



Artists Striving To End Poverty – Child Protection Policy

I. Introduction:

As a child-focused organization, ASTEP creates circumstances in which children and adults regularly come into contact with each other. To that end, this policy is intended to guide the organization and individuals associated with it (volunteers, staff members, board members, interns, partners, and others, hereafter referred to as *associates*) on appropriate interactions with children. The goal of this policy is to promote the safety and well-being of children participating in ASTEP programs and activities and to provide clear guidance to ASTEP associates on safer ways of working with children. We have a responsibility to promote the protection and safety of children while they are in contact with staff. A child or minor is defined as a person under 18 years of age.

Artists Striving to End Poverty will pursue its commitment to protect children through:

Awareness: Ensuring that all staff and associates are aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children and of ASTEP's proactive approach to promoting child safety.

Prevention: Ensuring, through awareness and good practice, that staff and associates minimize the risk to children.

Reporting and Responding: Ensuring that staff, associates, and children participating in programs, are clear what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children and that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse.

II. Awareness:

ASTEP will take proactive measures to ensure that staff members and associates are aware of the problem of child abuse, the potential for child abuse through the organization's activities/programs, and the organization's commitment to child safety. Specific activities include, but are not limited to:

- Briefings about the child protection policy during staff meetings, volunteer trainings, board meetings, discussions with partners, etc.
- Briefings with children so that they are aware of who to contact if they or someone they know are at risk of abuse

III. Prevention:

While recognizing that it cannot eliminate all risks to children, ASTEP will take proactive measures to prevent child abuse and maltreatment with staff members and associates.

1. **Recruitment checks and procedures:** Recruitment to all ASTEP jobs and volunteer positions will include specific checks and procedures. The staff member overseeing recruitment will be responsible for adhering to these procedures.
 - a. **Interview Procedures:** The initial interview will include specific questions relating to the applicant's approach, attitude and experience of working directly with children; these questions will be tailored to the post applied for. Subsequent interviews may involve follow up questions where appropriate.

- b. **Reference Checks:** It is our policy to contact references at the point at which applicants are invited for a final selection interview or before an unconditional offer of employment is made. The reference check includes specific questions about the applicant's suitability for work involving children; ASTEP will ask for at least one referee who has experience in either a professional or a voluntary capacity of your capability in this area. ASTEP's policy is to automatically follow up all reference checks by telephone in order to check the validity of the referee and ask specific questions about the referee's opinion of your suitability for work with children.
 - c. **Verification of Qualifications:** We will carry out a check on essential qualifications for the post prior to any offer of employment being made. You will be asked to bring certificates relating to the essential qualifications claimed on the application form when you come for your final interview. The certificates will be photocopied and recorded and the originals returned to you on the day of the interview. Should you be unable to provide certificates for verification, we will ask you to provide some other form of verification of the qualification obtained, either a copy certificate or written confirmation from the awarding body.
 - d. **Identity Check:** As proof of identity you are required to submit your passport or driver's license where applicable, which you will be asked to bring when you attend your final interview. A copy of the passport/license will be made and held on file and the original will be returned to you on the day of the interview. The offer of employment will be subject to satisfactory proof of identity. Should you have any difficulty with this request you should discuss this with the recruiting staff member who will inform you whether any other form of verification is acceptable for the post.
 - e. **Criminal Records Check:** If you are applying for and are successful in your application, you will be subject to a criminal records check. A satisfactory records check is a condition of employment or volunteer placement and failure to agree to the criminal records check will preclude you from consideration for the position. This will be carried out in line with partner requirements. Where the results of a criminal records check are unacceptable to Artists Striving to End Poverty, no further follow up will be required. You will be informed immediately in writing of the outcome of an unsatisfactory check and of your right to appeal. An offer of employment or of a volunteer position will not be made until satisfactory clearance has been obtained from a criminal records check.
2. **Code of Practice:** All prospective staff and associates are educated in ASTEP's Child Protection Policy, Code of Practice, and related child protection issues. The Child Protection Policy and Code of Practice are part of the orientation procedure for all new staff and associates, who are required to sign an acknowledgement form stating that they have reviewed, understand, and will comply with ASTEP's Child Protection Policy.

