CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING POLICY

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

Angels Center of Hope(ACOH) is committed to protecting the safety, dignity, rights, and well-being of every child who participates in or comes into contact with its programs, services, activities, and operations.

The organization recognizes that every child has the right to grow, learn, develop, and participate in a safe environment free from abuse, neglect, exploitation, discrimination, harassment, and all forms of harm.

We maintain a zero-tolerance approach toward child abuse, sexual exploitation, harassment, inappropriate conduct, and any behavior that threatens the safety or well-being of a child.

This policy establishes the standards, responsibilities, procedures, and accountability measures necessary to prevent child abuse and respond appropriately to any suspected or reported incident.

All employees, board members, volunteers, interns, contractors, consultants, partners, and representatives working with or around children are expected to comply with this policy.

2. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is to:

1. Protect children from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of harm.
2. Establish clear standards of conduct for all individuals associated with the organization.
3. Prevent situations that may expose children to abuse, exploitation, or inappropriate behavior.
4. Establish procedures for identifying, reporting, documenting, and responding to child protection concerns.
5. Ensure that all employees and volunteers understand their responsibilities concerning child safety.
6. Promote a culture of accountability, transparency, dignity, and respect.
7. Ensure compliance with applicable Louisiana and federal child protection laws and regulations.
8. Provide children and families with safe and accessible channels for raising concerns.

3. SCOPE OF APPLICATION

This policy applies to:

- Board members and organizational leadership.
- Full-time and part-time employees.
- Volunteers and community representatives.
- Interns and trainees.
- Consultants and independent contractors.
- Program facilitators, mentors, and instructors.
- Drivers and transportation personnel.
- Partner organizations and service providers.
- Visitors and other individuals participating in organizational activities involving children.

The policy applies to all activities, whether conducted at organizational facilities, schools, community centers, churches, homes, outdoor venues, online platforms, or during local and out-of-state trips.

4. DEFINITION OF A CHILD

For purposes of this policy, a child is any person under the age of eighteen (18) years.

The organization will provide appropriate protection and safeguarding measures to all children regardless of their age, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, disability, socioeconomic background, or family circumstances.

5. FORMS OF CHILD ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

The organization recognizes the following forms of child abuse and maltreatment:

5.1 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes intentionally causing physical injury or harm to a child through hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, choking, excessive physical punishment, or other harmful physical acts.

5.2 Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes involving a child in sexual activities, inappropriate touching, sexual exploitation, grooming, sexual harassment, exposure to sexually explicit materials, or any other sexual conduct involving a child.

5.3 Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Emotional abuse includes threatening, humiliating, intimidating, degrading, manipulating, verbally attacking, or repeatedly rejecting a child in ways that may harm their emotional or psychological well-being.

5.4 Neglect

Neglect includes failing to provide adequate supervision, food, shelter, medical attention, protection, or other essential care when legally and practically responsible for doing so.

5.5 Child Exploitation

Exploitation includes using children for financial gain, forced labor, trafficking, inappropriate fundraising activities, commercial sexual exploitation, or other activities that compromise their safety and dignity.

5.6 Online Abuse and Digital Exploitation

Online abuse includes cyberbullying, inappropriate electronic communication, grooming, sharing or requesting sexually explicit images, unauthorized distribution of children's photographs, and other digital activities that expose children to harm.

6. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The organization shall uphold the following principles:

6.1 Best Interests of the Child: The safety, welfare, and best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration in all decisions involving children.

6.2 Equal Protection: Every child shall receive equal protection regardless of background, identity, disability, religion, or family circumstances.

6.3 Respect and Dignity: Children shall be treated with kindness, respect, compassion, and dignity at all times.

6.4 Participation and Voice: Children shall be encouraged to express their concerns, opinions, and experiences in age-appropriate and accessible ways.

6.5 Confidentiality: Information relating to child protection concerns shall be handled sensitively and shared only with individuals or authorities who need it for safeguarding, reporting, or legal purposes.

6.6 Accountability: All individuals associated with the organization are responsible for upholding this policy and reporting suspected violations.

7. RECRUITMENT AND BACKGROUND SCREENING

The organization shall take reasonable steps to ensure that individuals recruited to work with children are suitable, trustworthy, and capable of fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities.

