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INTERNATIONAL POLICY SUPPORT DOCUMENT



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PUTTING OUR VALUES, POLICIES AND QUALITY STANDARDS INTO PRACTICE

## CODE OF CONDUCT

### KEY USERS

Mandatory for:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All national associations (NA) and promoting and supporting associations (PSA) of SOS Children's Villages International</li><li>• All board members and all employees of SOS Children's Villages</li><li>• All offices of the general secretariat of SOS Children's Villages International</li><li>• All persons who work for or on behalf of SOS Children's Villages</li></ul>
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### RELATED POLICIES

Basic policy:	<a href="#">Who We Are – Mission Statement of SOS Children's Villages</a>
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### RELATED DOCUMENTS, TOOLS, SYSTEMS

Core policies and quality standards	<a href="#">Child Protection Policy</a> <a href="#">Human Resource Manual</a>
Policy support documents	<a href="#">Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Guideline</a> <a href="#">Reporting and Responding Procedures for Child Protection</a>

### RESPONSIBLE FOR CONTENT

Function:	Human Resource and Organisation Development
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### DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Approved by:	Secretary General, September 2011
	This document was developed by the HR/OD Function with inputs from National Associations, the Senior Management Team, external consultant and the Secretary General.
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## INTRODUCTION

SOS Children’s Villages takes action for children<sup>1</sup> as an independent non-governmental social-development organisation. We respect varying religions and cultures, and we work in countries and communities where our mission can contribute to development. We work in the spirit of our Vision, Mission and Values as described in the ‘Who We Are’ booklet, our quality standards, including the Child Protection Policy, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which we promote around the world.

<b>Our Vision</b>	Every child belongs to a family and grows with love, respect and security.
<b>Our Mission</b>	We build families for children in need, we help them shape their own futures and we share in the development of their communities.
<b>Our Values</b>	<b>COURAGE</b> We take action
	<b>COMMITMENT</b> We keep our promises
	<b>TRUST</b> We believe in each other
	<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b> We are reliable partners

These are the core beliefs and attitudes our organisation is built on; the cornerstones of our success. These fundamental values guide our actions, decisions, and relationships as we work towards fulfilling our mission, as well as keeping safe the children in our care. SOS Children’s Villages builds on these core values to retain its reputation as a child-care organisation of quality, integrity and respect for the fundamental rights of all persons in compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The organisation also acknowledges the existence of external codes and guidelines that support our work in line with child rights and humanitarian principles, and these have been used in the development of this code.

SOS Children’s Villages has developed this Code of Conduct to uphold and promote the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct among all co-workers and persons affiliated to the organisation – without infringing on the (bill of) rights applying to the countries where we work. The objective of the Code is not to punish or sanction but to raise awareness and provide guidance for co-workers’ and affiliated persons’ conduct. Moreover, this document is intended to protect co-workers and affiliated persons from false allegations of inappropriate behaviour towards children.

This Code of Conduct applies to everyone employed by, contracted by or in some other formal relationship with SOS Children’s Villages and is relevant to all locations. It supplements the existing general obligations of co-workers contained in the employee handbook.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ‘child’ means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless the law applicable to the child states that majority is attained earlier.

# 1 ENSURING RESPECTFUL AND RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT

**1.1** I am aware that as an employee/associate of SOS Children's Villages I continually represent SOS Children's Villages in my work and life. I acknowledge that my attitude and behaviour have a significant impact on the children and co-workers in SOS programmes, and on the reputation of our organisation. I will therefore be mindful of my conduct both within and outside SOS Children's Villages. In particular, I shall adhere to the local laws that apply where I live and work and I shall act according to the organisation's core values outlined above.

**1.2** In my interactions with all children, youth, co-workers and persons affiliated to SOS Children's Villages, I am committed to empathetic and non-violent behaviour in action, language and gestures. I will respect the basic rights of all, regardless of gender, age, ability, health, language, ethnicity, race, colour, religion, caste, sexual orientation and any other aspects of identity or personal characteristics. I will act fairly, honestly and tactfully and will treat all children, youth, co-workers, and affiliated persons with sensitivity, tolerance, dignity and respect. I will respect the national law and local culture, traditions, customs and practices that are in line with UN conventions. Therefore, I will not take part in any form of discrimination, harassment, or abuse (physical, sexual or verbal), intimidation or exploitation, or in any other way infringe the rights of others.

**1.3** If my role is that of a manager, I also understand that I have additional responsibilities to model the good behaviour promoted through this code in order to create an environment in which good conduct can flourish. I will ensure that co-workers and persons associated with SOS Children's Villages are aware of the code and are supported in putting it into practice, and I will manage misconduct appropriately and actively address breaches of the code.

