



Associazione Maestri di Strada ONLUS

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Child Safeguarding Policy

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The guidelines contained in this document, referred to as the "Child Safeguarding Policy" (hereinafter referred to as the Policy), are binding for all individuals who, in any capacity, work on behalf of the Maestri di Strada ONLUS Association and are therefore required to adopt the attached code of conduct.

Any report of abuse or exploitation will be handled according to the General Procedure for the Protection of Young People associated with this Policy and in compliance with current legislation.

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Glossary

All those who come into contact with young people play a role in their protection. In order to fulfill this role effectively, it is essential to be aware of issues related to child protection and to attribute the same meanings to the phenomena being addressed.

For this reason, it is considered important to provide clear and understandable information, firstly on the phenomenon of child abuse, as well as on the possible risks associated with the actions of an adult.

You can find here the main definitions:

Young Person: This term refers to anyone under the age of 18.

Abuse: Any act that causes physical or psychological damage to a young person, directly or indirectly resulting in harm. The WHO includes in this definition any form of physical and/or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment, and exploitation for commercial or other purposes, which result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity within a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. Exposure to partner violence is also sometimes included among forms of child abuse.

Physical Abuse: Actual or potential physical harm and injuries inflicted by another person (both adults and minors). It includes hitting, punching, kicking, shaking, biting, choking, burning, scalding, poisoning, and suffocating.

Psychological Abuse: A form of abuse manifested through continuous phrases and behaviors enacted by someone, in various capacities, who takes care of the minor and that have a high likelihood of causing harm to the physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social health and development of the minor. It includes forced isolation, prolonged criticism and reproaches, blame attribution, verbal threats, intimidation, discriminatory attitudes, rejection, exposure to violence (assisted violence), or to criminal or immoral influences.

Sexual Abuse: Any sexual act between an individual over 18 years old and a young person who, due to reasons of psychological and/or emotional immaturity, or dependency on adults (or because they are influenced by them), is deemed incapable of making informed choices or having adequate awareness of the meaning and value of the sexual acts in which they are involved. The term "sexual act" refers to both actual sexual intercourse, forms of erotic contact, and acts that do not involve direct contact, such as exposing the minor to the sight of a sexual act.

Sexual Exploitation: A form of sexual abuse that involves the engagement of children or adolescents in any type of sexual activity in exchange for money, gifts, food, lodging, or other items beneficial to the minor or their family.

Images of Sexual Abuse: Any representation, by any means, of minors involved in explicit sexual activities, actual or simulated, as well as any representation of their bodies not justified by the context of use.

Neglect and Negligent Treatment: Inadequacy or insufficiency of care regarding the physical, psychological, medical, and educational needs appropriate to the developmental stage of the young person, by those who are legally responsible for them.

Harmful Social and Cultural Practices Against Young People: Many forms of violence are based on tradition, culture, religion, superstition, or erroneous beliefs about their development and health. These practices, including corporal punishment, domestic violence, segregation and discrimination, female genital mutilation, early marriage, child labor exploitation, are generally perpetrated and actively condoned by the parents or guardians of the minor, or by other significant adults who often enjoy the support of the majority within the community. Many of these practices can cause serious injury and death, while others involve psychological violence. All are an attack on the human dignity of the young person and violate universally accepted international human rights standards.

Child Labor: Often defined as work that deprives minors of their childhood, potential, and dignity and harms their physical and mental development. It involves mentally, physically, socially, or morally hazardous work for minors that interferes with their schooling and recreational life. In its most extreme forms, child labor enslaves minors, separates them from their families, and exposes them to serious dangers and diseases (see OAU Guidelines on Child Labor).

The commitment of Maestri di Strada to the protection of young people

The Maestri di Strada ONLUS Association recognizes and adopts as the foundational principle of its action the right of every young person to be protected from all forms of mistreatment, neglect, exploitation, and violence. Maestri di Strada therefore commits daily, using all available means, to ensure that minors who attend the formal and informal spaces managed by the educational professionals collaborating with the Association are always protected from possible mistreatment and abuse.

To pursue this objective, the Association has developed a specific Child Safeguarding Policy, based on the four foundational principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescence:

Article 2 Non-Discrimination Principle:

The rights apply to all young people without any distinction based on gender, ability, religion, cultural and social background, physical characteristics, languages, opinions of the child/adolescent, or parents.

Article 3 Best Interest Principle:

In all decisions, the best interests of the young person must be given primary consideration.

Article 6 Life, Development, and Protection Principle:

All young people have the right to life, to healthy development, and the right to be protected from any form of violence or exploitation.

