

Child Safeguarding

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SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES



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SOS Children's Villages
International Office Asia
Advocacy Unit
SOS Enclave, Sector 29, Faridabad-121008,
Haryana, India
Email: ioasia@sos-kd.org
Website: www.sos-childrensvillages.org

Content development: Evangeline Ekanayake
Project management and editing: Chathuri Jayasooriya
Cover photo and inside photos: SOS Children's Villages Archives
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Creating and maintaining a safe and protective environment

1

Commitment to child care is synonymous with a commitment to the safety of children. SOS Children's Villages understands this and places a very high priority on maintaining a caring and protective environment, and prevent and address all forms of abuse, exploitation and maltreatment. We strongly condemn all forms of abuse, whether they take place externally or within the organization.

We also prioritize maintaining effective mechanisms in four key areas of child Safeguarding:

1. Creating awareness
2. Strengthening prevention
3. Encouraging reporting
4. Providing effective response in the event of an incident

Parameters of child safeguarding

Child protection refers to the overall safety of children from all forms of danger and abuse that can affect them at home, alternative care settings, school, community or society at large. This covers a wide range of risks, dangers and socio-political vulnerabilities such as the danger of trafficking, underage marriage or recruitment, risk of impact of poverty, and all manner of abuse that cover the gamut of situations that can throw a child in to harm's way.

We are particularly committed to protecting our children in the SOS programmes from risks of any harm that can occur within the SOS family houses or any other programme setting. This may be any form of harassment or abuse perpetrated by an adult on a child, which we call *adult to child incidents*, or a child on another child, which we call *child-to-child incidents*.



What is child protection?

Actions that individuals, organizations, countries and communities take to protect children from acts of maltreatment, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including domestic violence, child labour, commercial and sexual exploitation and abuse, HIV/AIDS, and physical violence. It also describes the work organizations undertake in communities or programmes to protect children from the risk of harm due to the situation they live in.



What is child safeguarding?

All activities an organization undertakes to ensure that its co-workers, operations, and programmes do no harm to children and do not expose them to the risk of harm and abuse; that appropriate responses and effective management of child safeguarding concerns are in place; and that any concerns the organization has about children's safety in its own programmes and within the communities they work in are reported to the appropriate authorities.

2 Our guiding framework

SOS Care Promise

The foundational principles that govern all programmes of SOS Children's Villages worldwide including Asia, are found in the SOS Care Promise. Of the nine care commitments which form the bedrock of all that SOS Children's Villages does, the fourth care commitment focuses on the safety and protection of children.¹



Care Commitment 4

We create a safe environment for children in all our programmes

We commit to create a safe environment for children in all our programmes at all times by implementing child safeguarding measures and procedures in line with our child protection policy, international standards and best practices. We also insist that our partners do the same.

We manage incidents

Report
Respond

We create a safe environment for children



We minimise risks

Advocate and raise awareness
Prevent through risk mitigation

Source: SOS Care Promise: How SOS Children's Villages Ensures the Best Care for Children and Young People. SOS Children's Villages International, 2018

¹ SOS Care Promise: How SOS Children's Villages Ensures the Best Care for Children and Young People (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2018).

SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy

SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy is the backbone of our protection and child safeguarding principles, procedures and practices. It lays out the policy framework for all our child safeguarding activities.

Every child has the right to develop to his or her full potential, to quality education, participation and non-discrimination. Everybody has the responsibility to protect children from all forms of abuse, abandonment, exploitation, violence and discrimination.²



This policy focuses specific attention on internal mechanisms to prevent and respond to child abuse within SOS Children's Villages. The policy is supplemented by several other documents and tools, such as Code of Conduct of SOS Children's Villages, Child Safety is Everybody's Business: Child Safeguarding Reporting and Responding Procedures in Member Associations, and Working Together to Protect Children: Roles and Responsibilities of the GSC in the Reporting and Responding Process.

² *Child Safety is Everybody's Business: Child Protection Policy* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2008).

Keeping Children Safe: Child Safeguarding Standards

Keeping Children Safe (KCS), an international organization setting standards to protect children from exploitation and abuse, has awarded its Level 1 Certification to SOS Children's Villages. The certification confirms that SOS Children's Villages has developed a child safeguarding framework to protect children from harm and has processes for responding effectively when incidents occur.

