

Zest4Kidz Child Protection Policy

The Trustees of Zest4Kidz acknowledge the rights of children to be protected and treated with respect and have their views taken into account. The nature of our work means that these rights may not be adequately protected in the setting in which we find them. Our work involves us attempting to get these issues addressed within their current context.

However it is essential that in any interaction with leaders and volunteers of Zest4Kidz children have the right to be protected and to be treated with respect and have their views taken into account.

Many of the children we work with have been badly abused and brutalised and that this makes the particularly vulnerable to being further abused by people in positions of trust, this includes leaders and volunteers working with Zest4Kidz.

Any abusive or risky behaviour by leaders or volunteers of Zest4Kidz will not be tolerated, and will be reported to the relevant authorities in accordance with this policy.

This policy aims to set out safe working practices for leaders and volunteers of Zest4Kidz and to outline the reporting procedure should abuse be suspected.

This policy is based on the advice and guidance contained in "Our Duty to Care: The Principles of good practice for the protection of children & young people", it also takes into account the guidance contained in "Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children"

It is the responsibility of all Team Leaders and Team Members to ensure that this policy is complied with.

Recognizing Child Abuse

Training provided by Zest4Kidz will ensure that leaders and volunteers will be clear about what abuse is and know how to respond to it.

What is Abuse?

All workers should be aware that child abuse occurs when the behaviour by someone in a position of greater power than a child causes harm. Because children can be abused in a number of ways, sometimes at the same time, it is not always easy to categorise it, but four broad definitions can be considered: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

While all children can be vulnerable to abuse, Zest4Kidz acknowledges that the children it is involved with may be particularly vulnerable to abuse. Many of the children visited by Zest4Kidz projects have been abused and/or brutalised, this makes them especially vulnerable to abuse by adults particularly by people who are in a caring or helping position.

Suspecting child abuse:

Leaders and volunteers may come across actual or suspected child abuse in a number of different contexts:

- A child may give an account of what has happened to them in the past
- A concern may arise that a child is being abused by a current carer
- A concern or an allegation may arise concerning a Team Member or Team Leader of Zest4Kidz

Children will sometimes confide that they are being harmed, and sometimes other people witness incidents which suggests that children are being harmed. However, it is often necessary to rely on signs or suspicious behaviour on the part of the child or adult. It is not always easy to accept that children can be deliberately harmed or abused, especially by people who volunteer for humanitarian work. Reluctance to think badly of such people, or a lack of understanding of abuse can lead to a resistance to hear or recognise abuse.

It is essential that concerns no matter how small, are discussed with the relevant personnel as outlined within this policy.

Reporting Procedure

Any Team Member or Team Leader who has a suspicion or concern about child abuse should report this to the Zest4Kidz Child Protection Officer. If the concern is about a child's current local carer, or a concern about past abuse, this will be passed to the Zest4Kidz Team Leader, who will pass this information on to the appropriate authorities in the country in which the project is taking place.

If the child protection allegation concerns a Team Leader or Team Member, the Child Protection Officer will inform the Zest4Kidz team leader who will make immediate arrangements to have the allegation investigated.

In such circumstances the Team Leader will inform the Chair of the Board of Directors of Zest4Kidz.

While the matter is being investigated the Child Protection Officer and the Team Leader will ensure that the leader/volunteer is suspended from all contact with children.

The Child Protection Officer will conduct an initial screening to establish if there is a concern. If a concern is established the Child Protection Officer in conjunction with the Team Leader and Chair of the Board of Directors will establish contact with the authorities in the country hosting the project.

The leader/volunteer against whom the allegation is made must be advised as soon as possible of the allegation and given an opportunity to respond. Any response from the leader/volunteer must be noted and forwarded where necessary to the relevant authorities. It must be noted that an allegation may be erroneous or malicious and therefore should be dealt with sensitively and support provided for the worker, including counselling where necessary.

Consideration should also be given to support/counselling of volunteers/leaders involved in the project, in the event of such an allegation being made.

The Team Leader will also make all necessary arrangements to support the leader/volunteer throughout any investigation process in the host country. This will also include contacting the Irish Embassy.

On returning to Ireland the Child Protection Officer will make a formal report to the Health Services Executive and the Gardaí if necessary.

Volunteers, leaders, and team leaders are advised that they are legally protected under the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998.

The Chair of the Board of Directors should be kept informed at all stages of this process.

It is the duty of all volunteers to report their concerns promptly and in accordance with this policy, failure to do so potentially puts children at further risk as well as damaging the reputation of Zest4Kidz or other voluntary humanitarian organizations.

Code of Behaviour

In order to ensure safe working practices for both children and volunteers/leaders this policy sets out a code of behaviour which Zest4Kidz expects all involved to adhere to.

While Zest4Kidz endeavours to promote children's rights within their locality it is essential that their rights are protected during any activities provided by leaders and volunteers of Zest4Kidz. It is essential that this code of conduct is observed by both volunteers and leaders in order to avoid the possibility of any misunderstandings, or the potential for allegations of misconduct.

Leaders and volunteers should:

- Be sensitive to the risks involved in participating in contact sports and other activities.
- Physical contact is a valid way of comforting, reassuring and showing concern for children. It should only take place when it is acceptable to all persons concerned.
- Should never physically punish or be in any way verbally abusive to a child, nor should they tell jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of children.

Code of Behaviour Continued

- Be sensitive to the possibility of becoming over involved or spending too much time with any one child.
- Respect the personal space, safety and privacy of individuals.
- Ensure that they are never alone with a child

Dealing With Challenging Behaviour

While Zest4Kidz does everything to ensure that programmes and activities are safe for both children, leaders and volunteers, it is possible that challenging behaviour may be encountered. It is essential that any volunteer who faces behaviour that they find difficult or challenging they should discuss that with a leader as soon as possible. Assistance from locally based staff should be sought to respond to the behaviour. It is not the responsibility of Team Members or Team Leaders to respond to such behaviour.

Supervision of Activities

It is the responsibility of Team Leaders to ensure that all activities with children are safe for both children and Team Members; the key to this is to ensure that all activities are properly organised and supervised.

It is the responsibility of Team Leaders to ensure that there are sufficient Team Leaders and Team Members for the chosen activities.

It is the responsibility of Team Leaders to explain and assign roles to Team Members concerning Zest4Kidz activities.

During activities Team Leaders must ensure that they are observing both children and Team Members.

Team Members must ensure that they abide by any instructions given to them by the Team Leaders.

If Team Members experience any difficulties with the activities or role assigned must advise one of the Team Leaders.

Training for Z4K Trip Team Leaders

All Team Leaders will receive training in:

- The principles and philosophy of Zest4Kidz
- The activities provided by Zest4Kidz
- Child protection including their role and responsibilities and reporting procedure

Training for all Z4K Trip Team Members

All Team Members will receive basic training on:

- Activities to be undertaken during Zest4Kidz trips
- Role and responsibilities of Team Members
- Basic child protection including the Zest4Kidz working practices and reporting procedure