Article 12 Participation Principle:

All young people have the right to express their opinion in all decision-making processes that concern them, and their viewpoint must be taken into consideration, even by adults.

In light of these general principles, and through the adoption of this policy, the code of conduct, and the procedures implemented to minimize the risks of inappropriate behaviors and to respond promptly and effectively, Maestri di Strada commits to the following obligations towards all young people involved in its activities:

- **Awareness:** Maestri di Strada commits to ensuring that its staff, collaborators, and volunteers, as well as those from other partner organizations, are aware of the issues related to abuse and exploitation and the risks associated with minors. All individuals involved with the Association undergo training and work to promote a culture of safeguarding young people in all environments where they interact with minors or have an impact on them. Minors themselves and their families are informed, through appropriate means, of the expected code of conduct from Maestri di Strada staff and representatives and how they can report any suspected abuse.

- **Prevention:** Maestri di Strada commits to ensuring that its staff, collaborators, and volunteers, as well as those from other partner organizations, adopt appropriate organizational measures to minimize the risks of mistreatment, abuse, or exploitation in order to prevent potential harm to minors. In every activity or project, a safe environment will be created where the rights of minors are always protected, and potential abuses are prevented.
- **Reporting:** Maestri di Strada ensures that its staff, collaborators, and volunteers of the Association and other partner organizations are clear on when it is necessary to report a suspected case of possible abuse and what actions to take. They should also know how to proceed with making the report to the relevant and responsible authorities.
- **Response:** Maestri di Strada commits to ensuring an effective response to every report of abuse by supporting, safeguarding, and protecting the involved minor.

General Procedure for the Protection of Young People

In order to best protect young people, Maestri di Strada defines the following procedures to ensure that anyone in contact with a young person:

- Is aware of the issues related to abuse and the associated risks for young people
- Minimizes risks by creating an environment where the rights of young people are always protected and potential abuses are prevented
- Understands when it is necessary to report a suspicion of possible abuse and what actions to take
- Implements an effective response to every report of abuse, supporting, safeguarding, and protecting the young person involved.

These procedures enable the appropriate implementation of the current Policy in the following areas:

- Awareness and Prevention
- Reporting and Response

AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

a. Dissemination and Awareness

Maestri di Strada ensures wide dissemination of the Policy and Code of Conduct to all stakeholders (institutions, family members or guardians of minors, community representatives, etc.), particularly towards the young people it interacts with, using language and methods appropriate to their development.

b. Implementation of the Policy in Systems and Management Processes

When Maestri di Strada is responsible for conducting activities or providing services for young people, it continuously commits to defining specific processes aimed at protecting them in the best possible way. The quality of such activities and services must also reflect the principles and standards of the Policy.

The Policy must be incorporated into every activity and process of Maestri di Strada that involves potential contact with young people.

The Policy must be reflected in every provision regarding human resources and management, defining how employees, collaborators, and volunteers should conduct their work.

Failure to comply with the provisions contained in the Policy must be considered a serious disciplinary violation.

c. Risk Assessment and Management

All activities conducted by the Association must be assessed beforehand to ensure that any risk to the protection of young people is identified, and appropriate control systems are developed.

d. Staff Selection and Hiring

The hiring and selection of personnel (whether they are employees, contracted collaborators, or volunteers) must reflect Maestri di Strada's commitment to the protection of young people, ensuring that communications, checks, and procedures are in place to exclude anyone who is not suitable to work with minors, including access to criminal records.

Selected candidates are made aware of the binding nature of the Policy they sign, the related Procedure, and the Code of Conduct, and the fact that they apply to both their professional and personal lives.

e. Training and Development

The staff working with young individuals must receive specific training on issues related to abuse, harassment, and maltreatment, including potential risks and prevention methods, as well as appropriate behaviors and boundaries when working with minors. The basic contents of the Policy, the Code of Conduct, and the General Procedure should be included in the initial and ongoing training of all staff, collaborators, and volunteers. Sensitivity to the context and various local cultures, as well as their understanding, should be included in the training process, without tolerating any harmful acts towards children and adolescents.

f. Responsibility

The Board of Directors of Maestri di Strada Association commits to ensuring that measures for the protection of young individuals are implemented as the Focal Point for Child Safeguarding.

In every project, the project manager is responsible for safeguarding young individuals within their specific area and for implementing this policy accordingly.

REPORTING AND RESPONSE

Maestri di Strada, in compliance with privacy regulations, has established a system to record and analyze all reports. Therefore, it has defined a PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING A CONCERN OR SUSPICION.