Failure to follow the Child Protection Policy, protocols, and guidelines is grounds for discipline, up to and including dismissal from employment, volunteer/internship, or Board/advisory membership.

All ASTEP staff and associates are required to abide by the following code of practice. As a reminder, a child is defined as a person under 18 years of age.

- A. All Staff Members, Associates, and Volunteers Must Comply with the Code of Practice and Sign ASTEP's Volunteer Contract.
- B. All representatives of ASTEP must:
 - a. Report concerns that a child is a victim of child abuse or sexual exploitation immediately to the Child Protection Policy Focal Point.
 - b. Fill out the Form for Reporting Child Protection Concerns in the Child Protection Policy
 - c. Report concerns of child abuse or sexual exploitation to the designated Board Member when the suspected perpetrator of the abuse is the Child Protection Policy Focal Point.

- d. Identify and avoid potential situations which may lead to staff behavior being misinterpreted
- e. Ensure when making images of children (e.g. photographs, videos) that they are respectful, that the children are adequately clothed and that sexually suggestive poses are avoided. Respectful and decent language should also be used in all communications about children.

C. All representatives of ASTEP must never:

- a. Hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children
- b. Have sexual intercourse, or engage in any sexual activity with anyone under 18 years of age. Mistaken belief in the age of the child is not a defense.
- c. Develop relationships with children which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- d. Use language, make suggestions, or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive, or abusive.
- e. Behave physically in a way that is inappropriate or sexually provocative.
- f. Sleep in the same room as a child with whom they are working.
- g. Find themselves alone with a child (including in vehicles). Where possible and practical, the two-adult rule, wherein two or more adults supervise all activities where children are involved.
- h. Do things for children of an intimate, personal nature that they can do for themselves (help to dress or undress children, help children in the bathroom, etc.).
- i. Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse.
- j. Discriminate against, show unfair differential treatment to, or favor particular children to the exclusion of others.
- k. Place themselves in compromising, or what could be interpreted as compromising or vulnerable positions or situations.
- l. Disclose children's personal information that could be used to identify the location of children within their country
- m. Engage with children (under 18 years) on Facebook or any Social Media sites. This includes but is not limited to becoming "friends" with a child on Facebook. The Internet and social media continue to be a new frontier as it relates to the workplace and child protection, please proceed with caution when engaging with Children on social media of any kind.

3. **Engagement with Partners:** ASTEP will proactively discuss its Child Protection Policy with all partners hosting volunteers. Together, ASTEP and partners will develop site-specific guidance for staff and volunteers on appropriate interactions with children. However, in all sites, the ASTEP Code of Practice must adhere. ASTEP will also work with partners to ensure that reporting and response procedures are in place for all sites so that prompt action can be taken when abuse is suspected. ASTEP will also hold frank discussions with partners about potentially harmful practices that may seem "culturally appropriate" in the context, such as corporal punishment, the institutionalization of children, and others.

IV. **Reporting and Responding:**

In order that standards of reporting and responding are met, Artists Striving to End Poverty will ensure that it:

1. Takes seriously any concerns raised
2. Takes positive steps to pursue the protection of children who are the subject of any concerns
3. Supports children, staff, associates, or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns
4. Acts appropriately and effectively in instigating or co-operating with any subsequent process of investigation

5. Is guided through the child protection process by the principle of 'best interests of the child'
6. Listens to and takes seriously the views and wishes of children
7. Works in partnership with parents/caregivers and/or other professionals to ensure the protection of children

Procedure for Reporting Concerns:

Staff and associates could have their suspicion or concern raised in a number of ways, the most likely of which are:

1. Witnessing inappropriate or harmful conduct of an ASTEP staff member or associate;
2. A child disclosing abuse;
3. Bruising or evidence of physical hurt; which may or may not be accompanied by;
4. Unusual behavior by a child.