Keeping Children Safe standards are an example of global standards in child care which inform the care standards and policies of SOS Children's Villages.

The Keeping Children Safe toolkit is a complete package made up of five components for people working in child protection across the world.

The standards and defined processes provide a sound basis for the development of effective measures to prevent and respond to violence, from awareness raising strategies to safeguarding measures. They offer an excellent opportunity not only for the improvement of the quality and professionalism of those working with children, but most importantly, to help us achieve greater impact for children.³



READ MORE: Refer book 1 of this Information Pack for details on the international and internal policy frameworks that guide our programmes.

³ Read more at <https://www.keepingchildrensafe.global/accountability/>



Two brothers from a family supported by the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka

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Our child safeguarding mechanism

Adult-to-child incidents

We recognize that all children are potentially at risk of abuse and exploitation. Some may be more vulnerable than others due to discrimination related to the child's economic status, gender, disability, ethnicity, caste or living situation. We are aware of the need for effective guidelines especially in cultures where children are not encouraged to speak up against adults or voice their dissent. Violations may include exploitation, domination, intimidation or any form of hurt or abuse. Due to the volume and intensity of time spent together in alternative care situations, boundaries between adult caregivers and children are less clear, which greatly heightens the need for more appropriate standards by which to judge adult-child boundaries and interactions within care relationships. The SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy provides clear,

detailed standards by which the programmes of all member associations are carried out. We have adopted all the necessary systems, processes and guidelines required to implement a clear zero tolerance policy that applies to all forms of child harassment, mistreatment or abuse. At the same time, we are making our best efforts to raise awareness on and encourage reporting.

It is important therefore that boundary crossing and boundary violations be considered within the context of the complexity of caring relationships where boundaries may not always be perfectly clear. Nevertheless, in the interest of ensuring quality care and serving the best interest of each child, some form of distinction is needed in order to guide our responses.

Child-to-child incidents

We most often encounter children deprived of adequate parental care and who have often experienced trauma related to neglect, violence and abuse within their families of origin or other care placements. We recognize that,



An SOS mother helping her son sit safely on his wheelchair, at SOS Children's Village Jorpati, Nepal, one of the two children's villages in Asia dedicated to caring for children with disabilities

Early exposures to toxic stress and adversity can negatively affect neurodevelopment, which in turn affects the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills. Children with a history of abuse or neglect may therefore be more vulnerable to becoming repeat victims of harmful behaviour or even enacting those behaviours themselves.⁴

We understand that such boundary violations between children in alternative care settings demand a highly nuanced response style. Therefore, we prioritize equipping our care professionals to respond in an unbiased, safe and caring manner. Regular on-the-job training and a mechanism that ensures a safe environment enable them to appraise and ensure the best interests of every child involved in any incident.

Creating a safe environment

We place a very high priority on ensuring that every person connected to SOS Children's Villages has a clear and shared understanding of all forms of abuse, and takes their own role in child protection very seriously. To this end, we strive to train and educate all our staff in human resource measures of managing crises, dealing with

offenders and in offering counselling and victim support when required.

Awareness: Creating a culture of honest communication

At SOS Children's Villages, we regard information and awareness as our first weapon in fighting abuse. We strive to create a progressive, responsive and proactive culture, which recognizes the importance of child safeguarding and is not afraid to speak out against child abuse. In Asia, we have a special focus on establishing the practice of reporting, as people in the region tend to be hesitant to report abuse. We encourage the culture of dialogue and discussion on child abuse, and treat child safeguarding as everyone's responsibility in the organization. We strive to create in all our member associations a culture of protected, clear, and honest communication to enable the exchange of positive and critical feedback.

We invest in awareness raising as a matter of priority so that all caregivers, children, families and ultimately the societies that our children come from, will be much more aware about abuse, its consequences both to the victim and the perpetrator and our strategies to mitigate it.

