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# Child Safeguarding Q&A



## Frequently asked questions

Here is a list of frequently asked questions. If you are a partner of Oak Foundation and your question is not listed below, please get in touch with us and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

### What does child safeguarding mean?

Child safeguarding is the responsibility that organisations have to: make sure their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to children; and ensure that children are not exposed to the risk of harm and abuse.

### What is Oak Foundation's approach to child safeguarding?

We take a risk-based approach to safeguarding. This means that we consider potential risks to children from our own and partners' programming, operations, staff, and services. Certain activities carry higher risks and thus require safeguards to mitigate risks.

Our approach to safeguarding is also strengths-based. We believe that our grantee partners know their programmes and the people they serve best; therefore, they are also best placed to identify their risks and measures they have in place to protect children.

### What is a child safeguarding policy?

A child safeguarding policy represents an organisational commitment to ensure that children are treated with respect, do not face abusive or demeaning language or behaviour, are protected from physical and sexual violence and abuse, and are not exploited in domestic work or other labour, among other key priorities.

Oak Foundation believes that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. There is an obligation on all organisations and professionals working or in contact with children to strive to ensure their operations are 'child safe'. This means that staff and contractors do not pose a risk to children and that programmes, policies and practices are designed and developed in ways that promote the protection of children. To have an idea what a child safeguarding policy looks like, you can have a look at Oak Foundation's own policy, available on our website.

### What is the value of a child safeguarding policy?

A policy communicates the intention of an organisation to protect children. It helps to lay down standards of conduct and behaviour, provides a clear overview of what is acceptable and not as well as giving a clear pathway to follow if there are breaches of the policy. Some Oak grantees have shared with us the value that child safeguarding brought to their organisation. You can read here about [Raising Voices](#), [Hill Learning Center](#), and [Heartline's](#) safeguarding developments.

### What does 'contact with children and working with children mean?

Contact with children means working on an activity or in a position that involves or may involve contact with children, either under the position description or due to the nature of the work environment. This includes indirect contact with children in the community. Working with children means being engaged in an activity with a child where the contact would reasonably be expected as a normal part of the activity and the contact is not incidental to the activity. Working includes volunteering or other unpaid work.

Oak grantee partners that are in contact with children or working with children need to put in place safeguarding measures. This could include the development of a child safeguarding policy.

### **Who is considered a 'child'?**

A 'child' refers to all human beings under the age of 18. This is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the world's most widely ratified convention.

### **Does my organisation need a child safeguarding policy?**

All grantee partners working with, having access to, or coming into contact with children need to assess the risks their programming, operations, and services potentially have on children.

Depending on the level of contact, your organisation might need to develop a policy or put in place other safeguarding measures such as a code of conduct, media policies, human resource measures, or risk assessments.

If your organisation works directly with children, you need a safeguarding policy. The first step is to discuss with your programme officer and fill out Oak's online self-audit. You will be sent a link to the online system when you apply for a grant.

### **What is the process for developing the policy?**

The child safeguarding policy development process is tailored to suit the needs of individual grantee partners and will differ across and within Oak Foundation programme areas; however, the process will follow this basic path:

Initial assessment: prospective partner completes our online self-audit and submits it with supporting evidence (this includes existing policies, procedures and guidelines on the topic). Here partners can also indicate if they would like additional support.

Review of self-audit: Oak Foundation programme and safeguarding staff review the self-audit and materials provided.

Outcomes and actions: Oak and prospective partner discuss outcomes and agree on next steps. Those partners who need to improve their safeguarding measures are offered technical support by one of our expert service provider organisations in their region or through a consultant of their own choosing.

Implementation and monitoring: Partner develops an implementation and monitoring plan that is reported on in progress reports to Oak Foundation.

### **How long does it take to develop a child safeguarding policy?**

The time it takes to develop a policy depends on: the size of the organisation; the number of branch or country offices; existing policies and guidance on the topic; the ability to dedicate staff time; and the organisation's commitment to the process, among other considerations.

### **What happens once the policy is in place?**

A child safeguarding policy is a living document. It needs to be brought to life through an implementation plan outlining the action the organisation is taking to adhere to the commitments outlined in the policy. This includes how often the policy is revised, how staff will be kept informed and trained, and how the organisation keeps itself accountable to its board and management.

### **Do you need to have child safeguarding measures in place to receive funding from Oak Foundation?**

We expect partners who work with or who come into contact with children to have child safeguarding measures including a policy, a code of conduct, and a reporting framework in place. Prospective partners that do not meet our safeguarding standards are not excluded from funding but are rather offered support to develop and implement child safeguarding measures.

### **What is the online child safeguarding self-audit?**

For many years we have asked grantee partners to fill in a self-audit form which outlines the partners risks and asks them to rate themselves against our safeguarding standards. Until 2021, this was done as a separate word document which in turn was stored along with other due diligence related documents in our grants management system. In line with our objective to integrate safeguarding throughout our grant-cycle, we moved the child safeguarding self-audit online, using Survey Monkey Apply. By having the form online and asking partners to update us on their safeguarding situation annually, we get a better sense of how safeguarding is evolving and implemented with our partners.

### **What support can we expect from Oak Foundation?**

Oak Foundation supports its partners throughout their safeguarding journeys. Oak has contracted a number of expert service providers around the world to help develop quality child safeguarding policies and implementation plans that are in line with national and international standards.

Support from Oak Foundation and service providers can include, but is not limited to: providing toolkits, basic structures, and sample documents; organising workshops or online webinars; introducing you to consultants when needed; and being available for questions that you might have throughout the process.

### **Is there any funding available for the development of safeguarding policies and implementation plans?**

We are keen to support our partners to become child-safe organisations. The best thing to do is to raise this with your Oak programme officer. With the knowledge they have of your organisation as well as our offer of safeguarding resources, they will be able to support you and direct you towards appropriate support.

### **Does Oak Foundation have its own child safeguarding policy?**

Yes. Oak Foundation holds itself as a Foundation and all its employees accountable to a high standard of child protection. Oak Foundation has had a child safeguarding policy in place since 2013. The policy stemmed from Oak's commitment to a world in which all children and adults are protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

Oak's policy can be found on our website in our publication section and applies to all staff employed by Oak Foundation, Trustees and Advisors to the Board, volunteers, visitors sent by Oak to Oak-funded programmes, interns, and other contracted personnel, including consultants.

We have two internal staff groups that support the implementation of our policy. One group focuses on support to our grantee partners and the other group focuses on internal oversight within the foundation.

We review our policy regularly. The last revision was done in December 2020.

### **How do you respond to allegations of violations of the child safeguarding policy?**

Any breach of the Oak child safeguarding policy needs to be reported on our report a concern webpage. You can find the link to this page in the footer of our website. Oak has designated officers based in Geneva that receive and deal with all concerns in a discreet manner.

For Oak grantee partners, we ask that you include a reporting procedure in your child safeguarding policy that outlines who to report to and how you will deal with concerns.

Although we do not require partners to inform us of a breach of their child safeguarding policy, we encourage you to get in touch and inform us if you need support.

**What safeguarding measures do I need to have if my organisation has very limited contact with children?**

If your organisation does not normally come in to contact with children, we do not expect you to develop a dedicated child safeguarding policy. Nevertheless, we recognise that children are a particularly vulnerable group and may need extra protection. Therefore, we ask that your organisation have a focal point that is familiar with the local authorities dealing with child protection matters and is able to contact them should an issue arise. We also ask that staff are aware of who this person is and how to contact them. For many organisations, this person will be part of Human Resources or leadership.