



## **RCT ZAGREB**

Rehabilitation Centre for Stress and Trauma  
Kvaternikov trg 12, 10 000 Zagreb  
T: +385 1 4641 342 E: [info@rctzg.hr](mailto:info@rctzg.hr) W: [www.rctzg.hr](http://www.rctzg.hr)

# **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

**Creating a safe and empowering environment for children in  
Rehabilitation Centre for Stress and Trauma**

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## Scope of this document

A part of Rehabilitation center for stress and trauma (RCT) activities include providing various psychosocial services and support to children and their parents. Therefore, it is necessary to establish ethical standards and define a Professional Code of Conduct when working with children at the organization level.

RCT is committed to respecting and promoting children's rights, acting in their best interests, keeping them safe and protecting them from all forms of abuse and harm.

The child protection policy is a document that defines common values, principles and beliefs, as well as the practical rules of conduct when working with children. It contains the concrete steps to be taken in fulfilling our child protection obligations.

RCT Child Protection Policy applies to:

- All employees of RCT,
- Associates, such as: interns, consultants, partner organizations' staff, trainers and external contractors who provide services for RCT,
- Volunteers

In RCT we are dedicated to preserving the best interests of the children we work with. We achieve that by creating and implementing projects that promote children's physical and psychological health. By adopting this document, we are ensuring that the employees, associates and volunteers of RCT know and share the values and principles that lead us in working with children and that their behavior protects the rights and dignity of children they work with.

The document defines the standards by which RCT's employees, associates and volunteers are obligated to act towards children and take measures in order to protect children's rights as well as the obligation to report any breach of these rights to the legal authorities. Meticulous adhering to these standards ensures the creation of conditions that are in the best interest of children and their development.

## Legislation framework

The RCT's child protection policy has been developed in accordance with the legal guidelines for the protection of children's rights:

- UN Child Rights Convention, 1989 (Art. 19);
- General Comment No. 13 (2011) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child – the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence;
- Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, 2012



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- Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, 1990 (NN 56/90, 135/97, 8/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10, 05/14)
- The Law on Protection from Domestic Violence (NN 137/09, 14/10, 60/10)
- Protocol on the Treatment of Sexual Violence, 2014
- Protocol on Treatment of Domestic Violence, 2004
- Protocol on the Treatment of Violence between Children and Youth, 2004
- Protocol on the Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014
- Ethical code of research with children, 2003
- Code of ethics of psychological activity, 2005
- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), 2016

### Definitions:

- Child is any person under the age of 18, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).
- Child abuse or maltreatment includes, according to the World Health Organization (1999), “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power”.
- Child protection is a broad term used to describe principles, policies, standards, guidelines and procedures designed to protect children from intentional and unintentional harm. In the context of this document, it is particularly referred to the responsibilities of the organizations and staff, regarding the children they work with.
- Child Protection Policy, in its simplified form, is a statement of intent that shows a commitment to protect children from harm, making clear to everyone involved what is required in terms of the children’s protection. It is an instrument to promote a safer environment for children and to state the organizations’ commitment to taking care of them.
- Informed consent is the ability to give consent in a free and informed way, always taking into account the age and the level of development of the child. For the purposes of using a child’s photograph (e.g. for advertisement or reporting), the person responsible for the child must give consent; however, the child should also be informed and understand in what he/she will be involved, so he/she can give their “informed consent”.
- Direct contact with children means being in the physical presence of children while the organization’s activities are being carried out. It includes occasional or frequent contact, as well as the short- or long-term contact.