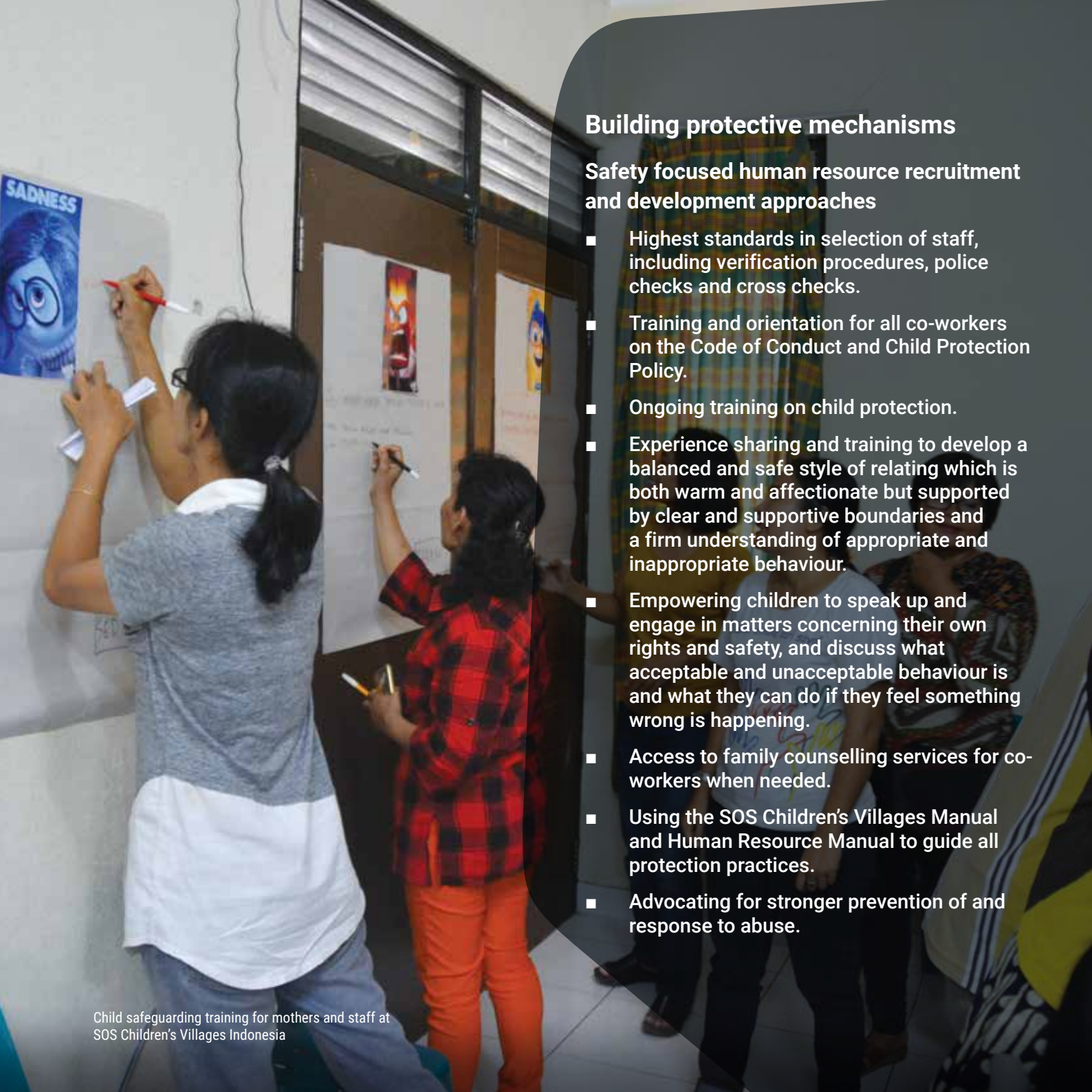
⁴ *Child Safety is Everyone's Business: Child Safeguarding Reporting and Responding Procedures in Member Associations.* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2020).



