operating Instructions**

- 4.1. During the Centre's activities, interaction with children primarily occurs in the following situations:
  - 4.1.1. lecturers trained by the Centre visit schools to conduct health promotion lectures;
  - 4.1.2. the Centre conducts survey-based research among children, which is coordinated beforehand with the University of Tartu's (hereinafter: the University) Human Research Ethics Committee.
- 4.2. The Centre ensures that individuals working with children are educated in matters regarding child protection and children's rights. Individuals working with children confirm in writing their knowledge of and adherence to the Centre's Child Protection Policy.
- 4.3. The University verifies that individuals working or wishing to work at the university (i.e., employees under both employment and civil law contracts, as well as interns, volunteers, etc., who interact with children in the name of the university or at the university) are not subject to the restrictions on working with children described in paragraph 20 of the Estonian Child Protection Act. It is recommended to perform this verification again at least once a year, preferably every six months, for individuals already working with children at the Centre. Detailed instructions for conducting the verification are available on the University's intranet.
- 4.4. In addition to complying with the legal requirements in force in Estonia, individuals working with children must base their activities on the principles and values presented in article 3 of this document.
- 4.5. Reporting child maltreatment or suspicion thereof according to paragraph 27 of the Child Protection Act is mandatory for all individuals possessing such information, including those working with children at the Centre.
- 4.6. Child maltreatment, suspicion thereof or violation of the Centre's Child Protection Policy (hereinafter: child maltreatment) must be reported to one's immediate supervisor (or their supervisor if that is not possible) and, if necessary, to the child protection officer or the police. In cases of great danger to the child's well-being or situations requiring urgent intervention, it is not necessary to go through the Centre's case resolution process described in the Centre before reporting of the situation according to article 4.9.5 of this document. The Centre's contact information for reporting maltreatment is provided on the Centre's website.
- 4.7. When processing a report of child maltreatment, it is mandatory to follow the duty of confidentiality unless required otherwise by national legislation.
- 4.8. In resolving a case of child maltreatment, at least the following topics should be focused on:
  - 4.8.1. evidence of child maltreatment or violation of Child Protection Policy;
  - 4.8.2. identified risks to the child;
  - 4.8.3. measures for protecting the child and minimizing risks;
  - 4.8.4. agreements on next steps, including urgent measures in the Centre's operations and, if necessary, contacting a child protection officer or the police.
- 4.9. Guidelines for reporting maltreatment:
  - 4.9.1. The report should preferably be in writing or, if reported orally, the supervisor that received the report should document it in writing.

- 4.9.2. The description of the situation must be as detailed as possible, focusing on what was said or observed, who was present, and what happened. Speculation and interpretation should be clearly distinguished from factual details.
- 4.9.3. The case reported is initially considered alleged rather than proven. Collected information must be treated as confidential and shared only with individuals involved in resolving the situation.
- 4.9.4. The reporting person and any other parties involved should be informed that depending on the circumstances of the case, complete confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed (for example, when fulfilling the notification obligation under the Estonian Child Protection Act).
- 4.9.5. A child in need of assistance within the meaning of paragraph 26 of the Child Protection Act must be immediately notified of to the local government or to child helpline service 116 111 and, if necessary, to the police.
- 4.10. Handling a case report at the Centre:
  - 4.10.1. Upon receiving the report, the supervisor analyzes the situation and involves other university employees with the necessary expertise as needed (including from the Human Resources Office).
  - 4.10.2. To protect the child, it may be necessary to take immediate measures to ensure that further maltreatment does not occur and that the principles of child protection at the center are not violated again.
  - 4.10.3. If a serious violation of the Centre's Child Protection Policy is identified, it may lead to the termination of employment with the individual who committed the violation, in accordance with university and national legal requirements.
  - 4.10.4. If the circumstances of the incident indicate a case of discrimination or bullying, it will be resolved according to the guidelines provided in the university's Guidelines for Equal Treatment.
  - 4.10.5. If the circumstances of the incident give reason to suspect a crime or other serious child protection violation, or if it concerns a child in need as defined in paragraph 26 of the Child Protection Act, it is mandatory to notify the child protection officer of the local government or the police.