If a member of staff or associate has such concerns they should be reported to the Child Protection Policy Focal Point using the form as set out in Appendix B. The concerns should be reported in writing within 24 hours. If the concerns relate to the conduct of a member of staff, these should be reported to the Child Protection Focal Point immediately. Steps will be taken to fully support anyone who in good faith reports his or her concerns about a colleague and every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality for all parties whilst the allegation is considered.

Concerns in relation to a member of staff may indicate unsuitability to continue working with children in their present position, or in any capacity. Consideration will need to be given to whether:

1. Someone has behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child,
2. Someone has possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
3. Someone has behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.

The Child Protection Policy Focal Point will work with the partner organization and the Child Protection Policy board representative to determine necessary action which may include:

1. A police investigation of a possible criminal offence;
2. Inquiries and assessment by children's social care about whether a child is in need of protection or in need of services; and
3. Consideration by an employer of disciplinary action in respect of the individual.

V. Designated Child Protection Policy Focal Point:

ASTEP has appointed a Child Protection Policy Focal Point who is responsible for dealing with any concerns about the protection of children. The Focal Point will be supported by the designated Board Member, to whom allegations can also be brought. The contact information for these people are:

Abby Gerdtz (Focal Point)

Phone: 212.921.1227

Cell: 603.479.9971

Email: Abby@asteponline.org

Mark Canavera (Designated Board Member)

Phone: 212.470.7915

Email: Mark.Canavera@gmail.com

The role of the Child Protection Policy Focal Point is to:

1. Know which outside child protection agency to contact in the event of a child protection concern coming to the notice of ASTEP and working with partners to determine these contacts at all project sites.
2. Provide information and advice on child protection to staff, volunteers, and board members within ASTEP.
3. Liaise with local children's social care services and other agencies, as appropriate.
4. Keep relevant people within ASTEP informed about any action taken and any further action required, for example, disciplinary action against a member of staff or an associate.
5. Ensure that a proper record is kept of any referral and action taken and that this is kept safely and in confidence.
6. Advise ASTEP of safeguarding and child protection training needs.
7. Review this policy annually and update as needed

Note: Portions of ASTEP's child protection policy have been adapted from other organization's child protection policies. ASTEP understands that those organizations bear no responsibility for activities undertaken by representatives or individuals acting on behalf of ASTEP.

Appendix A: Responding Appropriately to a child making an Allegation of Abuse

1. Stay calm
2. Listen carefully to what is said.
3. Find an appropriate early opportunity to explain that it is likely that the information will need to be shared with others – do not promise to keep secrets.
4. Tell the child that the matter will only be disclosed to those who need to know about it.
5. Allow the child to continue at her/his own pace.
6. Ask questions for clarification only, and at all times avoid asking questions that suggest a particular answer.
7. Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you.
8. Tell them what you will do next, and with whom the information will be shared.
9. Record in writing what was said, using the child's own words, as soon as possible – note the date, time, any names mentioned, to whom the information was given and ensure that the record is signed and dated.
10. It is important to remember that the person who first encounters a case of alleged abuse is not responsible for deciding whether abuse has occurred. That is a task for the professional child protection agencies, following a referral from the Child Protection Policy Focal Point in the organization.

Appendix B: Form for Reporting Child Protection Concerns

When completed, this form should be submitted to the Child Protection Policy Focal Point Abby Gerdtts at abby@asteponline.org (212.921.1227). If the Child Protection Policy Focal Point is the person suspected of abuse, please send to board member Mark Canavera at mark.canavera@gmail.com (212.470.7915)

Name of child _____

Age if known _____

Date of Incident(s) _____

Venue of Incident(s) _____

What prompts your concerns? Please be as specific as possible

Were there any physical or behavioral signs? Any other causes for concern?

Have you spoken to the child? If so, what was said?

Have you spoken to the child's parents/caretakers? If so, what was said?

Has anybody been alleged to be the abuser? If so, give details.

Please give your name and contact details.

Name (print) _____

Signature _____

Address _____

Phone number _____ Date _____

This form must be completed and given to the Child Protection Policy Focal Point.