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- Indirect contact with children includes all the situations when a person has access to children's personal information, such as names and addresses, photographs or any other personal content, in the context of the organization's work. Indirect contact should also be considered when reporting to funding entities that support projects aimed at children, since this has an impact on them (therefore requiring responsibilities in terms child protection).
- Physical abuse: actual or potential physical harm perpetrated by another person, adult or child. it may involve hitting, shaking, poisoning, drowning and burning. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or caregiver causes symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness to a child.
- Emotional abuse: persistent emotional maltreatment that impacts a child's emotional development. Emotionally abusive acts include restriction of movement, degrading, humiliating, bullying (including cyber bullying), threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.
- Sexual abuse: forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities that he or she does not fully understand and has little choice in consenting to. This may include, but is not limited to, rape, oral sex, penetration, or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching. It may also include involving children in looking at, or producing sexual images, watching sexual activities and encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.
- Child sexual exploitation: a form of sexual abuse that involves children being engaged in any sexual activity in exchange for money, gifts, food, accommodation, affection, status, or anything else that they or their family needs. It usually involves a child being manipulated or coerced, which may involve befriending children, gaining their trust, and subjecting them to drugs and alcohol. The abusive relationship between victim and perpetrator involves an imbalance of power where the victim's options are limited. It is a form of abuse that can be misunderstood by children and adults as consensual. Child sexual exploitation manifests in different ways. It can involve an older perpetrator exercising financial, emotional or physical control over a young person. It can involve peers manipulating or forcing victims into sexual activity, sometimes within gangs and in gang-affected neighborhoods. It may also involve opportunistic or organized networks of perpetrators who profit financially from trafficking young victims between different locations to engage in sexual activity with multiple men.
- Neglect and negligent treatment: allowing for context, resources and circumstances, neglect and negligent treatment refers to a persistent failure



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to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, which is likely to result in serious impairment of a child's healthy physical, spiritual, moral and mental development. It includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm and provide for nutrition, shelter and safe living/working conditions. It may also involve maternal neglect during pregnancy as a result of drug or alcohol misuse and the neglect and ill treatment of a disabled child.

### Values and principles of RCT in working with children:

- Health, physical safety, psychological and emotional well-being of children are our organization's priorities.
- Abuse of children in any form or circumstances is not acceptable, and all children have equal rights to be protected from it.
- With our activities, we are aiming to improve the psychological and emotional development of children in order to help them reach their full potential.
- We carefully consider the children's physical and psychological needs, as well as listen to their own attitudes, views and opinions. We encourage children to express themselves freely and authentically. Through our actions we empower them to understand and advocate for their own rights and rights of others.
- We appreciate, respect and understand children within their own unique culture, religion and ethnicity. Differences are viewed, valued and approached as a resource and prerequisite for building a humane and democratic society. Through respect for diversity, we develop new forms of action based on equity, dignity and equal rights for all members of society.
- Employees, associates and volunteers of RCT have a duty to protect and care for the children they work with, are in contact with, or who are affected by their work. They must protect their rights and interests, especially when they are victims of violence, as well as take all measures of prevention.
- RCT grounds its work on high ethical and legal standards. When providing services to beneficiaries, we are guided by the principles of accountability and professionalism, respecting the ethical standards of the professions.
- Partners with whom we collaborate in projects that include children are also obliged to meet the legal standards of child protection in their work. We also choose partners and collaborators that share our values and principles in working with children.

### Respecting these values, when working with children, employees, associates and volunteers of RCT are obligated to:

- Work with children in a way that ensures their safety and does not cause any physical or psycho-emotional harm;



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- Recognize and appreciate the needs, attitudes, views and opinions that children express;
- Work with children in a way that strengthens their capacities and abilities; develops their skills and help them reach their full potentials;
- Work with children in the spirit of cooperation with mutual trust and respect;
- Accepting children within their culture and the context in which they live;
- Work in partnership with caregivers and other professionals to increase the capacity for meeting the needs of the children and ensure their protection;
- Develop all projects and activities in accordance with the best interests of children;
- Make sure to use language acceptable and understandable to children when conveying these standards to them.

### **Professional Code of Conduct for employees, associates and volunteers in working with children:**

This Code of Conduct includes ethical guidance and proper standards of behavior and defines acceptable and unacceptable behavior of adults towards children. RCT considers all forms of abuse and harm towards children to be unacceptable. Any form of unacceptable behavior which breaches this Code of Conduct must be reported.