# 2 PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT IN RELATION TO CHILDREN

## Promoting the welfare and development of children

**2.1** I am concerned for the situation of children in general and will endeavour to promote their welfare and contribute to the development of each individual child to his / her full potential.

**2.2** I will contribute to the creation of a loving and caring atmosphere for children. I will treat children with respect, justice and understanding and extend to them the benefit of moral guidance, self-discipline and appropriate instruction.

**2.3** I am aware of being a role model for children and youth and therefore commit to displaying respectful and responsible behaviour. I recognise equal opportunity and will treat all children equally, including the promotion of gender equality.

## Child protection – keeping children safe from harm

**2.4** I will always uphold the trust and confidence placed in me by SOS Children's Villages to protect children and serve their best interests.

**2.5** I will conduct myself in a way that safeguards children and youth from all forms of discrimination, abuse, mistreatment and neglect. I will strongly support our values and our vision that "every child grows in a family, with love respect and security", and I will promote children's development.

**2.6** I will not initiate or become involved in sexual relationships with children. I am aware that such a relationship will lead to legal consequences and impact the organization's reputation. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defence.

**2.7** I will not exchange money, employment, goods, favours or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour. This includes any exchange of SOS services that are due to participants in the SOS programme.

**2.8** This means that I will not enter into sexual relationships with members of the local community that are receiving assistance or services from SOS Children's Villages, since these relationships are likely to undermine the credibility and integrity of the work of SOS Children's Villages.

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**2.9** I will not hire children as ‘house help’ (domestic workers<sup>2</sup>) or for any work that is likely to be hazardous or interfere with the child’s education, or that may be harmful to the child’s, physical, mental, social, spiritual or moral development.

**2.10** I will make sure that my work with children is visible to others and generally will not spend excessive time alone with children and away from others. Only when it is appropriate due to the nature of my role (e.g. SOS mother/SOS parent) will I spend longer periods of time alone with children. I shall not have children that are SOS participants to stay with me in my home (overnight or for extended periods) especially when there is no other responsible adult around.

**2.11** I will report all concerns regarding actual or potential child abuse, mistreatment or any other violation of the Child Protection Policy according to our reporting and responding system. I shall do this trusting that I shall be protected and supported by the organisation.<sup>3</sup>

**2.12** I will keep data about the children and youth in SOS Children’s Villages’ programmes confidential<sup>4</sup> (e.g. information on their family background, health status, etc.<sup>5</sup>). This principle of confidentiality also extends to former participants in SOS services and their siblings, and applies beyond the point at which co-workers cease their employment with SOS Children’s Villages.

**2.13** I will reveal all information about any charges against me pertaining to child abuse either at the time of my joining SOS Children’s Village or arising during the time of my employment.

## 3 PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT IN RELATION TO OTHER ASPECTS OF WORK

### Responsible use of power and position

**3.1** I will use my position for the benefit of the organisation when dealing with government officials, donors, sponsors, suppliers and other people affiliated to SOS Children’s Villages. I will avoid any conflict of interest arising from personal interests and/or obligations I might have towards third parties SOS Children’s Villages has business relations with.

**3.2** I am aware that children, youth and adults look up to me as a person in authority. I must not use that position for my own benefit or for the benefit of my family or friends.

**3.3** This means I must not enter into any sort of business relationship on behalf of SOS Children’s Villages with family members, friends or other personal contacts for the supply of any goods or services to SOS Children’s Villages.<sup>6</sup>

**3.4** I am aware that employment of relatives, spouses and partners of existing employees and board members is strongly discouraged.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The definition of child domestic work (‘house help’) does not include occasional babysitting, gardening, help during school holidays or out of school time.

<sup>3</sup> It is the responsibility of SOS Children’s Villages to ensure that those reporting concerns in good faith do not experience any negative repercussions or adverse effects as a result of carrying out their duty to report, even if the allegation later proves to be false. However, co-workers making knowingly false or malicious allegations may be subject to disciplinary action. See also: 4.3.

<sup>4</sup> Confidential means “ensuring that information is accessible only to those authorized to have access”.

<sup>5</sup> Photographs and other information about participants in the SOS programme must not be published on social media (such as Facebook) without their consent or the consent of the legal guardian.

<sup>6</sup> Such a purchase is acceptable if it results from an open, fair, transparent and accountable procurement process where the goods or services provided by the person or company represent the best quality and value for SOS Children’s Villages.