Before allowing an individual to work directly with children, the organization shall, as appropriate and legally permitted:

1. Obtain a completed employment or volunteer application.
2. Verify the applicant's identity.
3. Conduct reference checks.
4. Review relevant employment and volunteer history.
5. Conduct criminal background checks, including fingerprint-based checks where appropriate and legally available.
6. Obtain legally authorized child abuse and neglect registry clearances where applicable.
7. Assess any history of misconduct, abuse, exploitation, or inappropriate behavior involving children.
8. Require applicants to disclose relevant information that may affect their suitability for child-facing responsibilities.

Background screening shall be conducted before an individual begins unsupervised work with children.

The organization may deny or restrict participation where screening identifies concerns that could compromise child safety, consistent with applicable law.

Background screening does not replace ongoing supervision and accountability.

8. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

All employees, volunteers, board members, and representatives must maintain appropriate professional boundaries when interacting with children.

8.1 Acceptable Conduct

Staff and volunteers shall:

- Treat every child with respect and dignity.
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
- Use positive, non-violent, age-appropriate communication.
- Provide supervision appropriate to children's ages and activities.
- Respect children's privacy and personal boundaries.
- Obtain appropriate parental or guardian consent for activities and participation.
- Report suspected abuse, neglect, exploitation, or inappropriate conduct.
- Follow organizational safety and supervision procedures.

8.2 Prohibited Conduct

The following behaviors are strictly prohibited:

- Hitting, slapping, shaking, or physically punishing a child.
- Sexual contact or inappropriate touching.
- Engaging in romantic or sexual relationships with children.
- Making sexually suggestive comments or gestures.
- Humiliating, threatening, intimidating, or verbally abusing children.
- Using children for personal, financial, or commercial exploitation.
- Taking or sharing inappropriate photographs or videos of children.
- Communicating privately with children through personal social media accounts inappropriately.
- Meeting children privately without appropriate authorization and safeguarding arrangements.
- Transporting children without required permission and safety arrangements.

- Providing alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs, or other prohibited substances to children.
- Concealing or failing to report suspected abuse or misconduct.

9. CHILD SUPERVISION AND SAFETY

The organization shall maintain appropriate supervision arrangements during all activities involving children.

The organization shall:

1. Ensure that children are supervised by appropriately screened and authorized personnel.
2. Apply a two-adult supervision practice wherever reasonably possible.
3. Avoid isolated one-on-one interactions between adults and children.
4. Ensure that meetings involving individual children take place in observable and appropriate settings.
5. Maintain accurate attendance and registration records.
6. Establish appropriate sign-in and sign-out procedures.
7. Ensure children are released only to authorized parents, guardians, or designated caregivers.
8. Maintain safe and age-appropriate facilities.
9. Establish procedures for responding to accidents, injuries, and emergencies.
10. Ensure appropriate supervision during transportation, overnight activities, field trips, and community events.

Where one-to-one support is necessary, it must be authorized, documented, observable, and conducted in accordance with safeguarding procedures.

10. PARENTAL OR GUARDIAN CONSENT

The organization shall obtain appropriate written parental or legal guardian consent before a child participates in activities requiring such consent.

Consent procedures shall cover, as applicable:

- Program enrollment and participation.
- Emergency medical treatment arrangements.
- Transportation and off-site activities.
- Field trips and overnight activities.
- Photography, video recording, and publication.
- Electronic communication and online participation.
- Collection and use of personal information.

Parents and guardians shall receive relevant information about the organization's programs, safety procedures, and child protection expectations.

Consent does not authorize any activity that would otherwise be unlawful or unsafe.

11. PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEO, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The organization recognizes the importance of protecting children's identities, privacy, and dignity.

Accordingly:

1. Written parental or guardian permission shall be obtained before taking or publishing identifiable photographs or videos of children, except where otherwise legally authorized.
2. Children shall not be photographed in inappropriate or compromising situations.
3. Images shall not be shared for personal purposes.
4. Children's full names, home addresses, school details, and other identifying information shall not be unnecessarily disclosed.
5. Staff and volunteers shall not request inappropriate photographs or videos from children.
6. Organizational social media accounts shall be monitored by authorized personnel.
7. Images and recordings shall be stored securely and accessed only for legitimate organizational purposes.