A child in SOS Children's Villages China

In awareness creating, we prioritize the following:

1. Ensuring that all persons connected with SOS Children's Villages understand child abuse and its implications.
2. Integrating discussions on child rights and protection into the fabric of the organization in formal and non-formal platforms and staff appraisals.
3. Creating regular opportunities for girls and boys to voice their concerns, so that it becomes natural for children to speak about their own protection and safety and have their concerns heard and addressed.
4. Maintaining the best interest of the child in all matters. In the case of conflicting interests, priority is given to the child's welfare.
5. Clearly communicating roles and responsibilities regarding child protection and safeguarding to all.
6. All employment contracts and codes of conducts signed by co-workers and representatives of the organization also contain a segment on the Child Protection Policy, which is read and signed together with the contract of employment.



Building protective mechanisms

Safety focused human resource recruitment and development approaches

- Highest standards in selection of staff, including verification procedures, police checks and cross checks.
- Training and orientation for all co-workers on the Code of Conduct and Child Protection Policy.
- Ongoing training on child protection.
- Experience sharing and training to develop a balanced and safe style of relating which is both warm and affectionate but supported by clear and supportive boundaries and a firm understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.
- Empowering children to speak up and engage in matters concerning their own rights and safety, and discuss what acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is and what they can do if they feel something wrong is happening.
- Access to family counselling services for co-workers when needed.
- Using the SOS Children's Villages Manual and Human Resource Manual to guide all protection practices.
- Advocating for stronger prevention of and response to abuse.

Reporting: An accountable pathway to mitigate abuse

The SOS Children's Villages Child Safeguarding Team is tasked with ensuring that strong and effective reporting mechanisms are in place and operational.

The team takes all concerns of abuse very seriously. We are held to account by the SOS Care Promise and Child Protection Policy to take every appropriate action needed in the event of a reported incident. Each member association defines for themselves and implements clear reporting and responding

procedures, lines of communication and relevant roles and responsibilities.

The Child Safeguarding Team also nurtures a culture of safety, which enables honest and fearless discussion about abuse, and addresses any hesitation to report abusive behaviours or practice. A sense of shared responsibility is fostered in every one in the organization to stand up against abuse and voice their concerns. The mechanisms also address all issues that prevent people from voicing concerns.



Two sisters teaching their brother to ride a cycle, at SOS Children's Villages Bangladesh

Addressing fears of reporting and whistleblowing

One of the key challenges in child safeguarding is the fact that people are more often afraid to report others' inappropriate or abusive behaviour. There are a variety of fears and anxieties behind this reticence to whistle blow. The Child Safeguarding Team has addressed the general hesitations of whistle blowers in the following ways and encourage all co-workers (adult caregivers), children and all other stakeholders to come forward fearlessly if they have a genuine concern.

The fear factor

Fear of retaliation, further victimization, worry that the perpetrator might lose her/his job, which will lead to guilt on the part of the victim for complaining, fear of undue exposure and breach of confidentiality, anxiety that no one will believe the account, that nothing positive will happen.

Dealing with fears of whistle blowing

Awareness, trainings, both formal and non-formal discussions about child safeguarding and reporting highlight the following factors which directly address the fear of reporting.

- Confidentiality is assured very strongly.
- Assurance that a fair and just hearing will be given to all reports made in good faith.
- The principles of non-retaliation is explained as elucidated in the Code of Conduct.

Responding effectively and appropriately to incidents, allegations and emerging risks

Dealing with incidents of alleged or real abuse is never easy and can be potentially damaging to both the victims and perpetrators psychologically, legally and socially. We are aware of this and place high priority on providing strict confidentiality, a safe environment and a fair hearing. Responses are always commensurate with the gravity of the offense and are characterized by a sensitive and nuanced adherence to best practice. Our primary concern is to ensure that no one is falsely convicted and the rights of everyone involved are protected.

Our member associations' child safeguarding activities ensure that its co-workers, operations, and programmes do no harm to children and do not expose them to the risk of harm and abuse; that appropriate responses and effective management of child safeguarding concerns are in place; and that any concerns the organization has about children's safety in its own programmes and within the communities they work in are reported to the appropriate authorities.