<sup>7</sup> See HR Manual, Standard 5: Professional Recruitment Process, p. 25

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**3.5** I understand that I must not ask for or invite any personal payment, service or favour from others, especially participants in SOS services, in return for our help, support, goods or services of any kind. I shall not accept bribes or significant gifts (except small tokens of appreciation)<sup>8</sup> from governments, participants in SOS services, donors, suppliers or others which have been offered as a result of my employment.

**3.6** When involved in local political, religious, or community activities, I commit to ensuring that SOS Children's Villages' mission and objectives are not compromised, and that SOS Children's Villages are not brought into disrepute.

**3.7** I will not work under the influence of intoxicating substances such as alcohol or any other substances that significantly impair my ability to do my job.

**3.8** I will ensure good and constructive working relationships with all co-workers. I will not allow any personal relationships with my co-workers to have a negative impact on my work, other co-workers or the working environment in general. If I am in an intimate personal relationship with my line-manager, or a co-worker that is reporting to me, I will declare this relationship.

### Responsible use of resources

**3.9** I will administer resources<sup>9</sup> entrusted to me by SOS Children's Villages in a transparent and prudent manner and in compliance with established controls that ensure optimum use of all our material and human resources.

**3.10** Co-workers are the most important resource in SOS Children's Villages. I shall not behave in a way that creates unnecessary risk to my health, safety and security, or to that of others with whom I work.

**3.11** I will use all computers and other information technology responsibly and refrain from inappropriate usage, especially that relating to the creation, viewing, downloading or distribution of any inappropriate or offensive material, including, but not restricted to, abusive images of children, pornography or child pornography.

**3.12** I will perform my job in an environmentally responsible manner in order to be a good role model for children and youth in this regard, and to pass an intact and healthy environment to the next generations.

### Responsible use of information

**3.13** Given that my position in SOS Children's Villages involves trust and confidence, I will exercise prudence in disclosing information outside the normal requirements of my job. I shall not communicate any sensitive or potentially damaging information to external bodies or individuals, including media representatives, without appropriate authorisation. I will comply with the restrictions set out in relevant SOS Children's Villages' guidelines.

**3.14** When sharing general information about children and co-workers (for example, data, pictures, etc. for PR purposes) I will do so with full respect and consideration for their privacy and dignity.

**3.15** I commit to sharing required information in a timely manner to contribute to a harmonious organisational climate, always bearing in mind the best interest of the child.

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<sup>8</sup> You should notify your line manager if you are offered or receive gifts of any kind

<sup>9</sup> Both financial and non-financial resources

## 4 CONSEQUENCES OF BREACHING THE CODE OF CONDUCT

- 4.1 Each of my actions matter! I realize that any violation of this Code of Conduct can have serious implications on the lives of children and youth, and for the organisation. Therefore, SOS Children's Villages will respond to violations of the Code of Conduct as deemed appropriate, regardless of position, status or personal relationship, and in accordance with national and local legislation and/or the terms and conditions of service defined within SOS. Consequences may include disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, and possible referral to the national authorities, e.g. police or other relevant agencies.
- 4.2 Should I become aware of any breaches of the Code of Conduct, I understand that I am duty bound to report these to my manager or other person in a position to receive such reports.
- 4.3 I understand that when reporting an actual or potential breach of the Code of Conduct I will do so in good faith and that SOS Children's Villages will ensure that I do not experience any negative repercussions or adverse effects as a result of carrying out my duty to report, even if the allegation later proves to be false. However, if I knowingly make a false or malicious allegation then I also understand that I may be subject to disciplinary action. In addition, if it transpires that I knew about misconduct but failed to report it, I am aware that I may also then be subject to disciplinary action.
- 4.4 I understand that the Code of Conduct cannot cover all aspects of good conduct. Where I have any concerns about possible misconduct or behaviour that may bring the organisation into disrepute, I undertake to raise the concerns at the earliest possible time either verbally or in writing with my manager.
- 4.5 In cases where the manager is the subject of concern, reports should be made to his or her superiors and to the HR department at the next level.

## 5 SIGNATURE AND COMMITMENT

- 5.1 I have carefully read and clearly understood the SOS Children's Villages Code of Conduct. I am aware that SOS Children's Villages expects me to uphold the standards of behaviour described in this Code of Conduct at all times. I fully appreciate its context and contents. By signing this Code of Conduct, I commit myself, in unison with the entire SOS Children's Villages organisation, to aspire for and maintain the required conduct as a precondition of my service to SOS Children's Villages.
- 5.2 I have received and hereby sign a copy of this document; a copy of the signed document will be filed in my personnel file.

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Signature:**

**Location:**