Who should report:

Employees, Collaborators, Volunteers

What to report:

A concern or suspicion of abuse, mistreatment, or exploitation against a young person, a violation of the Code of Conduct by a staff member or Partner.

Below there is a (non-exhaustive) list of typical situations to report:

- A young person discloses abuse or reports events/behaviors that raise suspicions that they or other minors are experiencing abuse or exploitation.
- There is knowledge or suspicion that a young person has been abused, exploited, or is at risk of abuse or exploitation.
- A member of the community reports that harm has been done to a young person or that there is a risk of harm.
- Maestri di Strada staff or a Partner abuses a young person they have come into contact with through their work for Maestri di Strada.
- Maestri di Strada staff or a Partner abuses a young person outside of the work context.
- A young person in contact with Maestri di Strada abuses another minor.

When to report:

As soon as possible and no later than 24 hours. Promptness is crucial to ensure the safety of the minor.

Whom to report to:

To your immediate supervisor or to the Focal Point for the protection of young people if the supervisor is not available or accessible, or if the supervisor is the subject of concern. The right to immediately report personally to the competent authorities remains unchanged if there is an event considered a crime.

Management of reports must adhere to the following Guiding Principles:

a) Safety and Well-being of the young person are paramount. No minor should be put at risk by the action taken or because no action is taken.

b) Professionalism and confidentiality throughout the process. All reports must be treated professionally, confidentially, and promptly, and all involved parties must be ensured appropriate treatment. Minors who are victims of abuse, witnesses, and those accused have the right to confidentiality. Confidentiality means that reports should only be made to designated individuals within the organization. This is based on the "need to know" principle and follows a "chain of command" that is as short as possible to minimize the potential leakage of information and subsequent breach of confidentiality. Confidentiality and privacy must be ensured at every stage, from reporting to keeping records and data securely, to applying any disciplinary measures against staff.

c) Respect for all parties involved. Every report made in good faith is considered to be made in the best interest of the minor, regardless of the outcome of the analysis or any investigation. Any staff member who intentionally makes a malicious or untruthful report of suspected abuse may face disciplinary action. All individuals involved, including the person accused, must be treated with respect, dignity, and sensitivity throughout the entire process. The suspected or accused person must be informed as soon as possible of the initiation of an internal procedure against them and kept informed unless otherwise instructed by Law Enforcement or Authorities.

d) Care in the management of communications from young individuals. Anyone who comes into contact with a young person reporting sensations and information of abuse or mistreatment is obligated to act in a manner that avoids further stress to the young person, and must therefore:

- Listen to the young person without exerting pressure to obtain information during their narrative. It is important that the young person is allowed to respect their own pace;
- Inform the young person in a simple and transparent way about the procedure that will be followed, also indicating with whom the information will be shared;
- Carefully document what is reported by the young person in the Incident Report form, meticulously avoiding any distortion of the narrative;
- Act immediately if there is a reasonable concern that the situation may jeopardize the safety of the young person, involving other services to which the case's jurisdiction may be transferred.

How to report:

Preferably confidentially through the Incident Report form. If this is not possible, by phone or in person. In any case, it must be reported as soon as possible in the Incident Report form.

What happens next:

If the Focal Point has not been directly involved in the report, the responsible party reports the concern to the Youth Protection Focal Point through a dedicated Incident Report form. The report will be handled in accordance with Maestri di Strada's disciplinary measures and current legislation.

The Focal Point, immediately and no later than within 24 hours, will analyze the information received and discuss with the responsible party who submitted the report on how to proceed in accordance with the Policy, establishing the degree of urgency and appropriate timing. It will ensure that any urgent measures are taken to protect the minor, as well as ensuring immediate access to medical, psychological, or social support based on a local mapping of services.

The Focal Point will simultaneously inform the President of the Association about the received report and, together with them and the responsible party who received the report, form a Case Management Team (under the President's responsibility) with the task of:

- Primarily ensuring the safety of the young individuals and all involved parties;
- Assessing the potential involvement of external consultants and professionals;
- Planning, if deemed appropriate, an internal fact-finding investigation;
- Assessing actions to mitigate concerns;
- Assessing disciplinary action against the individual subject of the report;
- Considering reporting the case to Judicial Authorities, Law Enforcement, and Social Services (regarding the protection of the involved minors), involving the Youth Protection Management team;
- Establishing an action plan, including timing, roles, and responsibilities for managing the case;
- Safeguarding all documentation throughout the process in a secure location and sharing it confidentially only with individuals involved in active roles;
- Defining an internal action plan to monitor the progress of the report (including role division, tasks, and timing) and bring it to closure;
- Providing adequate feedback and support to the involved parties until the active case management is fully closed;
- Always acting in accordance with the underlying principles of the General Procedure and, more broadly, the Childhood and Adolescence Protection Policy;
- Always acting in accordance with current legislation.