An SOS foster father walking home with his son, at SOS Children's Village Fukuoka, Japan

Investigating an allegation of abuse

- SOS Children's Villages has the responsibility to respond and act on every reported incident. Once reported, an incident is rigorously assessed and all necessary measures are outlined.
- A child safeguarding investigation involves gathering information which will be relevant to either support or refute allegations. This is done through interviews of key parties in the incident.
- Investigation adheres to international best practice, safeguarding the independence of the inquiry, the processes followed and outputs such as the report and recommendations.
- When a child is either suspected of being abused or has been abused, our priority is the child's protection and the provision of an environment of healing and restoration through counselling and other support.
- Member associations determine at their discretion what procedures to follow for different types and levels of abuse.
- All investigations of abuse involve an internal neutral investigator who presents initial findings to the Child Safeguarding Team. This team works together with an external expert from the National Child Safeguarding Team to determine the best course of action.
- Adult-to-child abuse may involve legal measures depending on the type and severity of the incident in accordance with the national laws.
- Child-to-child abuse focuses on the rights, protection and very specially the development of both or all children involved in the incident.
- Clear leadership is provided with one person bearing responsibility for managing information as well as internal and external communication, while quick decisions are made and cases are reported to child welfare authorities according to national protocols.
- Written records of cases and their management are securely kept in the children's village or the programme.

The investigation will aim to establish the following:

Determine the protection, medical and/or therapeutic needs of the children and/or youth involved.

Establish the facts of the particular incident in order to be able to prove or disprove the allegation.

Find out if the Child Protection Policy or the Code of Conduct was breached.

Identify aspects of programme delivery or performance, which increase the risk of abuse or exploitation of children and/or young people by co-workers, another child or a young person.

Inform subsequent actions such as recommendations for appropriate disciplinary action and/or improvements to organizational practice and procedures.

Core principles of a child safeguarding investigation

Safety is paramount: The safety and welfare of the alleged victim and the reporter are the primary considerations.



Thoroughness: An investigation is conducted in a diligent, complete and focused manner.



Confidentiality: Reporter, alleged victim, witnesses as well as alleged perpetrator have the right to strict confidentiality, except in specific circumstances.



Competent and responsible investigators: Persons who conduct a child safeguarding investigation are responsible co-workers and well-trained specifically in child safeguarding investigations.



Impartiality: A child safeguarding investigation is a fair and equitable process, so the investigators are free of any influence that could impair their judgement.



Objectivity: Evidence supporting and refuting the allegation is gathered and documented in an unbiased and independent way.



Timeliness: A child safeguarding investigation is conducted in a timely manner.



Accuracy and documentation: The investigation report and its conclusions are accurate and supported by adequate documentation.



Follow up: The investigation report includes concrete follow-up recommendations.



Closure: The investigation closure is properly communicated to all involved stakeholders.



An SOS mother in India carrying her child on her back, keeping her close and safe in her warmth

The evolution of child safeguarding through the recent past

Child safeguarding within SOS Children's Villages has evolved in to a healthy, dynamic mechanism over the past decade. It is gaining ground by overcoming taboos, challenging stereotypes and overturning non-progressive barriers by breaking the silence.

This evolution of child safeguarding has been taking place through the production of policies, guidelines, toolkits, and an array of materials geared to educate, equip and empower stakeholders at every level. These materials are well researched, and has gained wide acceptance both in our member associations and beyond.

To complement the materials, there is also a growing band of child advocates who are now increasingly more aware, more vocal and passionate about the rights of their friends and themselves, and have taken up their own cause in creative and powerful ways across Asia.

Adding to this evolution of the child safeguarding mechanism are the ever-growing child protection networks of the government and the civil society, in which our member associations in Asia are also actively engaged.



A group of children from SOS Children's Villages Indonesia



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Child safeguarding
around Asia

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From broken beginnings to amazing achievements, quality care makes the difference

In 1994, a seven month old girl named Mali* was sent to the hospital in a coma for the second time, with ripped lungs, intestines and liver, and some of her organs were even needed to be cut off due to the damage from severe physical abuse by her own mother and grandmother.

After being rescued, Mali was sent to one of the SOS Children's Villages in Thailand. Having been brutally abused, she became frightened of people, not letting anyone get close to her, nor touch her. Her body was also wounded badly with poor health condition. Her SOS mother and officers supported her to slowly build up trust towards people at her own pace.