*Employees, associates and volunteers of RCT are obliged to assure the following to the children they work with:*

- Protection of rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, conventions, laws, implementing regulations;
- Implementation of programs that promote the protection of child rights, safety and health;
- A safe and reliable way of reporting violations of the standards outlined in this document, providing mechanisms for collecting complaints in a confidential and safe manner to the superiors, providing support to victims and informing institutions responsible for violating the rights of the children.

*When in direct or indirect contact with children in their work, employees, associates and volunteers of RCT should:*

- Be aware of situations that may pose a risk to children and know how to react properly in such situations;
- Plan and organize work and workplace so that all potential risks for children are minimized;
- Enable children to talk to employees, volunteers and associates of RCT and express themselves freely and openly about any problem or concern they may have, and to create an environment in which children will feel safe and respected;



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- Report any misconduct towards children, which rises a justified suspicion of abuse and / or neglect to responsible legal institutions;
- Educate children about their rights and empower them to advocate themselves and respond adequately if they are violated.
- Approach and treat children with respect for their integrity and dignity as active citizens with rights. Enable them to be actively involved in decision-making processes concerning their own lives;
- Always be aware of the power balance between the adult and the child and avoid taking any advantage of this (abuse of power);
- Avoid being placed in vulnerable or compromising situation for the child; make themselves visible and transparent and try to be accompanied by another adult when working with children, except when required in the scope of the intervention (e.g. psychological counselling);
- Always be aware of the responsibility of the adult to respect and set appropriate boundaries when working with children, since children do not have the same capacities to set them towards adults;
- Observe and respect the appropriateness and timing for physical contact with children, concerning normal acts, such as holding hands, hi-fives or greeting with a hug/kiss. Before such physical contact they should always check that the child is comfortable with that;
- Immediately report to coordinators or superiors any situation that could be an object of misinterpretation by others; avoid behaving in a way that could be misinterpreted by third parties;
- Be caring and responsible; try to be a positive role model;
- Treat children equally, regardless of gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, ethnic background, religious and political options, level of functionality (e.g. learning difficulties or other disabilities) or life events (e.g. pregnant teenagers). Avoid exercising any type of persuasion regarding the child's personal choices (e.g. religious, political);
- Be aware that child abuse can also be perpetrated by peers; try to avoid putting children in risky situations with their peers, such as mixing older and younger individuals or vulnerable children without supervision;
- Ask for permission from children and their caregivers when taking photographs of them, filming them or requesting personal information for activities. This includes explaining how the photographs, videos or information will be used. Otherwise, make sure the faces or other identifiable characteristics aren't visible. Ensure such photographs or videos present children in a dignified and respectful manner;
- Ensure that all information concerning children and their families remains confidential;



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- Immediately report concerns or allegations of child abuse and of behavior which goes against the values and principles of the Child Protection Policy and Professional Code of Conduct to the coordinator or directly superior.

*When in direct or indirect contact with children in their work, employees, associates and volunteers of RCT should never:*

- Physically hurt or abuse children or participate in any dangerous or illegal behavior toward children;
- Engage in any physical contact with children in an inappropriate, unnecessary or culturally insensitive way;
- Behave in an inappropriate or sexually provocative way or develop sexual contact with children;
- Develop such a relationship with children which could in any way be considered exploitative or abusive;
- Act in a manner that could cause or increase the risk of a child being abused;
- Use language phrases, make suggestions, or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or otherwise humiliating;
- Fail to respond adequately to illegal, dangerous or violent behavior of children;
- Fail to respond adequately to the illegal, dangerous or violent behavior of caregivers or other adults towards children;
- Discriminate by treating better or favoring certain children while excluding others;
- Publish photographs, videos or personal information of children to promote RCT's activities, without their permission and the permission of their caregivers;
- Publish information, stories, photographs or videos that may endanger or humiliate children or their families;
- Post unofficial photographs, videos or information about children on personal websites or social networks;
- Use computers, mobile phones, video or digital cameras or any other technology for the purpose of exploiting or harassing children;
- Expose children to inappropriate content that may cause emotional damage such as violence or pornography;
- Engage children in activities inappropriate for their age or development, interferes with their education or play, or places them at risk of injury;
- Expose children to child labor and hazardous work;
- Neglect children, which includes not offering them the adequate care and not meeting their needs;
- Ignore or undervalue concerns raised by children about harm being caused to them;