Children's wishes and privacy shall be respected when obtaining and using images.

12. CHILD PROTECTION REPORTING PROCEDURES

The organization takes all allegations and suspicions of child abuse, neglect, exploitation, and inappropriate conduct seriously.

Any employee, volunteer, board member, contractor, or representative who becomes aware of a possible child protection concern must take appropriate action.

12.1 Immediate Safety

If a child is in immediate danger:

- Take reasonable steps to protect the child from further harm without placing yourself or others at risk.
- Contact emergency services by calling 911 when appropriate.
- Seek necessary emergency medical assistance.
- Notify the appropriate child protection authorities.

- Inform the organization's designated Child Protection Officer when doing so will not delay or interfere with external reporting.

12.2 Reporting to Louisiana Authorities

Suspected child abuse or neglect in Louisiana must be reported to the appropriate authorities in accordance with applicable law.

The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) operates a 24-hour Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline:

- **Call:** 833-LA-CHILD (833-522-4453)
- **Text**:(225) 424-1533
- **Website:** https://dcfs.louisiana.gov/

Reports may involve suspected physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation, or juvenile sex trafficking.

Where the law requires reporting to law enforcement, DCFS, or both, the applicable reporting requirements must be followed.

12.3 Mandatory Reporting Obligations

Louisiana Children's Code Articles 603, 609, and 610 establish mandatory reporting responsibilities for designated individuals.

These categories include certain organizational or youth activity providers, coaches, teaching and child care providers, healthcare practitioners, social service practitioners, and other specified persons.

Employees and volunteers must understand that an internal organizational reporting procedure does not replace an individual's legal duty to report suspected abuse.

No supervisor, manager, board member, or other representative may prevent or discourage an individual from making a legally required report.

Where an oral report is made by a mandated reporter, the reporter must comply with applicable written follow-up reporting requirements, including the five-day requirement where applicable.

12.4 Reporting to Law Enforcement

The organization shall cooperate with law enforcement authorities when criminal conduct is suspected.

Louisiana law also establishes reporting obligations concerning witnessed child sexual abuse. Individuals must follow the applicable legal reporting requirements.

12.5 Internal Reporting

In addition to external reporting, employees and volunteers should notify the designated Child Protection Officer or Executive Director of the incident, unless that person is implicated or notification could compromise the child's safety or an investigation.

Internal reporting must never delay external reporting.

13. RESPONDING TO A CHILD'S DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE

When a child discloses abuse or inappropriate conduct, staff and volunteers must:

1. Remain calm and listen carefully.
2. Allow the child to speak freely without interruption.
3. Take the child's concerns seriously.
4. Avoid expressing shock, disbelief, or judgment.
5. Reassure the child that they did the right thing by speaking up.
6. Avoid promising absolute confidentiality.
7. Avoid asking leading or investigative questions.
8. Record the child's words as accurately as possible.
9. Report the concern to the appropriate authorities.
10. Take reasonable steps to prevent further exposure to harm.

Staff and volunteers must not independently investigate allegations or confront the alleged perpetrator.

14. DESIGNATED CHILD PROTECTION OFFICER

The organization shall appoint a Child Protection Officer (CPO) responsible for coordinating its safeguarding activities.

The Child Protection Officer shall:

- Promote implementation of this policy.
- Coordinate safeguarding training.
- Receive and document internal safeguarding concerns.
- Support appropriate referrals to external authorities.
- Maintain secure safeguarding records.
- Monitor compliance with child protection procedures.
- Advise organizational leadership on safeguarding risks.
- Recommend improvements to child protection practices.

The Child Protection Officer does not replace the legal reporting responsibilities of individual mandated reporters.

Where a complaint involves the Child Protection Officer, it shall be reported directly to the Executive Director or Board Chair, as appropriate.

15. CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORD KEEPING

All child protection concerns and related information shall be handled confidentially and responsibly.

The organization shall:

1. Maintain secure records of incidents, allegations, referrals, and actions taken.
2. Limit access to authorized individuals.
3. Protect children's personal and identifying information.
4. Maintain records in accordance with applicable privacy and records-retention requirements.
5. Avoid unnecessary disclosure of sensitive information.
6. Cooperate with authorized child protection and law enforcement investigations.