It took years for healing to take place both physically and mentally. For years, her SOS mother took Mali to the hospital for follow-ups, took care of her physical wounds, and persistently interacted with her to ensure the sense of love and security. Gradually, with each year of persistent love and care, her health started getting better. Most importantly, she slowly gained trust in human beings again. Her SOS mother was the first one that she allowed to touch her, followed by other people in the safe surrounding of the SOS Children's Village.

Contrary to belief and to every one's great relief, when Mali became a teenager, she was very sociable, independent, and even had strong leadership skills, leaving almost no sign of the traumatic event. Mali was the one who could help her mother in taking care of the younger siblings and in doing house chores responsibly, socially influence other children in the village, and even be entrusted by the village director to take a lead in several village events such as Christmas parties due to her participatory and creative nature.

Today, Mali is completely healthy both physical and mentally. Moreover, she has also become a contributing member in society, pursuing her dream in the field of human development. She is also a trainer providing trainings in a prestigious company. It is hard to believe how far she has come and how well she has healed from her unspeakably traumatic beginnings. Some stories start with horror but end with amazement, and Mali's is certainly one of them.

*Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the individual



A group of children learning team work in the safe and relaxing environment of SOS Children's Village Bangpoo, Thailand

Child Led Protection Commissions in Indonesia

The initiative to establish a Child Led Protection Commission (CLPC) in every children's village comes from SOS Indonesia's National Youth Coalition (NYC). This initiative was launched in 2020.

The role of the CLPC is to support the Child Protection Team (which is led by adults) in the children's villages, in order to engage in raising awareness and preventing violence against children. This initiative demonstrates that our youth are well aware of their role and responsibility in child safeguarding.

5

Our key achievements



Making children aware of their rights, risks and roles in prevention

Our children across Asian member countries have made great strides in learning about their rights and in articulating them to others. Children have become the proponents themselves of their own rights and have begun to recognize ways in which these rights are violated, and when they or their friends are at risk of abuse or exploitation.

SOS Children's Villages further recognizes the importance of children's participation, empowering girls and boys to speak up against all forms of abuse, acting as agents of self-protection and the protection of their peers.

“I’VE GOT RIGHTS!”



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD In Youth-Friendly Language

1 Everyone under 18 has these rights.

2 ALL CHILDREN have these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do, what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or girl, and if they are rich, whether they have a disability, whether they are rich or poor.



3 When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

17 You have the right to get information that is important to your well-being, from radio, newspaper, books, computers and other sources. Adults should make sure that the information you are getting is not harmful, and help you find and understand the information you need.

18 You have the right to be raised by your parents if possible.

19 You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind.

20 You have the right to special care and help if you cannot live with your parents.



30 You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion – or any you choose. Minority and indigenous groups need special protection of this right.

31 You have the right to play and rest.



32 You have the right to protection from work that harms you, and is bad for your health and education. If you work, you have the right to be safe and paid fairly.

33 You have the right to protection from harmful practices such as child marriage.

It is our great pride and joy to see how children growing up in our SOS families are taking the message of prevention and protection to other children and to the public. The strongest and most convincing proponents of children's rights are the children themselves and we have been able to raise a band of young ambassadors for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Child-led child safeguarding groups in Laos

SOS Children's Villages Laos has formed child-led child safeguarding groups in each of their Children's Villages. Led by the children themselves, each group consists of 10-15 children with a mission: to advocate for the safety of children.

- The child safeguarding children's group is an enthusiastic army of little people committed to safeguarding their peers.
- These children are trained in child safeguarding principles, the UNCRC, protective behaviour and the Child Protection Policy.
- They help children like themselves understand risks and dangers, and help protect their peers, brothers and sisters from all kinds of violence and abuse.
- The group supports the children in conducting awareness raising activities within the children's village and at school, and support in educating their siblings who display inappropriate behaviour.
- So far, the child-led child safeguarding groups have been able to track, report and respond to some of the cases, in some locations.



