

Child Protection 101

What is child protection?

Child protection is first and foremost about making sure that the welfare of a child comes before anything else whilst they are participating in an activity you're organising. When working with children it's important to recognise that they can be more vulnerable than adults. As such we must be careful to not place their welfare at risk and to support them where their welfare may be at risk. It's also important to recognise that they have a right to be heard and participate in decisions which affect them. This is also a part of enhancing their welfare, and a great way to make sure that your Dojo is always improving and working for the children involved.

The key part of child protection is identifying risks that could be posed to a child and managing them appropriately. An example of this would be to ensure that anyone who is volunteering who could be in a position of power or trust for a child has been adequately checked and trained. Some key risks for children are abuse & neglect, trafficking and exploitation. Making sure that volunteers are aware of the potential risks and how to bring up a concern they have ensures the welfare of a child is best protected.

Volunteers at Dojos are placed in a position of authority and trust over children who attend the Dojo. As a result it is important that volunteers understand that they are in this position and the responsibilities that come with it. Being in a position of trust means that a child may disclose something to a Mentor or a Mentor may notice something which concerns them. It's important to make sure that every Mentor knows what to do in the event that a situation arises where a Mentor has a concern about a child.

Risks

Identifying and mitigating risks in a Dojo is a key part of making sure that the welfare of the children attending your Dojo. These risks take 2 forms, internal and external. You can control internal risk by putting in place policies. You cannot control external risks, however you and your volunteers can identify when there is a concern regarding a risk to a child's welfare outside of the Dojo and liaise with the appropriate authorities to ensure they are aware of the risks to that child.

Internal risks

Here are a few examples of internal risks for you to think about:

- Safety/suitability of the location
- Inappropriate interaction with volunteers
- People not involved in the activity interacting with the children taking part
- Child going missing or getting lost on an outing

External risks

An example of an external risk that you could not control, but might identify as a concern, is neglect or abuse by parent or family member. In this case the Dojo should work with the authorities as specified in the *Child Protection Policy (see below)*. It is the responsibility of the authority to investigate as they see appropriate, but they may seek a Dojo mentors cooperation with their own process.

Policy

One of the key components to dealing with risk in your Dojo is having a Child Protection Policy. A Child Protection Policy provides a way to ensure that everyone is on the same page about their responsibilities to ensure the welfare of children attending your Dojo and ways for them to get support about concerns they may have. It also ensures that parents and children understand what they should expect from volunteers at your Dojo, and also what to do if they have a concern. A policy should also identify one person or two people who are responsible for ensuring the welfare of children at the Dojo and liaising with external organisations as required.

A copy of the policy should be available to everyone involved in the Dojo, including children and their parents.

The policy should also be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that it is up to date with current best practice. You should also review it against your practice in the Dojo to ensure that volunteers are following the policy.

What should a policy contain?

- A policy statement which clearly states the aims, purpose and target audience for the policy.
- A recruitment procedure for volunteers. This should include steps such as having an interview with the volunteer, getting and checking on references, and if available performing a background check.

- Guidelines on training that the volunteers should receive. Awareness level training is suggested for all volunteers.
- A code of behaviour for volunteers.
- Reporting procedures for both volunteers and your liaison person. This should cover volunteers reporting to your internal liaison person and reporting from your liaison person to other organisations such as social care services or the police.
- A description of the role and responsibilities of your liaison person.
- Procedures for dealing with allegations against a volunteer or young people.
- Guidelines on how records should be kept.
- Guidelines on confidentiality.
- Guidelines on sharing information with parents and children, and other organisations.
- Guidelines on working with local authorities.

Practice

The practice of all volunteers should be informed by the policy. The champion of the Dojo is responsible for making sure that all the volunteers are aware of the policy, and supporting them where they have questions or issues.

Intended for RP Pilot Participants

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