Confidentiality shall never be used as a reason to withhold information from authorities when disclosure is legally required.

16. PROTECTION AGAINST RETALIATION

The organization strictly prohibits retaliation against any child, parent, guardian, employee, volunteer, or other individual who raises a child protection concern in good faith or cooperates with an investigation.

Retaliation may include intimidation, threats, harassment, exclusion, discrimination, or adverse treatment.

Any retaliatory conduct shall be addressed through appropriate organizational disciplinary procedures.

17. TRAINING AND AWARENESS

All employees, volunteers, and individuals working directly with children shall receive appropriate child protection and safeguarding orientation before beginning their responsibilities.

Training shall cover:

- Recognizing signs of child abuse and neglect.
- Understanding appropriate professional boundaries.
- Identifying grooming, exploitation, and inappropriate behavior.
- Understanding Louisiana mandatory reporting requirements.
- Reporting suspected abuse and safeguarding concerns.
- Responding appropriately to children's disclosures.
- Maintaining appropriate supervision.
- Protecting children's privacy and digital safety.
- Understanding emergency response procedures.

Refresher training shall be provided periodically and whenever relevant legal or organizational requirements change.

18. TRANSPORTATION AND OFF-SITE ACTIVITIES

All transportation and off-site activities involving children must be properly authorized and supervised.

The organization shall:

- Obtain appropriate parental or guardian permission.
- Use appropriately licensed and insured drivers.
- Ensure vehicles are safe and legally compliant.
- Maintain appropriate passenger supervision.
- Keep accurate transportation records.
- Establish emergency contact procedures.
- Avoid unauthorized transportation arrangements.
- Ensure overnight activities have appropriate supervision and separate sleeping arrangements.

19. PARTNERS AND THIRD-PARTY SERVICE PROVIDERS

The organization expects all partner organizations, contractors, and third-party service providers involved in activities with children to uphold appropriate safeguarding standards.

Where appropriate, partnership agreements shall include:

- A commitment to child protection.
- Compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- Appropriate staff screening.
- Child protection training.
- Reporting and referral procedures.
- Cooperation with safeguarding investigations.

The organization reserves the right to suspend or terminate a partnership where serious safeguarding concerns arise, subject to applicable contractual and legal obligations.

20. DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

Any employee, volunteer, contractor, or representative who violates this policy may face appropriate disciplinary action.

Depending on the seriousness of the violation, actions may include:

- Verbal or written warnings.
- Additional safeguarding training.
- Suspension from child-related duties.
- Removal from organizational activities.
- Termination of employment or volunteer engagement.
- Termination of contractual or partnership arrangements.
- Referral to law enforcement or appropriate regulatory authorities.

Any action shall be taken in accordance with applicable law and organizational procedures.

21. POLICY MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Board of Directors and organizational leadership shall oversee implementation of this policy.

The policy shall be reviewed at least annually and whenever there are significant changes in applicable laws, regulations, organizational activities, or identified safeguarding risks.

The organization shall periodically assess the effectiveness of its safeguarding procedures and make improvements where necessary.

22. LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

This policy is intended to operate consistently with applicable laws and regulations, including, where applicable:

- Louisiana Children's Code, including Articles 603, 609, and 610, concerning child abuse definitions and reporting.
- Louisiana Revised Statutes (R.S) 14:403, concerning abuse of children and reporting obligations.
- Louisiana Revised Statutes(R.S) 15:587.3, concerning criminal background information for volunteers and employees in youth-serving organizations.
- Louisiana Child Protection Act and other applicable Louisiana child protection provisions.
- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as applicable.
- Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act requirements.
- The Child Welfare Information Gateway guidance on child abuse prevention and reporting.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), where applicable.

- Other applicable federal, state, and local child safety, civil rights, privacy, and employment laws.

This policy shall be interpreted consistently with applicable law. Where legal requirements provide greater protection to children or impose additional obligations, those requirements shall prevail.

23. BOARD APPROVAL AND ADOPTION

This Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy has been reviewed and adopted by the Board of Directors of [Organization Name].

The organization commits to implementing, monitoring, and enforcing this policy throughout its operations and programs.

Approver by: Board of Directors

Date of Approval: December 12,2006

Last Review Date: January 15,2026