

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY FOR ALL ACTIVITIES OF KdG RESEARCH OF KAREL DE GROTE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND ARTS

This Child Protection Policy:

is approved by: Veerle Hendrickx, General Director

Initially on: 26/02/2024

Confirmed for further application on the date of signature below;

Will be reviewed every year

The contact for questions or comments regarding this child protection policy is:

Marijke Hendrickx, director KdG Research and Academy

Contact: researchoffice@kdg.be

1 INTRODUCTION

This document represents the Child Protection Policy of KdG Research at Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts (KdG). KdG Research is strongly committed to the well-being of all people involved in its research projects. As a research organisation, we work in close collaboration with the field and with practitioners in the field. Moreover, our research topics have inherent particular attention for vulnerable groups within society. Therefore, KdG Research is committed to respect the highest standards to guarantee the rights of those involved in our research activities. For example, the Research centre 'Pedagogy in Practice', whose primary target group is children, pays particular attention to the well-being and safety of children. This child protection policy describes the standards we apply in terms of:

- **The safeguarding of children:** Child safeguarding is the responsibility of the organisation to ensure it does no harm to children. This means doing all we can to prevent exploitation and abuse, and if abuse occurs, to respond appropriately. This means that the organisation recognises what risks their activities may pose on the child.
- **Prevention:** the organisation ensures that all the steps are taken to prevent children from being harmed, abused or exploited.
- **Protection:** all staff of KdG will take any safeguarding concern seriously and robustly respond to the concerns raised with constantly prioritising the safety and well-being of those at risk. The staff will maintain the highest standards of behaviour, as set out in this document.

To ensure uniformity, KdG will use the following definitions:

- **Child:** any individual below the legal age of 18 years old.
- **Harm to a child:** ill treatment or the impairment of the health or development of the child, this includes but is not limited to: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect.

- **Physical abuse:** any intentional bodily injury. Can include: hitting, throwing, shaking, burning,...
- **Emotional abuse:** humiliating or constantly criticising a child, threatening, shouting at a child or calling them names. Making the child the subject of jokes, or using sarcasm to hurt a child, blaming and scapegoating. Any persistent form of non-physical harm that can cause severe and lasting effects on the child's emotional development.
- **Sexual abuse:** Any form of sexual behaviour towards a child (looking, showing or touching). For the implementation of this policy the basic principle is that a child cannot consent to any form of sexual activity. Nevertheless in accordance with applicable law KdG recognizes the right of children who meet the age of sexual majority (actually as of the age of 16) to decide autonomously and give consent in this matter.
- **Neglect:** The ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs.
- **Risk of harm:** a significant danger that a child will suffer harm which would be likely to cause serious physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment or sexual abuse.
- **Staff:** This term entails any person working for Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts involved in or conducting activities of KdG Research.
- **KdG Research;** the organisational entity within KdG University of Applied Sciences and Arts that encompasses all research activities.

Aim and legal framework of the KdG Research Child Protection Policy

With this Child Protection Policy KdG Research wants to assure that all its staff and all its activities involving, aiming at or affecting children adopt high standards for children's safety, children's rights and children's participation, the prevention and protection of children from harm.

The Child Protection Policy adheres to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) and other applicable rules of international, European and Belgian Law.

This policy is organised according to the four standards of child protection:

- 1: the implementation of the policy itself;
- 2: the people and how they guarantee the application of the policy;
- 3: safeguarding procedures;
- 4: accountability;

Scope of the Child Protection Policy

The Child Protection Policy refers to all activities of KdG Research, including research activities, implementation activities, dissemination activities, valorisation activities, pedagogical coaching and childcare support involving, aiming at or affecting children.

Every person, be it a staff member or someone outside the organisation, or a partner organisation participating or being directly involved in the aforementioned KdG Research activities with children, needs to be well aware of the contents of this policy and adhere to it.

If a research centre actively participates in a partner organisation's activities involving, aiming at or affecting children or if a centre is otherwise involved in such external activities e.g. is supporting the partner organisation in any way, financially or otherwise, the research centre will ensure the partner organisation adheres to principles with respect to the protection of children which are similar to those stated in the KdG Child Protection Policy and therefor provide a similar level of protection. In order to give effect to this provision, the partner organisation may submit and make reference to its own internal policy on the protection of children or in case of absence

or insufficiency of such policy, may formally declare to adopt and adhere to the KdG Research Child Protection Policy.

The principles and procedures set out in this policy need to be the foundation of any activity of KdG Research.

2 PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

KdG recognises all children as right holders and will in all activities assure that all children's right will be respected and that no harm in any form shall befall any child.

At the core KdG Research's Child Protection Policy is the concern for children's wellbeing, safety and autonomy.

1.

KdG ensures that none of the Research centres' activities will cause any harm to children and even more, that during all activities, attention will be paid to children's wellbeing and involvement and the children can keep their dignity at all times, during all activities.

KdG also ensures that it will undertake action when a staff member witnesses that a child or several children are harmed. All staff members should immediately share their concern about a child's wellbeing with a colleague. If needed, they can report to the internal counsellor for confidential affairs who will further inquire according to the procedures, as described in part 5 of this document.