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- Be alone with children and invisible to others for an excessive amount of time, including in a car, in their home / or the home of a child; make contact with children that is not under supervision / seen by another staff member or a third person;
- Never have children stay overnight in the room with adults or sleep in the same bed (unless prior consent is provided by both the child and his / her caregiver).
- Perform activities for children that they can do themselves, including dressing, bathing and grooming.
- Encourage inappropriate behavior or relations of any kind (e.g. encouraging inappropriate crushes of children);
- Invite children to their homes without the prior consent of their caregivers and the authorization of the coordinator or directly superior and only to in the relation with the approved RCT activities and programs;
- Transport children alone (e.g. in a car) without the prior consent by their caregiver and the authorization of the coordinator or directly superior, unless absolutely necessary for the safety of the child;
- Be under the influence of drugs or alcohol while working with children;
- Ignore or fail to report any concern, suspected violation or violation of the Child Protection Policy and the Professional Code of Conduct to the coordinator or directly superior.

*The protection of children is realized through:*

- Preventing all forms of violence among children;
- Preventing all forms of violence from adults towards children;
- Appropriate treatment of RCT's employees towards victims of violence;
- Appropriate treatment of RCT's employees against child rights violators;
- Reporting any violation of children's rights to the legal authorities;
- Protecting personal information of children and caregivers involved in RCT's projects;
- Ensuring adequate support to victims of child rights violations within the scope of RCT's activities through providing psychosocial support and counselling and / or referral to other relevant institutions and by reporting cases to the legal authorities.

To ensure the implementation of the standards defined by this Child protection Policy, it is necessary that:

- All employees, associates and volunteers of RCT are obligated to be introduced and familiarized with this Child Protection Policy at the organization level and act according to it;
- Employees, associates and volunteers, by signing a contract (contract of employment, service contract, copyright and / or voluntary agreement), have



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the obligation to comply with the Professional Code of Conduct defined in this Child Protection Policy, with which they are introduced and familiarized when signing the Contract;

- The recruitment process, both for employees and volunteers of RCT, includes the suitability check for working with children and young people;
- We work in partnership with caregivers and other specialists to ensure the protection of children;
- In cases of suspected violation of children's rights, physical and emotional violence, sexual abuse, neglect, neglected behavior, abuse or exploitation of the child, RCT's employees are obliged to initiate proceedings to protect the rights of the child;
- The procedure for the protection of the child's rights involves reporting the suspicion to the coordinator and the executive director, who then take action under the law and report the case to the legal institutions. If the suspect concerns an employee, associate or volunteer of RCT, the coordinator and the executive director will investigate, take disciplinary measures and report the case to the legal institutions in accordance with the legal provisions. Until the completion of the internal investigation and / or investigation of the legal authorities, the suspect will not be able to work with children. Upon completion of the proceedings, if the suspect is not released from suspicion, disciplinary measures will be imposed in accordance with the severity of the offense: the warning or dissolution of the contract with RCT. In the case of confirmed violation of children's rights of co-operating or partner organizations, RCT will terminate that co-operation or partnership;
- In the case of violation of children's rights that involves the police, RCT's employees are obliged to provide documentation and information on the violation of the child's rights to the police;
- The Child Protection Policy will be published on RCT's web site and available to all interested parties.