Guidelines

This guide is addressed to all recipients of the Policy as previously mentioned in the document. In general, in activities involving children, it should be established as a rule to have the presence of two or more adults.

It is important for all staff and other individuals in contact with children to:

- Be aware of situations that may present risks and what constitutes abuse or exploitation of young individuals;
- Know who the Youth Protection Focal Point is or the person to turn to in case of need;
- Treat young individuals fairly: they must have an inclusive attitude and involve everyone without discrimination;
- Whenever possible, work in the presence of other adults;
- Be mindful of language use, behavior, and how the relationship with young individuals might be perceived;
- Adopt non-violent and positive behaviors;
- Encourage young individuals to express their thoughts and points of view;
- Inform young individuals and communities of their right to report any issues;
- Obtain permission from children and parents before taking photographs, recording videos, or documenting their personal stories;
- Be aware of potential risks in children's relationships (including bullying and peer abuse).

It is important to avoid:

- Physically striking or assaulting young individuals;
- Engaging in any form of sexual activity with minors;
- Taking actions or behaviors that could be interpreted as misconduct or potentially abusive;
- Behaving in any way that could be abusive or put others at risk of abuse;
- Discriminating against, making feel guilty, humiliating, belittling, or placing children in degrading situations;
- Spending too much time alone with young individuals;
- Allowing a child with whom one is working to sleep over at one's home without supervision;
- Publishing any story that could endanger the child;
- Tolerating or not reporting any issues or suspected violations.

CODE OF CONDUCT

This code of conduct applies to all operators and collaborators who, in any capacity, work and/or collaborate with the Maestri di Strada ONLUS Association and come into contact with minors.

Operating alongside Maestri di Strada entails assuming a special responsibility towards the rights and protection of young individuals. Therefore, in my work with young individuals, as well as in my personal life, I MUST ALWAYS:

- Pursue the best interests of young individuals in all my actions and decisions concerning them.
- Know and respect the rights of young individuals, ensuring that these rights inspire and guide my behavior.
- Maintain a high personal and professional profile, behaving consistently with this Policy, and ensuring that all my actions are always a positive example for the young individuals I come into contact with.
- Treat all young individuals I come into contact with respectfully and inclusively, respecting their identity, cultural, religious, and gender differences, physical characteristics, and social background.
- Foster an environment that is relaxed and open to ideas and opinions from everyone, where each person feels listened to in their needs and respected in their differences.
- Encourage and support the self-determination and autonomy of young individuals, valuing their abilities and skills, and promoting awareness of their rights and capacity for self-protection.
- Report any concerns, suspicions, or certainties regarding possible abuse or mistreatment, as established in the General Procedure and this Policy.
- Organize activities, spaces, materials, and logistics in a safe and suitable manner for all participants, considering the needs and different abilities of all beneficiaries.
- Work in the presence of at least one other person when in contact with young individuals, avoiding being alone with any one of them. Where this is not possible, share possible alternatives to be adopted with the team and my supervisor.
- Establish contact with young individuals only in a professional context and for project-related purposes, always using safe and professional tools and environments of which the organization is aware.

I MUST NEVER:

- Mistreat, abuse, or exploit a young individual physically or psychologically, or engage in relationships with one or more of them that could be considered exploitative, abusive, or harmful.
- Engage in sexual or sexual exploitation activities with young individuals, regardless of the legal definition of adulthood or consent mechanisms recognized in different countries. Misunderstanding the age is not considered an acceptable defense.
- Act in ways that could put young individuals at risk of exploitation, mistreatment, or abuse.
- Tolerate or participate in behaviors by young individuals that are illegal, abusive, or endanger their safety.

- Display attitudes that could negatively influence the harmonious and socio-relational development of the young individuals with whom I interact, even from a psychological standpoint.
- Allow a young individual with whom I work to sleep in my residence, or during residential stays in the same room as me, without supervision and prior authorization from my direct supervisor, except under exceptional circumstances.
- Provide money, goods, or other benefits to a young individual outside the parameters and purposes established by project activities and/or without the knowledge of my supervisor.

Attachement: INCIDENT REPORT