Where necessary, the action taken could include a referral to law enforcement and child protection agencies, or in case of an allegation against a staff member, a suspension or termination of any type of cooperation.

All reports or general concerns regarding the protection and safety of a child will be taken seriously.

2.

KdG adheres to Janusz Korczak's view of children as complete individuals, able to act in the here and now and able to make decisions on their lives and occupations. Therefore, children will always have a right to decide whether or not to participate in any activity organised or facilitated by the centre of expertise, as well as to change their mind on their participation during the activity. Without affecting the immediate foregoing children may, where appropriate (e.g. in order to meet legal standards and guidelines) and within the limits set by law (e.g. children younger than 12 years of age), be represented by their parent(s) or guardians who will then decide on any matter with respect to the participation or involvement of their child(ren).

3.

KdG embraces the principles of equality, assuring that all children can exercise their rights, regardless of their ethnicity, sex, religion or other personal traits.

4.

Every person working for or with KdG Research will be duly informed of and accepts to adhere to this policy and consequently accepts the duty to safeguard the principles and procedures set out in this policy and to actively carry out their responsibilities towards the safeguarding of children.

5.

To ensure the safeguarding of children in accordance with the standards set forth in this policy, KdG Research may work together with local authorities or organisations for child protection as appropriate.

6.

KdG Research will ensure the safety of children while maintaining confidentiality of any personal information regarding the victim or those raising the concern. Only when necessary and in the cases provided for by law (e.g. in case of a criminal offense or the need for specialised care for the child) names and other personal information can be shared in accordance with applicable law and whenever possible always with the prior consent of the child involved or its legal representative(s).

3 POLICY

In order to guarantee the wellbeing of children, KdG Research endorses the following Keeping Children Safe Safeguarding Standards¹:

- All children have equal rights to protection from harm.
- All staff members have an obligation to avoid any physical or emotional harm to children. This policy is mandatory for every person engaging with children.
- All staff members or volunteers or other people involved in activities of KdG Research will be duly informed of the scope, responsibilities, procedures and any updates of this Child Protection Policy and need to adhere to the principles stated therein.
- All staff members have an obligation to report worrying situations they observe. Staff members will always share these observations with a colleague, as this is a shared responsibility.
- KdG Research also has a responsibility to support partner organisations to meet the applicable Child Safeguarding Standards.
- During all stages of activities organised by KdG Research children (and/or their legal representative(s)) will be informed about the goals and actions of the activities. They have a right to withdraw their participation at any moment, in any stage of the activity.
- For all dissemination purposes, children will be consulted on their participation. Also at this stage, they have a right to withdraw their participation at all times.
- KdG Research will also clearly inform the children of their conduct towards each other, as to prevent bullying or other types of harm between children. KdG Research will also ensure that the risks of harm between children will be very well monitored.

These principles will be guaranteed during all stages of research and coaching activities:

- In recruitment and selection of participants, transparent procedures will be used. Information will be provided in ways children can fully comprehend.
- Taking into account the set-up, methodology, purposes and goals of the research activities all children will be able to participate and no type of discrimination will be allowed. Flexibility of activities is planned, in order to allow this participation for all children. Equality is taken seriously, by assuring activities are accessible for all children.

The Child Protection Policy is published on the KdG Research website, translated in Dutch and made accessible to any other person engaged in a KdG Research activity.

¹ Keeping Children Safe. Child Safeguarding Standards and how to implement them. 2014. Download available: [Layout 1 \(europa.eu\)](#)

Working with partner organisations and occasional visitors or volunteers

- KdG Research makes sure that any partner organisation they are engaged with has a good track record of working with children and meets the principles of KdG Child Protection Policy in its joint activities with KdG whether by means of an own child protection policy whether by acknowledgement and adherence to the KdG Child Protection Policy (see above).
- If a concern about a partner organisation is raised, concerning the wellbeing of children, KdG Research will determine in good consideration which measures it may take towards the partner organisation and/or will propose to the partner organisation to implement. Furthermore KdG Research will assess whether or not the appropriate authorities need to be informed, as well as if the cooperation with the particular partner should be terminated. To make the decision for termination KdG Research will take the reaction of the partner to the raised concern into account.
- Designated staff members will be responsible for monitoring and properly briefing the volunteers and occasional visitors of their obligation and acceptable conduct towards the children.
- All occasional visitors and volunteers shall never be left unattended with the children.

Media and GDPR guidelines

Access and preservation of personal data is a key aspect of how research activities take into account the principles stated in this Child Protection Policy. The principles and procedures regarding GDPR are covered in the KdG data protection policy. We highlight the three aspects that are most relevant to children.

Informed consent

Informed consent must always be sought before taking any photos, videos, or requesting personal information about children's lives that may be used.