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**CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE
RECEIVED CHILD PROTECTION
TRAINING IN SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES ACROSS ASIA, IN 2020**

(Data as on December 31, 2020, excluding the member associations in China, Japan and South Korea)

The child-led safeguarding groups support children in the SOS Children's Villages to educate their siblings about protecting themselves from abuse

Risk mitigation mechanism

Our safety protocols which are rooted in the Code of Conduct and the Child Protection Policy and guidelines are to us yet another achievement as they have helped us successfully navigate a potentially vulnerable terrain. We ensure that the conduct of all co-workers and employees is guided by local laws and a universal set of principles. The SOS Children's Villages Code of Conduct, which must be signed by all employees, requires that employees pledge to adhere to the local laws that apply where they live and work and act according to the organization's core values. The Code of Conduct also provides clear guidance of what acceptable staff behaviour is, and is aligned with our quality standards including the Child Protection Policy, which is a binding document.

This robust mechanism entrenched in local and international protocols, has provided us with the tools and measures to successfully keep our children safe throughout the Asian region.

Reporting mechanism

- A Child Safeguarding Team of three is appointed in each programme and facility, to which child protection concerns can be reported. This team is known to children and caregivers and is appointed in consultation with all. The team, usually lead by the village director, is tasked with awareness, prevention and appropriate response in the case of an incident.
- A national level Child Safeguarding Team which is led by the national director is also appointed by the board of the member association and is tasked with monitoring the overall child protection status in the country.
- Confidentiality is given a very high priority, is assured and maintained.
- All co-workers are obliged to provide any information they may have on any case of abuse. Any one withholding or covering up is considered an accomplice.
- Protection and support are provided to children or adults who report on incidents.
- Fair hearing is given to any accused person.



SOS mother with her daughters, at SOS Children's Villages Mongolia

Internal child safeguarding audits

Not only do we have safeguarding, reporting and responding procedures but we also have a system by way of which these procedures are monitored and evaluated. Internal child safeguarding audits are a mechanism that focuses on monitoring compliance with the Child Protection Policy and related policy support documents. These audits also include the provision of recommendations, support knowledge exchange and offer other

services designed to add value and improve member associations' operations in the area of child safeguarding. It is mandatory that a child safeguarding audit is conducted in every programme location every three years at a minimum. The audit is conducted by the national office. the national child safeguarding focal person keeps track of outcomes and learnings and also to identifies areas for further improvements.

6 The future of child safeguarding



Children playing happily, at a children's village in SOS Children's Villages Philippines

Emerging vulnerabilities of a virtual world

Hot on the heels of these great strides made in child safeguarding are newer and darker challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic which has swept the world, leaving children and young people more vulnerable than ever is one of the most virulent challenges among them. If our world was speedily moving towards virtual connection even before the pandemic, with its emergence we were left with no choice. We were catapulted as it were into the world of cyber space, to merely survive. Our conversation and communication, our administrative engagement and our learning have all had to instantly forge pathways through virtual reality. This has been both a great leap forward, a test of our true resilience and yet a harbinger of deeper vulnerability and risk.

Towards a safer future for all our children

At SOS Children's Villages, we are learning and growing greatly through the unprecedented times of COVID-19. While on the one hand we encourage our children to get onto the new learning platforms and engage in online classrooms, on the other hand in our board rooms and staff discussions we are speedily equipping ourselves to recognize the online threats and risks this entails to our children. It is necessary for us to act fast and keep a step ahead of the pitfalls of the virtual world. Responding to this requirement, we are now raising awareness and developing strategies to counter the risks of online child abuse.

Child safeguarding risk assessment with regard to COVID-19 has currently enabled us to take proactive measures to mitigate risks and spring back with resilience into a world reeling with COVID-19 and its economic and psychosocial impact. In the Asian region, we take heart as we pause to reflect on our history. It is a history littered with natural disasters, wars and armed conflicts. However, with many disasters we see how new SOS programmes were born. This then is familiar terrain and presents us with a new opportunity to find new ways to overcome new challenges.

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Two SOS siblings having a fun time on the swing! - SOS Children's Villages Laos



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

SOS Children's Villages
International Office Asia,
SOS Enclave, Sector 29, Faridabad - 121008,
Haryana, India

Tel: +91 - 129 - 4295555
Fax: +91 - 129 - 4295566
Email: ioasia@sos-kd.org
Website: www.sos-childrensvillages.org