- The Informed Consent needs to be signed by the child and a parent or legal guardian if the child is under the age of 13.
- All informed consent forms will be kept on the servers of KdG, in locked files, and will be unavailable to anyone except those outlined in the study / research. They will be deleted after the legal term of 3 years, starting after the completion of the research.
- Obtaining prior written consent does not mean there is no requirement to obtain verbal consent when taking photographs/video/interviews.
- The child, a parent or a legal guardian can refuse to sign the Informed Consent form. This will also be documented on the servers of KdG. There cannot be any form of collaboration when the Informed Consent wasn't signed.
- The child, the parent or the legal guardian can withdraw their consent during the collaboration.

The Data Protection Officer of KdG (privacy@kdg.be) is available for further information on the the implementation of these guidelines.

Interviewing children

When interviewing children, for example in the scope of research, always ask to sign the informed consent. Further, there are some guidelines that needs to be followed:

- **Informed Consent:** in relation to interviews, it includes explaining what subjects are likely to be covered in the interview and clarifying the child's right to withdraw their consent at any point. The child has the right to say no to any participation in certain parts of the interview. The interviewer should review the child's understanding of consent at the start of the interview.
- **Provision of support:** there should always be someone else present during the interview, someone who the child is familiar with. If possible, the child should be giving a choice regarding who supports him/her during the interview
- **Respecting the right to say no:** before the interview, it is always made clear that the child only must talk if they feel comfortable doing so. The child can withdraw his or her consent at any point during the interview.
- **Gender:** boys and girls might have different needs when talking about a certain topic. They may be more comfortable to talk to a man or a woman, respectively. Gender must be considered when deciding what topics may be discussed.
- **Respecting the right to information:** the child needs to be informed and verbally asked for their permission when notes are taken or if the interview is recorded. This also needs to be documented in the Informed Consent form.

External journalists, photographers or film crews

If the organisation invites external individuals who photograph, interview or film children, these individuals are also required to sign the Informed Consent with GDPR guidelines. They cannot have contact with children without supervision. Through a separate consent form, children, parents and guardians are informed about how the images will be used.

4 PEOPLE

Recruitment of staff

- During recruitment, the research centres shall outline the child protection policy. Reference to the child protection policy will be included in the publication of any vacant position that involves interaction with children. During the job interview, the match with the principles stated in the Child Protection Policy will be actively questioned.
- In case of doubt, references are requested (with the candidate's consent) to inquire about previous handling of the principles around child protection.
- Before signing the employment contract, all new staff members (researchers, pedagogical coaches, administrative and technical staff) have to submit an official certificate of good conduct.
- Since 1 February 2023, the Flemish government introduced the obligation within several sectors to request and verify an extract from the criminal register 'Model Article 596.2 minors model' from new employees working with children or young people. Within education regulations, this obligation already applied to the appointment of permanent and temporary employees. The new decree extends this obligation to students and volunteers who come into contact with minors as part of activities for the educational institution.
- New staff will be acquainted with the child protection policy by their supervisor.

Responsibilities of staff.

- Staff members have to be acquainted with the child protection policy;
- On a regular basis, the centre of expertise dealing with children in their research activities will organise reflective sessions in which staff members are invited to reflect on their actions on child protection and on children's wellbeing.

- All pedagogical coaches, who are working in childcare organisations, have to carry a life saving certificate. The courses towards these certificates pay special attention to children's life safeguarding.

5 PROCEDURES

Safeguarding procedures.

- When conducting research about and/or with children, the principal investigator will submit an ethical application to the relevant Ethical Committee (e.g. Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities at University of Antwerp).
- Specifically within the Research Centre 'Pedagogy in Practice', all pedagogical coaches, who are working in childcare organisations, have to carry a life saving certificate. The courses towards these certificates pay special attention to children's life safeguarding. The centre organises or co-organises these courses on a regular basis.

Raising of concerns and how it will be dealt with

- Complaints about KdG staff can be reported (anonymously if desired), to the KdG contact point for transgressive behaviour: <https://www.kdg.be/contact/meldpunt-grensoverschrijdend-gedrag>
- Not only victims, but also witnesses can report their concerns here.
- In addition to this possibility to make a complaint one can also contact the internal counsellor for confidential matters directly. They go through the options for further follow-up and support and never take action without the consent of the person who made the report. If necessary and desired, they can refer specifically to the appropriate services.
- In the case of a serious breach by a KdG employee, this leads to the launch of the contract termination procedure, in line with internal procedures in other breaches of similar order. This procedure is described in the disciplinary regulations, and includes the possibility of a preventive suspension.

6 ACCOUNTABILITY

- Each KdG Research staff member has a responsibility for ensuring that the Child Safeguarding Policy is implemented as set out in the policy and procedures outline in this document.
- The KdG Research centres keep a record of lessons learned of each project.
- Employees' handling of the policy will be included in the standard performance cycle on a yearly basis. Areas for improvement are discussed here and translated into individual learning actions.
- The KdG Director Research & Academy, has overall responsibility for the Child Safeguarding Policy. The heads of the Research centres are responsible for determining policy and good practice and for implementation of the policy in all activities related to their areas of organisational responsibility.
- Once a year, the child protection policy is reviewed, updated and lessons learned are added if this turns out to be necessary.